

Wannin A Wanaruah Word Meaning "to Walk" Thanbarran

A Kamilaroi Word Meaning "A Connecting Pathway"

This title is drawn from the languages of the Kamilaroi and Wanaruah people who walked these lands

A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley

2004

by

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A project of the Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee





MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE COUNCIL DOCUMENT FOR RECONCILIATION

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE

OUR COMMITMENT TO ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

Muswellbrook Shire Council acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were the first people of this land and have survived European settlement

for more than two centuries.

Muswellbrook Shire Council recognises that the arrival of Europeans brought massive change to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to the land.

Muswellbrook Shire Council acknowledges the past injustices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in doing so makes a commitment

to support self-determination.

Muswellbrook Shire Council welcomes the rights of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders to live according to their own values and customs, within the law.

Muswellbrook Shire Council acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture strengthens and enriches our community and commits itself to respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, protecting their special places and significant cultural sites.

Muswellbrook Shire Council accepts its responsibility to develop an awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, and will positively promote their culture in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a local, regional and national level.

Muswellbrook Shire Council commits itself to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people to equity and access to Council, its resources and community services.

Muswellbrook Shire Council supports all people working together to achieve mutual respect and harmony within the community.



Foreword

Over five years ago a group of people interested in pursuing reconciliation locally began meeting monthly at Simpson Park in Muswellbrook.

What is now the Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee recognises that the pursuit of Reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal community members is an ongoing process that includes a variety of actions.

This book grew from the notion that a fundamental building block towards a reconciled society is increased understanding.

The act of researching and recording some aspect of "The History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter" is aimed at increasing our appreciation of current issues by gaining some understanding of what brought us to this point.

This book does not attempt to tell all the stories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people coming into contact. Nor does it tell all the ongoing positive and negative impacts of those contacts for local families. The book does provide an overview and examples of that contact. The Reconciliation Committee hopes that it will serve to inspire families to document their history before it is lost.

Local history books gain some of their poignancy because local people reading those histories may recognise people and places. It is possible that this phenomenon will increase the connectedness of people to the importance of reconciliation in our local community.

Muswellbrook Shire Council is proud that it has been able to have a Council Committee dedicated to Reconciliation

The Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee is proud too. That the Committee has been able to publish this book is seen by Committee Members as a step towards Reconciliation in the community in which they and their families work and live.

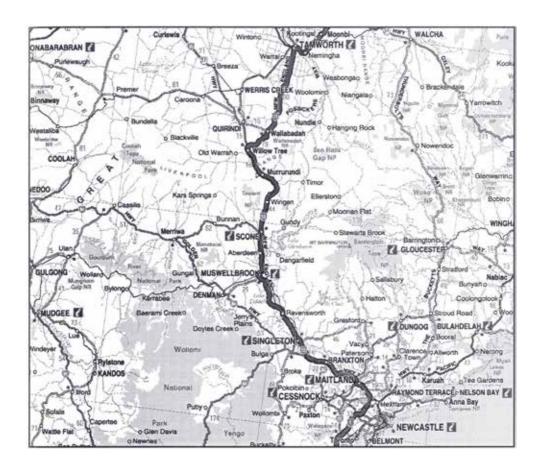
Cr Robyn Tozer
Deputy Mayor
On behalf of the Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal
Reconciliation Committee.

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Map of Hunter Valley and Adjoining Districts



Introduction

This social history depicts the relationships between Aboriginal and European people in the Upper Hunter Valley over the past two hundred years and is based on archival sources and oral tradition. Throughout the time period Aboriginal people experienced great suffering in the Hunter region during the 19th century as European colonists invaded their lands and waterways causing the destruction of traditional Aboriginal society.

By the close of the nineteenth century traditional Aboriginal society had virtually disappeared in the Upper Hunter Valley. While the odd record appears such as a cultural ceremony at Bulga in 1852 there are few other indicators of the traditional society which had existed for thousands of years. Instead colonization saw the emergence of small towns and villages with places such as Singleton, Carrowbrook, Ravensworth, Muswellbrook, Scone, Aberdeen, Murrurundi, Quirindi, Denman, Broke, Jerry's Plains and Wollombi replacing the traditional Aboriginal communities. The towns and villages serviced pastoral industries comprising of sheep and cattle and grew to become the dominant feature of social life.

Throughout the twentieth century the lives of many Aboriginal people in the Upper Hunter Valley were controlled under the auspices of government authorities and church groups. Government and missionary organisations such as the Aborigines Protection Board (APB), Aboriginal Welfare Board (AWB) and the Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM) featured dominantly in the daily lives of Aboriginal Australians in the region.

Toward the latter part of the twentieth century significant changes occurred in the treatment of Aboriginal people in Australia. The 1960's in particular was a period of great social and political change around the globe, including an enormously divisive war in Vietnam, a highly visible civil rights movement in the United States, the cold war and nuclear oblivion hovered. Aboriginal Australians after decades of enforced invisibility began to mobilise and assert pressure through the media on years of government neglect. Charles Perkins emulating Martin Luther King in the United States led a group of non-Aboriginal students on a 'Freedom Ride' bus protest campaign, revealing the horrific inequality of Aboriginal living conditions and exposing the overt racism and oppression impacting upon Aboriginal life in New South Wales. The fervor of the period included the Gurindji stockmen and women walk-off at Wave Hill in 1966. Their protest was in response to inequality, poor working conditions and included a demand for the return of their traditional land. A Referendum held in 1967 was responsible for changes to the discriminatory Federal Constitution and finally recognised Aboriginal people as Australian citizens

In the 1970's and 1980's the Northern Territory and States passed Aboriginal Land Rights legislation. The establishment of an Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawn of Parliament House in 1972 was a powerful symbol in the fight for social and political change. The past decade has been significant with the far-reaching High Court Mabo decision which recognized that Aboriginal native title was not extinguished by British colonization. Therefore Australia was not *terra nullius* or empty land on the establishment of British settlement. The decision influenced subsequent Federal Parliament legislation

including the Native Title Act and Wik decision. The Native Title Act allowed Aboriginal people who could prove they had unbroken links with their traditional land the opportunity to claim some country. The Wik decision, handed down in 1996, ruled that a pastoral lease could co-exist with native title. The ramifications of this decision were a giant leap forward in Aboriginal land rights but provoked the most inflamed land rights debate in Australian history. The federal government pressed for legislation known as the ten-point plan to resolve the confusion and deadlock. Its plan became law in 1998 extinguishing many of the Aboriginal gains made through Native Title. These issues and an attempt at reconciling the wrongs of the Australian past have for the most part been impeded by bureaucratic and political bickering.

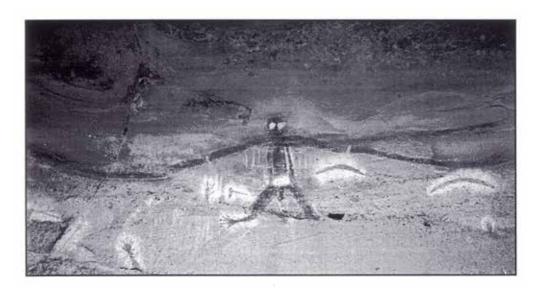
Background History

Today Aboriginal culture is recognized as holding the oldest collective memory known to man and prior to 1788 the continent was home to a diverse range of over 300 differing language or tribal groups. Western scientific understanding dictates that Aboriginal culture has existed on the Australian continent for upwards of 60,000 years. In contrast Aboriginal belief states that Aboriginal people have been a part of the Australian continent 'since the time before time began'. James Cook's exploration of the east coast of the Australian continent in 1770 and journal observations and maps were responsible for the British government's decision to establish a penal settlement at Sydney Cove in 1788. The invasion of Aboriginal Australia had begun.

Aboriginal peoples living in the Hunter Valley were culturally and environmentally rich groups who had lived in the area for thousands of years. The sense of care and respect they developed for their environment and sacred attachment to land ensured the survival of future generations. Trade and gift exchange were very important elements of Aboriginal economic, social and ritual life. Trade routes criss-crossed all parts of the continent including the Hunter Valley. Goods including shell, wood, gums, ochre and a variety of manufactured items such as tools, ornaments and sacred objects were sent along these routes. Kinship is the central core to the egalitarian Aboriginal extended family system including skin and totemic affiliation. There were no chiefs or kings; in traditional Aboriginal society, all Aboriginal adults have ongoing reciprocal commitments to one another.

The Dreaming beliefs of all Aboriginal groups are linked and interwoven to the Creative Ancestors. The Creation heroes created the world and all within during the creation era. Prior to the creation period the Hunter Valley like the continent at large was a vast empty flat plain devoid of any living thing. The creation ancestors rose up from their slumber beneath the plain to invoke the creation period. In doing so they left their indelible imprint – mountains, rivers, lakes, rocks, flora, fauna and man/woman. Every geographical feature and living thing on the land bore the mark of the Creative Ancestors.

In regard to spiritual beliefs there were several important Beings in the Hunter Valley, including Biame and Koin. Reverend Kemp recorded aspects of early Muswellbrook history when attached to the clergy in the 1840s. He wrote briefly about Aboriginal people in the locality and recorded a small vocabulary. He revealed that some Aboriginal people in the area believed in Biame the creation hero of the Kamilaroi, whilst others paid reverence to Koin the Creation Ancestor of the Awabakal, Gringhai and Worimi. An ochre painting of Biame is located in a cave at Milbrodale south of Singleton. Biame is depicted as a large figure with long outspread arms welcoming and embracing protectively the tribal territory.



Painting of Biame at Milbrodale

First Contact in the Upper Hunter Valley

1788 witnessed the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney, but more than thirty years would pass before the first colonists arrived in the Upper Hunter Valley. Between 1818 and 1821 Benjamin Singleton and John Howe led exploratory parties along the Great Divide from Windsor under the instructions of Governor Lachlan Macquarie. These men are credited with discovering the rich grasslands and the vast forests of the Upper Hunter Valley and the town of Singleton and Howe's Valley are a legacy of these men's efforts.

The anxiety and fear of Aboriginal people felt by Singleton and his group is clearly evident in the following extract which Singleton reported on Tuesday 5th May 1818:

Deep Gully's to the westward to get Water Halted the Night about 8 o'clock Disturbed by the Voice of Natives Cracking of Sticks an Rolling By the Stones Down towards us every man of us arose and fled from the fire secreting ourselves behind trees with our guns.

John Howe led an exploratory party along the mountain ranges to the Hunter Valley in the following year and a second journey in 1821. As a result the rich lands of the Hunter Valley became known to the colonists including the discovery of a large river teeming with fish. Howe believed the lands were ideal for sheep and cattle and wrote in his journal:

It is the finest sheep land I have seen since I left England ... The grass on the low ground equals a

meadow in England and will grow as good a swath and is like the native grass where old stockyards have been.

Howe continued his journey until he reached Maitland and from this time the Hunter Valley became a target of colonization. Several colonists were ordered by Governor Brisbane to survey the lands along the river, including Henry Dangar who wrote:

From 1822, when the valley contained no people, save its few Aboriginal inhabitants, to November, 1825, no less than 372,141 acres were appropriated to 792 persons, 132,164 acres were allotted for church and school purposes, and 100,000 acres reserved in various parts by the Government.

Aboriginal people living in the Hunter Valley resisted these incursions on their lands from the outset. In the summer of 1824 Henry Dangar leading a survey party of five men were forced by around 150 Aboriginal men to withdraw. *The Australian* reported on 23rd December 1824:

From Dartbrook they proceeded on to the Liverpool Plains, across the dividing range which separates the waters of the Hunter's River from the waters of the Western Country. On the borders of these they met with a large body of natives ... by whom they were attacked unawares: one of their party having been struck by a spear in the head.

With the assistance of guns the survey party managed to make their way to the sanctuary of Dr. Bowman's farm.

A Forceful Response

The next decade witnessed hundreds of colonists arriving in the Valley to occupy Crown Land grants for thousands of sheep and cattle. These land grants occupied prime locations along the Hunter River and the settlers quickly intensified efforts to exclude Aboriginal people from these properties and the resources of the land. Denied access to their land, resources and the improprieties endured by Aboriginal women, resulted with the situation deteriorating into a state of warfare. On 4th September 1826 Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, the missionary to Aboriginal people at Lake Macquarie wrote:

But Alas! the blood of the Blacks begin to flow, we are in state of warfare up the country here - two stockmen have been speared in retaliation for the 4 natives who were deliberately shot without any trial or form whatever. Martial Law is the cry of the Settlers and there be many who are grieved that a man is come to seek the welfare of the Aborigines.

The Trial of Lieutenant Nathaniel Lowe

The Aboriginal men who were 'deliberately shot' and referred to by Threlkeld were prisoners under the guard of Lieutenant Nathaniel Lowe and in 1827 this military man stood trial for murder in the Supreme Court at Sydney. From the allegations made in the trial it was claimed that an Aboriginal man named 'Jackey Jackey alias Commandant, alias Jeffrey' was taken outside the gaol at Wallis Plains (Maitland) and shot by a firing squad. One witness swore under oath:

About seven o'clock two soldiers took him to government house, where Mr. Lowe was then living. I followed them to government house and heard Mr. Lowe order four soldiers to take him and shoot him. They took the man about a quarter of a mile off in the bush. The soldiers had their muskets with them; they placed him by the side of a tree, three of them fired at him. I was standing close by; he fell and the fourth soldier who had not yet discharged his piece, went within a few yards of where the black lay and put a ball through his body...We all came away and left him there.

Another witness called William Salisbury gave a similar version of the alleged murder of the Aboriginal man, which occurred following an order from Lowe. The defence counsel, William Wentworth attacked the credibility of the witnesses emphasising they were both ex-convicts which cast sufficient doubt in the minds of the jury to deliver a verdict of not guilty for the alleged murder:

The jury retired for about five minutes, during which time the utmost impatience was manifested by the auditors in Court to hear the result. The Jury having returned, and silence restored, the Foreman delivered a verdict - NOT GUILTY. Loud and general applause accompanied this Announcement of the verdict. The numerous friends of Lieutenant Lowe crowded round to congratulate him on the happy termination of the trial. A second burst of applause was given as he triumphantly left the Court.

The hostile state of relations between the colonists and Aboriginal people led to bitterness and hatred and resulted in casualties to both sides over the next decade. On the same day as Threlkeld wrote of a "state of warfare" in the Upper Hunter Valley, eleven Hunter River 'landholders' presented a petition to Governor Ralph Darling requesting military assistance to counter resistance from Aboriginal people. It is clear from the petition that relations between the two were not good. However, it was in the settlers' interests to play up Aboriginal barbarity as a means of sanctioning their own terror campaigns. The following is an extract of this petition and is dated 4th September 1826:

May, it Please Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned, Landholders at Hunter's River, beg leave most respectfully to represent to Your Excellency the present very disturbed state of the country by the incursions of the numerous Tribes of Black Natives, armed and threatening death to our Servants, and destruction to our property.

We are fully impressed with the intentions of Your Excellency by ordering the protection of the Horse

Patrole; at this moment, we have received information that some of the soldiers are withdrawn to attend an Investigation at Newcastle on a subject connected with the marauding conduct of the Natives.

We most humbly trust Your Excellency will take this into Your consideration, either by ordering others to take their places, or by suspending the order to recall to Newcastle, until the threats and murderous designs of the Natives shall have subsided; for, in the event of our losing the protection of the Troops, our property will be exposed to revenge and depredation of these infuriated and savage people.

The relationship between Aboriginal people and colonists caused Darling to write to Earl Bathurst, Colonial Office in London informing him of the deteriorating state of relations. Bathurst wrote to Darling on 14th July 1825 who received the letter of instruction on 5th May 1826:

In reference to the discussions, which have recently taken place in the Colony respecting the manner, in which the Native Inhabitants are to be treated when making hostile incursions for the purpose of Plunder, you will understand it to be your duty, when such disturbances cannot be prevented or allayed by less vigorous measures, to oppose force by force, and to repel such Aggressions in the same manner, as if they proceeded from subjects of any accredited State.

As a result of these instructions Darling had a mandate to use his discretion and in the following extract he orders the colonists who were taking up land grants to employ force to counter Aboriginal peoples' resistance. He wrote to the 'Hunter River landholders' in October 1826:

Every one knows that, from the Natives as a Body, at the utmost but few in Numbers, nothing is to be feared. The Settlements at Hunter's River are very extensive, and the Settlers, who are proportionately numerous, should not allow the Natives to see they are under any apprehension. Vigorous measures amongst yourselves would more effectually establish Your ascendancy than the utmost power of the Military, as, when the latter are withdrawn ... no longer fearing the Settlers, the Natives will renew their depredations.

The result of these instructions saw the 'Settlers' willingly oblige the Governor, forming vigilante groups who attacked Aboriginal people at every opportunity, and in keeping with the instructions applied 'vigorous methods' to do so. *The Australian* in September 1826 mentioned incidents at Hunter's River where the military and civilians joined forces in a punitive expedition to counter Aboriginal resistance which led to the death of 18 Aboriginal people.

Clashes were breaking out throughout the Upper Hunter Valley and from the account left by Peter Cunningham it is apparent that casualties were occurring on both sides. Cunningham records one incident where "two whites were found in the hut, one quite dead" and the response of the colonists is clearly a forceful one:

A party of constables and soldiers was forthwith dispatched to punish the murderers, and near the scene of these atrocities fell in with a recent native track ...Wishing to secure one of the group to obtain information, a female with a child on her shoulders was pursued, as the most likely to be caught ... at length exhausted by her efforts, she sank with her load.

The Aboriginal woman was captured and subsequently interrogated by the military who discovered they had harassed the wrong community. Cunningham writes, "It turned out afterwards that this was unfortunately a friendly tribe, who had nothing to do with the murders".

Not all colonists followed the offensive and vigilante mentality, some preferred a more conciliatory approach for resolving differences with Aboriginal people. This was clearly the case at Merton, now Denman, where a confrontation occurred on the land grant of Captain William Ogilvie. Peter Cunningham, who was a neighbour of Ogilvie, recorded the incident which showed that resolution was possible and the nature of relations between the two peoples ranged from friendship to open violence:

The natives around Merton, the residence of Lieutenant Ogilvie, R.N., had remained all along on the most friendly terms with his establishment, but during his absence were provoked into hostility by a party of soldiers and constables, who had wantonly maltreated them.

Mrs. Ogilvie was at home, surrounded by her young family and a few domestics, when the loud threatening yells of the savages suddenly aroused her attention, and made her summon all her energies to face the impending disaster. They seized the two constables within a few yards of the door, whom they were

shaking by the collars,... when Mrs. Ogilvie, rushing fearlessly in among the brandished clubs and poised spears, by firmness and persuasiveness(sic) of her manner, awed them and soothed them into sentiments of mercy.

Aboriginal resistance to colonization continued in the following years and further evidence of conflict is found in *The Monitor*, which reported on 4th August 1828:

Dr. Little, of Upper Hunter's River, resides about twenty miles on this side of the mountain range which separates his District from Liverpool Plains. He lately crossed that range, and on coming to a hut, found to his horror and astonishment, the bodies of some half dozen black natives ... He pursued his journey until he fell in with white people, stock-keepers and others. He learnt from them that a large body of blacks had suddenly made their appearance, but whether they paid their visit hostilely, or merely came in great numbers for self-protection, the stock-keepers admitted they could not tell. However acting in concert, our people commenced a destructive fire of musquetry upon them, and the blacks presently fled. Such were the circumstances of the fight, that some of the black fugitives on being pursued, ascended the trees in hopes of escaping, whence they were brought down by the balls of the assailants.

According to this report the colonists were following the orders of Governor Darling, taking the initiative and using 'vigorous measures' to take the offensive against Aboriginal people. However, resistance against the colonists continued in 1830 at Wollombi where Lieutenant

Breton recorded an incident in his journal after travelling through the district. Breton wrote:

A neighbouring tribe killed, in 1830, more than 100 sheep belonging to a settler who has a farm near Wollombi; they then bound the shepherd hand and foot, left him upon an ant's nest (a bed that Guatimozin himself would not have envied him), and then departed. The man was rescued before he sustained any injury, and most fortunately for him, for these ants sting and bite in a way that would astonish any one, as I know from experience, having twice suffered from their attacks, to, my great annoyance, for many days afterwards. The large black ant can cause a pain almost as acute as that of a wasp! A party of soldiers, or dismounted police, were sent after the offenders, of whom they killed several.

According to Breton several Aboriginal people were shot for killing the 100 sheep and tying the shepherd to a bed of ants, a rather harsh penalty which highlights the sorry state of relations at this time. Conflict eased in the Upper Hunter Valley in the 1830's as the colonists gained ascendancy through force over the Aboriginal people. However in the upper reaches of the valley toward New England evidence suggests conflict had not entirely ceased.

The Muswellbrook Magistrate: Captain Edward Denny Day and The Myall Creek Massacre.

In October 1837 Governor George Gepps appointed Edward Day as a magistrate at Muswellbrook and when 28 defenceless Aboriginal people were killed by colonists on the station of Henry Dangar at Myall Creek in 1838, Day was sent by Gepps to arrest the murderers. The Muswellbrook Magistrate succeeded in his task apprehending 11 people at Dangar's station after a 53-day search. Gepps wrote of the massacre:

When Mr. Day arrived at the spot, some few scattered human bones only were visible-great pains had been taken to destroy the whole remains of the slaughtered blacks by fire; but undeniable evidence was procured, of more than twenty human heads having been counted on the spot, lead me to suppose that the number of persons murdered of all ages, and both sexes, was not less than twenty-eight ... The whole eleven would indeed have pleaded guilty at the first trial, if not otherwise advised by their Counsel. After condemnation none of the seven attempted to deny their crime, though they all stated that they thought it extremely hard that white men should be put to death for killing blacks. Until after the first trial, they never, I believe, thought that their lives were in jeopardy.

As a result of the second trial seven of the men arrested by Day received the death sentence and were hung for the callous murder of 28 Aboriginal people at the station of Henry Dangar.

The Impact of Dispossession

From the middle of the 1820's colonization moved quickly into the Upper Hunter Valley bringing major disruption to traditional Aboriginal society. According to the *Historical Records of Newcastle* a government account in 1827 revealed there were '25,540 horned cattle' and '80,000 sheep' in the Hunter Valley. The lush grasslands described a few years earlier by John Howe were being rapidly consumed by the beasts of the colonists and with it the environment of Aboriginal people was grossly disturbed.

With their food supply diminished Aboriginal people turned to the sheep, cattle and crops of the colonists to survive, but as stated this brought retribution from the colonists who reacted with violent force to what they saw as 'incursions' of their property. Without food the health of Aboriginal people naturally deteriorated and a reliance on the handouts of the colonists was precarious to state the least. Occasionally Aboriginal people did work of a seasonal nature by assisting in the harvest of crops in return for foods such as flour, pumpkins and sugar, but too often the payments included addictive substances such as alcohol and tobacco. And when the work ceased so did the payments leaving Aboriginal people in the unenviable position of trying to survive in an environment that was losing its vitality.

In 1846 a Select Committee of Inquiry was conducted to investigate the state of Aboriginal people in the Hunter Valley which revealed a number of negative aspects of the impact of dispossession. The following extract is from the reply by Reverend Joseph Cooper of the

Church of England to the Inquiry and relates to the state of Aboriginal people in the Upper Hunter Valley at Falbrook, Jerry's Plains and Wollombi:

The probable number Aborigines in this district is about one hundred and fifty. The males are the most numerous; there is however a fair proportion of females; the number of children is comparatively small.

The number has greatly diminished; within the last seven years the decrease has certainly been one-third of the number. About seven years ago I have seen eighty and ninety Aborigines encamped in the township of Paterson; the greatest number at the present never exceeds twenty of twenty-five.

The decrease appears to me to have taken place mainly among the adults. The number of children observed among them... was so small that the decrease could not arise from casualties among them ... many of the finest young men, existing even three of four years ago, have now disappeared.

The causes are in my opinion two- The vice of drunkenness, to which they are, both male and female, very addicted; and disease contracted through their intercourse of their women with the whites.

Their condition is very wretched; their means of subsistence is lessened to a very great extent ... There are few or no kangaroo; they have either been destroyed, or they have retired far from the haunts of men. The kangaroo was the chief food of the natives.

Obviously traditional Aboriginal society of the Upper Hunter Valley was experiencing major problems. In particular the winter times were harsh periods for Aboriginal people struggling to find a place in the sun away from the glare of colonization. The government occasionally distributed blankets as a means of helping Aboriginal people and it is interesting to note the comments of Reverend Cooper who requested in 1846 that the issue of such comforts be resumed:

I know of no bad effects arising from giving the unfortunate Aborigines blankets; we have, in a great measure, been the means of depriving them of the source from which they formerly derived their warm clothing in abundance, and it would seem cruel to withhold the blankets; I certainly think it would be highly advisable, both on the ground of principle and charity, to resume the distribution.

Return to Merton

In 1854 Edward Ogilvie returned to the Upper Hunter Valley to revisit the place of his childhood at Merton (Denman). Less than twenty years had passed since his days of playing with Aboriginal children along the waterways of the district. Ogilvie camped at Dartbrook on the outskirts of Scone and in the morning resumed his journey to Merton. It was on this part of his travels he met one of his playmates from earlier days. He writes:

As the man approached, with his keen eyes intently fixed upon me, he suddenly with a gesture of surprise and delight, pronounced my name, and I at once recognised him as an Aboriginal named Coolan, son of a chief of the once powerful tribe that dwelt in this neighbourhood, and who in days of yore had often been the companion and attendant of myself and brothers during our hunting and fishing excursions.

As they sat by the fire that night Coolan presented a roasted possum to an Aboriginal man accompanying Ogilvie in cultural tradition and proceeded to tell his childhood friend of the demise of his people:

He told how the once numerous tribes of the Camilarrai, who in his boyhood roamed the plains, and camped in the valleys ... the Marowancal, the Tooloompikalal, the Gundical, and the fine intelligent tribe of Paninpikilal, to which he himself belonged, had all sank, dropped off, died, and gradually disappeared, the miserable surviving remnant, some

half a dozen broken men, all gaining a livelihood like himself by tending sheep.

Ogilvie was saddened by Coolan's account and while he conceded the impact of alcohol had been significant in regard to the deterioration of traditional society he writes with condemnation of the aggression of 'settlers' to this demise. Ogilvie writes:

Not one of the tribes above enumerated had ever come into hostile collision with the white intruders, but had from the first occupation of their country, remained on terms of the most perfect amity with the strangers. Yet all have been swept away, as though to destroy and exterminate had been the aim of the new comers, instead of the humane desire to preserve and support their dark-skinned brethren ever evinced by the settlers in this locality.

It was less than twenty years and colonization had caused the disappearance of the traditional society, which had lived in the Upper Hunter Valley for thousands of years. A correspondent to the *Maitland Mercury* stated in August 1847.

In reference to the poor Aborigines, it may be supposed that they have latterly become so few in number, that they no longer form camps in the wild woods, but crouch in twos and threes by the woodheaps and pig sties of such benevolent Europeans as may vouch safe to allow them such lodging. I remember, twenty years ago, counting three hundred able-bodied black men at Patrick's Plains. Where are they now. Not three dozen could be found in the entire

district, I believe. What has become of Mr. Windeyer's enquiry into the state of the Aborigines?

The Myth of the Last Aboriginal

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century a myth has been perpetuated concerning the extinction of Aboriginal people throughout NSW and the continent at large. At Lake Macquarie an Aboriginal woman called Margaret was erroneously portrayed as the last of the Awabakal, yet she had children and grandchildren. At Dungog an Aboriginal man named Brandy was similarly viewed as the last of the Gringhai and in the 1860's the *Maitland Mercury* reported that the last Aboriginal man in the Muswellbrook district had died. However the Muswellbrook Church of England Parish records reveal that Aboriginal children were being born around the same period in the district. As well *The Dawn* (1953) relays the story of "Queenie Robinson" whose father was born on the banks of the Hunter River near Singleton:

I was born in the year 1876 at a little place near Oakley Creek, Coolah ... My father was born at Singleton, on the banks of the Hunter River, was taken care of by Mr. J. McMasters of Binna Downs Station.

Evidence is quite clear that Aboriginal people continued to be born in the Upper Hunter Valley and stood in total contrast to the much heralded dying race theory. Aboriginal people of the Hunter Valley had survived, despite the most savage assault upon their world. Some people moved to other areas of New South Wales, yet they were clearly descendants of the area. In 1889 a report by Board for the

Protection of Aborigines revealed there were ten Aboriginal people living at Scone and as "Queenie Robinson" remarked 'Now I have thirty-two grandchildren and twenty-two greatchildren'. Aboriginal people today not only have oral tradition to support the argument that they had not died out in the Upper Hunter, but documentary proof. One Aboriginal woman who still lives in Singleton is able to trace her ancestry back four generations to 1834 to the Falbrook District, Rix's Creek and the St. Clair Mission. Official records clearly reveal that there were 102 Aboriginal people in the Upper Hunter River district in 1882. These people were located at Cassilis, Gresford, West Maitland, Maitland, Merriwa, Morpeth, Scone and Singleton. By 1891 this number had risen, in total contradiction to the heavily ingrained "dying race" theory to 115. It also needs to be acknowledged that these figures only represent Aboriginal people under government control and is therefore not reflective of the actual number of Aboriginal people in the Hunter Valley at the time. This evidence quite clearly reveals that it is little more than a myth that the last Aboriginal person in the Muswellbrook district died in the 1860's.

Galmarra (Jackey Jackey)

One of the most famous Aboriginal men of the Hunter Valley is Galmarra or Jackey Jackey as he became known. His tragic tale reveals the difficulties faced when crossing the boundaries of two worlds. He was a Wonnarua man and grew up in the Merton (Denman) district in the 1840's. He was only a boy when his brilliant bush skills saw him chosen by explorer Edmund Kennedy to accompany his party to find a route from Rockhampton to Cape York Peninsula.

The ill-fated group experienced trying and harsh conditions, which resulted with Kennedy and Galmarra pushing on alone for the last leg of the journey. For whatever tribal transgression or other reason, Kennedy and Galmarra were attacked by Murris only kilometres short of their goal. Kennedy was killed and it was up to Galmarra to complete the last leg of the journey and bring news of Kennedy's death to the waiting supply ship. He then led Captain T. Beckford and a party looking for survivors or Kennedy's body, but they were unsuccessful.

Galmarra was heralded as a hero for his courage and loyalty to Kennedy. He was honoured with a brass plate awarded by Governor Fitzroy but was sadly introduced to alcohol by an adoring public. He was rewarded with a large sum of money for his heroism from which he bought a horse, saddle, blanket and spurs. He returned to the Singleton area living with the Aboriginal people of Patrick Plains, but dependence on alcohol saw him spend all of his money and sell his belongings to buy more.

He died still a young man in 1854 when on a droving expedition outside of Albury he fell into a fire whilst heavily intoxicated and burnt to death. His only belonging was noted as a blanket.

Mary-Anne Bugg (Black Mary) and Captain Thunderbolt

The famed bushranger Captain Thunderbolt was shot dead near Uralla on 25 May 1870 and is buried in the little cemetery there. His companion and partner in many exciting escapades was an Aboriginal woman Mary Anne Bugg otherwise known as (Black Mary). It is little wonder that the Hunter Valley attracted bushrangers and horse thieves like Thunderbolt. Probably the most famous thoroughbred breeding district in Australia the Hunter Valley became synonymous for breeding great horses from the early days of settlement in the region. Kia Ora, Segenhoe, Widden and other studs became time-honoured establishments and the breeding ground of countless Australian champions.

Race meetings and racecourses in the Hunter abounded from the earliest days. Maitland (1832), Patrick Plains (1833), Muswellbrook (1841), Scone (1842) and Singleton (1847) established race meetings. One of Thunderbolt's great weaknesses was for equine beauty and power:

He took from Mr Dines at Hambledown Hill a very fine animal, which he called "Combo" after the local place of that name. He also stole from Mr Wyndham, of Branxton, "Tallyrand", and the value of this beast can be gauged by the owner offering £100 for its recovery.

In an early escapade he stole another beautiful racehorse named *John Brown* from Mr Sam Clift of the Breeza Plains. The larrikan bushranger was a splendid horseman of ice cool determination and courage. Thunderbolt's career was highlighted by the fact that he never committed a crime that shed any blood. He was given shelter and assistance by many members of the community and was looked upon as a Robin Hood like figure.

Frederick Ward was born at Windsor in New South Wales in 1835. He moved with his family to Maitland when he was ten years old. At the age of seventeen he and his brothers had gained employment as horse-breakers for Mr Charles Reynolds of Tocal Station near Maitland. Legend holds that Ward was engaged to his childhood sweetheart, a Miss Anson, but despairing of his embarrassing financial position he was coerced whilst working at Tocal into a get rich campaign of rustling some valuable horses from his employer. Ward's share of the booty was £200 and his penchant for stealing horses was set. With his new found wealth the date of his wedding was set, invitations sent out and the cake was ordered. Ward's excitement and joy was shattered when he and the other accomplices were arrested for stealing the horses and sentenced to ten years imprisonment at Cockatoo Island. A devastated Ward knew that any chance of marriage to Miss Anson was gone.

He was released after serving half of his sentence to work at his sister's property in Mudgee. It was during his stay in Mudgee that he met (or was most likely re-acquainted) with an Aboriginal girl from the Maitland area Mary Anne Bugg. Mary Anne would become a legendary character in her own right. She would remain the bushranger's companion sharing many of his memorable escapades and she bore him three children. Mary Anne was born in 1834 near Stroud in the Hunter Valley, the daughter of James Bugg, a transported English convict

who was assigned to the AA company and progressed through loyal conduct and hard work from a labourer to overseer of shepherds at one of the companies outlying sheep stations. Mary-Anne's mother was an Aboriginal woman from the local area with whom Bugg had formed a long standing relationship - after saving his life from an Aboriginal attack, he married her out of gratitude for her bravery and obvious love. She gave up her traditional name and took the European name of Charlotte and they had eight children. Mary-Anne lived with her parents until she was forcibly removed from their protective care and placed in the orphan school at Parramatta and trained as a domestic servant. At the slender age of 14 she married a former policeman named Edmund Baker and she had accompanied him to Mudgee where he gained work as a shepherd. It was at Mudgee that Mary-Anne made the re-acquaintance of the recently released Fred Ward and they began an affair and her marriage to Baker was over.

In 1861 Ward was once more in custody on Cockatoo Island for stealing horses and was given five years plus the five years from his previous sentence that he had not served. Despite the upheaval and trauma of this Mary-Anne gave birth to Ward's baby daughter. Ward's escape with another prisoner Fred Britton from Cockatoo Island is the stuff of folklore and Saturday movie matinee material. Mary-Anne Bugg is credited as swimming from Long Nose Point to Cockatoo Island through shark infested waters to hand Ward a file, to cut through his leg irons. Hidden under seaweed she had swum out to the prisoners and passed the file to Ward through the planks of the wharf. She safely returned to the mainland and a few nights later Ward and Britton made their escape with the aid of a lantern held aloft by Mary-Anne to guide them. They made their way to shore and the horses she had waiting. This

heroic escape took place on 11 September 1863. With the aid of darkness they made their getaway to Windsor. Ward's career as a wanted outlaw and fugitive was underway.

The significance and contribution of Mary-Anne Bugg in the longevity of Thunderbolt's career and ability to outwit the law cannot be underestimated. Adept in Aboriginal and European ways, she could read and write and was a skilled hunter and tracker. Her bush skills gave her and Ward a great edge over any pursuers. They could cover vast distances through the skill of their horsemanship and by the fact that they always had the best of horseflesh. Legend dictates that Mary-Anne on many occasions accompanied Ward dressed as a male accomplice on his raids. She was also an excellent horsewoman and may well have been the first female Aboriginal jockey - Ward stole many top notch thoroughbreds and had an appetite for the races and a wager. One story holds that Ward had stolen a top horse and then he and Mary-Anne travelled a good distance to a remote race meeting. Mary-Anne was disguised as a male jockey and took the mount on the horse they had entered under a false name. Ward placed the bets and the horse duly won and he collected their winnings. They made good their escape on strategically placed getaway mounts on the discovery of their ruse.

In 1865 with a reward of £2000 on the bushrangers head, a large-scale New South Wales police hunt was mounted involving Aboriginal trackers. Thunderbolt and accomplices including Mary-Anne fled New South Wales across the Queensland border and back to Narran Lake 80 kilometres from Walgett. The police raided the bushrangers' camp but Ward and the other men got away

- Mary-Anne and a quantity of goods were captured. Feigning illness and fatigue Mary-Anne was taken to nearby Wilby Station. Days later Thunderbolt staged a daring raid on the station and rescued his sweetheart and fled once more across the Queensland border. For a spell Thunderbolt and Mary-Anne were successful in giving their pursuers the slip and for a period lived a peaceful existence on the Culgoa River near Bourke. They could not however stay away from the lure of easy cash and horses and returned to continue plundering the Hunter Valley highways and studs. The beginning of the end was signaled when Mary-Anne was arrested in Stroud for vagrancy and for consorting with an escaped prisoner and sentenced to six months jail. The police aided by Aboriginal trackers had tracked the bushranger and Mary-Anne to a mountain hideaway. Ward's continued good fortune held and he made another escape. Mary-Anne hindered by two children and pregnant with a third, did not have the same good fortune. She was released after serving only six months because of lack of evidence and her pregnancy. Representations for her release had been put forward by the then colonial secretary of New South Wales, Sir Henry Parkes who stated that she was the victim of police harassment. Only months after her release Mary-Anne became gravely ill. Her condition deteriorated. Thunderbolt moved her to a settler's hut near Muswellbrook and had her cared for. The effort was in vain and she died of pneumonia still only aged 28. The children of Thunderbolt and Mary-Anne were placed in government orphanages and represent a nineteenth century case of the 'Stolen Generations'. Descendents of Mary-Anne Bugg remain active members of the Aboriginal community in the present day Hunter Valley.

Without his trusted companion Thunderbolt was never the same. He himself was now suffering serious illness with advanced tuberculosis a fact borne out at the inquest after his death. The reward for his capture had been increased to £4000. On 25 May 1870 Thunderbolt after a hold up was surprised at a nearby inn by two police constables. A chase across country began. Thunderbolt and the two pursuing police exchanged shots which resulted with one constables animal bolting and running off with its rider. The other constable Alexander Walker (later an Inspector General of Police) stuck to his quarry and chased the highwayman to Kentucky Creek. Thunderbolt tried to deter his pursuer by screaming "to desist the chase if he had a wife and children". Thunderbolt rode his mount straight into the water but the animal was shot by Walker leaving Thunderbolt in deep water in more ways than one. Walker spurred his mount into the water, Thunderbolt tried his utmost to dislodge Walker from his mount. The constable fired a shot from point blank range into the bushrangers chest and he died nearly instantly. The bushrangers body was retrieved the next morning and transported by cart back into Uralla. The local community were far from pleased and showed outward emotion in the passing of Captain Thunderbolt.

Albert Widders

Following the footsteps of Thunderbolt and Mary-Anne Bugg's horsemanship is the story of Albert Widders. He was born at Camberwell, near Singleton. He entered the service of Captain Russell of Ravensworth as a young stable boy. His natural skill in the saddle quickly saw him rise through the ranks and he was eventually promoted as headstockman: 'this was a responsible position in those far off days'. Widders reputation as horseman achieved legendary status in the Hunter Valley and for more than fifty years he was regarded as one of the pastoral industry's greatest assets. A newspaper article written shortly after his death in 1923 reveals:

While riding the outer marches of the then wide domain of Ravensworth this half-caste like Othello, found favor in the eyes of a maiden of fairer hue, the daughter of a well to-do settler in the neighbourhood, who married Widders according to the rites of the Church.

After some 21 years employment with Ravensworth, Widders was persuaded to take up employment with Segenhoe Stud, owned at the time by the wealthy McDonald brothers. This time period of the later 1860s saw Widders' chief role as mustering wild unbroken horses for the Queensland market. This was the most strenuous period of Widders' working life. He himself had a brush with the famed Thunderbolt. He had acquired a small property in the Singleton area and he kept a few top horses there for his own mounts. Thunderbolt made a raid and lifted one of Widders' prized mounts. Widders tracked

the outlaw to his lair and recovered his mount. Widders' marriage collapsed possibly through his constant absence. Loneliness and 'adverse conditions arising, "Desdemona" sought the shelter of her father's roof with her children'.

Now alone, Widders took to the saddle permanently and was variously employed as a shearer, drover, and horse-breaker. During the 1870's he gained a permanent place in the employ of Mr John Fletcher at Orundumbi in the Walcha district. He eventually moved on taking charge of Giro in the Upper Manning and later the management of St Leonards, near Walcha. Encroaching free selectors were responsible for closing the area as a run for stock:

And the half-caste ex-station manager found a wider range on Tomalla in the employment of the Campbells, of Ardon Hall, near Scone. Here he maintained his reputation as a capable stockrider for several years.

He eventually moved back to the Upper Manning in 1886 gaining a position as head stockman at Cooplaccurripa. He stayed in charge there for over twelve years where his ability to deal with wild cattle was very evident. Advancing age was responsible in him finding easier employment at Fairburn near Armidale as a general hand for five years although his abilities as a vet were still sought until 1916. Failing eyesight was responsible for his retirement. last job was at Ward's Mistake near Armidale in the charge of a pack of rabbit hounds. Accounts state that Widders' ability with dogs matched his horsemanship and at one early stage of his life he was offered the chance to journey to England to take charge of a pack of foxhounds. Stories of Widders' horsemanship have taken on legendary form, witnesses attesting that from the 'brigalow scrubs of Queensland, or in the sub tropical growths in the gorges

abutting on the eastern slopes of New England' there was none better in the saddle or handling cattle than Widders. One story of Widders reveals that:

When a youth of 18 years he was set to ride any horse on Archerfield for a wager. The animal selected for the contest was yarded and kept on hard feed for a term. After great exhibition on the part of both horse and rider, a partisan of the latter felled the horse with a loaded whip handle. Naturally a free fight followed.

Widders was described in his prime as a man of commanding presence 'standing a trifle over six feet and athletically built'. Despite his 'towering stature' Widders 'was wonderfully agile'.

It was a seemingly easy accomplishment for him to spring into the saddle with his mount going at top speed as it was for him to assume the perpendicular the moment he touched the horse's back, nor did it appear to be anywise difficult for him to reach the back of an infuriated bullock in a stock-yard, only to spring off and grip the top rail of the fence when the animal was at the height of its mad career. As an athlete, Widders had no peer in high jumping, three standing jumps, or in long jumping.

He was also a noted runner 'and so smart was he in leaving the mark that few contestants were ever able to make up the initial leeway gained by the tall Hunterite'. As well as his experience as stockman, drover and shearer, Widders despite his height had been more than a useful jockey and wore 'the racing colours of several owners

and was the victor in many show-rings'. His capabilities in the show-ring persisted into old age:

Cattle-drafting, perhaps, was his forte, and though he was an old man when this particular item was introduced to shows, he was invincible for a long term. On Armidale show ground, when 80 years of age, he demonstrated his ability to use a horse.

Widders' exploits in some cases rival Banjo Patterson's heroes 'Clancy of the Overflow' and 'The Man from Snowy River'. Another great Hunter Valley horseman of the era, J S. Drew declared that he witnessed Widders greatest feat of riding:

"We were after a mob of wild horses in a very wet time. Coming down a mountain a mare in the mob fell and was sliding down the hill, when Widders jumped off and caught her. I knew the horse Widders was riding," continued Drew, who was no novice, "and the man that stopped him in the time and place he did was no ordinary man. And the way he sprang onto the mare! Why it was like the dart of a swift through the air." As regards his tenacity: When a new hand on Orundumbi, he was assisting in a horse muster at Surveyors Creek. About 2 o'clock one afternoon two horses that had got away every muster for years left the coachers. Widders and several other stockmen started in pursuit. Nightfall found the former alone with the horses in the junction of two creeks, where he held them until daylight next morning. Then resuming operations he yarded them unaided at Ingalba some 40 miles in a direct line from the starting point, at 10 a.m that day. The horse that carried the redoubtable half-caste through this long chase was a newly broken colt, but his was a type that – with all due respect to the theory of the racecourse test and its influence on the light horse generally – has long since vanished from New England runs.

On 6th December 1923 Albert Widders passed away and the remains of this remarkable Hunter Valley horseman were laid to rest in the Church of England cemetery at Armidale. Widders was not the only top Aboriginal horseman of the era Robert Stephens known as "Yellow Bobby":

Was an Aboriginal, and with a pack of dogs mostly the mongrel breed spent the last of his years prior to being removed to an institution for old and infirm, in a bark gunyah on the reserve in the bend of the second deviation on the Scone-Gundy road. Bobby was a wonderful stockman in his day, and in his after years was befriended and had many kindnesses passed his way by the squire of a well known property on the Hunter.

Albert Widders and Bobby Stephens established a long line of top line Aboriginal horsemen in the Hunter Valley. In the 20th century there were a number of top class Aboriginal jockeys who rode to prominence in the Hunter Valley. During the 1920's and 1930's Massa Read and Jimmy Dries were among the best riders of the era in the Gunnedah and Tamworth areas. Rae 'Togo' Johnstone was born in Newcastle in 1905 and is recognised as one of the all time great jockeys. He rode in excess of 3000 winners in nine countries with a total of thirty six classics including the English Derby on three occasions. These riders preceded the likes of Stan Johnson, Merv Maynard, Gordon Taylor and

Normie Rose who became household names to punters of the north after the Second World War. Maynard the son of Aboriginal activist Fred Maynard would in a career that spanned five decades ride internationally in New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia for some notable owners including American millionaire J. De Bloiswack, restaurateur Azzalin 'the Dazzlin' Romano, Sir Frank Packer and the Sultan of Jahor. He finished his career in 1994 with over 1500 winners including three Muswellbrook Cups. In 1993 Maynard was rewarded with an official audience with Queen Elizabeth II.

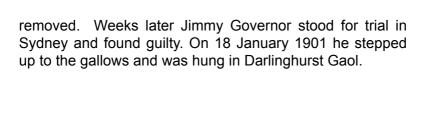
Jimmy and Joe Governor

Born close to Denison Town (Talbragar) NSW in 1875 Jimmy Governor grew into a hard working young Aboriginal man. He had been denied any sense of acceptance by white society despite his willingness to work and his attempt to adopt a white lifestyle. He was very much in love with his young white, wife Ethel Page, who was the subject of taunts and derision for marrying a black man. His marriage to the young white woman was the final ingredient in an already lethal cocktail of harsh and unjust life experiences. Any hopes of acceptance were completely dashed and Ethel and Jimmy found themselves ostracised and condemned. On 20 July 1900, his brother Joe and friend Jackie Underwood exploded in a rampage of revenge against the white world. At Breelong they killed five people and in the days following the brothers now separated from Underwood, killed another four people. Without condoning the horrific response of Jimmy Governor when he struck out at his tormentors, one can only feel compassion for the years of unjust treatment experienced by him and his family.

The Governors were on the run for over three months, covering more than 3000 kilometers including a large area of the Hunter Valley. They were pursued by over 2000 civilians and police. It was undoubtedly the intimate knowledge of country and bush skills of both Jimmy and Joe Governor that enabled them to avoid capture and make a mockery of their pursuers. Many landmarks of the terrain and country were named after the Governors including Governor Creek, Governor Hill, Governor Paddock and Governor Knob. The story of the Governor pursuit highlights both the ingenuity and skill of the pursued whilst

clearly demonstrating the ineptitude of the pursuers. The pursuit was marred by large-scale bungling, fear and total lack of familiarity with the land. The majority of civilians and police who flocked to join the manhunt lacked the skills and bush knowledge necessary to survive in it let alone catch the Governor brothers. The continued inability of the pursuers to apprehend the Governors fanned public hysteria and paranoia. The public at large were gripped with fear that the Governors were close at hand and about to inflict terrible vengeance.

The brothers run eventually ended with an ambush. Jimmy Governor was wounded, shot through the jaw, and taken captive. Joe managed to escape. Jimmy was transported to Wingham and from there shipped to Sydney to stand trial for the nine murders. In late October 1900 Joe Governor had managed to make his way back to country north of St Clair (outside Singleton). Exhausted from his escape and journey he lay asleep by a fire. A local farmer John Wilkinson stumbled upon his resting-place and guickly raced away to enlist the help of his brother George. Despite the screech of cockatoos and startled kangaroos bounding through the bush Joe Governor did not stir until a scream from John Wilkinson brought him to alarm. Joe managed to make an escape that lasted about a kilometre before he was fatally shot at a distance of some 300 metres. His body was slung over a horse and transported into Singleton where in a macabre scene it was laid out for display on a billiard table in the Caledonia Hotel. Jimmy Miller relates that his great-grandmother Harriet and three other Aboriginal women were refused a request to clean Joe Governors' body. He was buried outside the fence of the Church of England cemetery at Singleton as his head had been



The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board - Missions, Stations and Paternalism

By the later stages of the nineteenth century a more vigorous and renewed initiative was taken to the so-called 'Aboriginal problem', a phrase frequently used in contemporary newspapers and official documents. It was the common thought during this period that Aborigines would soon die out. The New South Wales government opted for an outright segregation policy by opening more reserves, mostly in country areas and especially on coastal areas north and south of Sydney. Most of these reserves were then set up on land that was seen as worthless and commercially unviable. The Aborigines were thus isolated and removed from the general populace of small and large country towns and confined to the outskirts.

It was not until 1881 that the New South Wales Government appointed George Thornton as 'Protector of Aborigines'. In this capacity, he had limited and restricted means to achieve any far-reaching gains and operated with a working budget of only a few hundred pounds. The government did allow Thornton to conduct a statewide survey on the conditions and needs of Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales. As a result of the survey, Thornton's analysis and recommendations reveal strong convictions of a reasonably positive and progressive nature. He was adamant that providing land back to Aboriginal people was the best means of action for the government to arrest the alarming decline in conditions faced by the Aboriginal population. He directed that land provided for housing and cultivation was the spark

necessary in invigorating self-belief and hope within the Aboriginal groups. Thornton stated:

I am strongly of the opinion that reserves should be made in such parts of the Colony, where it can be conveniently and usefully done, for the purposes of the Aborigines, to enable them to form homesteads, to cultivate grain, vegetables, fruit, etc, etc, for their own support and comfort. I have every hope and expect great success from granting reserves of from 10 to 40 acres of land for the uses of the Aborigines in their own particular district....

While he was a voice crying in the wilderness in white society, Thornton's appraisal coincided directly with the actions of Aboriginal people themselves. Aboriginal demands for land in New South Wales between 1860 and 1890 were of an extremely high level and comprehensive nature. The majority of reserves created during this period were because of Aboriginal demands and 'were farmed and managed by Aboriginal people themselves, and were never controlled by the APB'. Historian Barry Morris made comment on the period; 'the APB had little direct control over Aborigines. Supervision was exercised from the local police station. Men applied for farming land on the reserves through the local police, who sent the forms to the APB in Sydney to be approved or rejected'. This was a period marked as a most rewarding time for some Aboriginal families as they sought to re-establish themselves on their land as farmers. On the north-coast, 'some sixteen reserves were set up ranging from 2.25 acres to 507 acres. Depending on the size of the reserve, one family or, as on larger reserves, three or four families could have land under cultivation'. Hundreds of Aboriginal farmers

on the south coast, western New South Wales and the north coast were meeting with farming successes. These independent farmed reserves would be in direct contrast to the congested reserves that would come later where all means of independence, initiative and decisions on everyday life were eventually squashed.

St Clair (Mount Olive), Caroona and the Aborigines Inland Mission

At the turn of the nineteenth century there were few outward signs that aspects of traditional Aboriginal society had survived in the Hunter Valley. Small groups of survivors lived at places such as Reddonberry and Glennies Creek, while others had become integrated into mainstream society and lived in the towns. But for the majority of Aboriginal people in the Upper Hunter Valley life revolved around missions and reserves under the paternal umbrella of the Aborigines Protection Board.

In 1883, the New South Wales government formally established the Aborigines Protection Board. This body operated without any statutory powers defined in legislation until 1909. Nevertheless, it defined its own powers up until that time. The 1909 Act was substantially based on such definition. Its eventual role was to take complete control over every aspect of Aboriginal life in New South Wales in a most systematic way. In contrast to Thornton, the Board did not make decisions with long-term goals in mind for the Aboriginal population. This was clearly identified by the New South Wales Parliament, which in 1883 held the assumption that there would be no need to increase the funding for Aboriginal people, as they were dying out in any case. The deletion of 'full-bloods' from the census, under section 127 of the Commonwealth Constitution in 1900, as Smith has suggested, reflected the 'unstated consensus that their exclusion would before too long be made a reality by the eventual demise of the "dying race". Such a consensus was also informally stated on many occasions in popular contemporary literature in

By 1900, the number of governmentvarious forms. controlled reserves had grown to one hundred and thirty three across the map. In 1909 the NSW Protection Act was passed and this infamous Act was to be the main legislation governing the lives of Aboriginal people in New South Wales for the next sixty years. Many changes took place over the years under the Act but the Board had an all-powerful presence, which surpassed changing governments. In later years, its actions demonstrated blatant oppression, in that it moved Aboriginal people forcefully out of towns and onto reserves, and set up managers of their choosing to control and oversee the people on the reserves especially during the Great Depression. During this period measures were also taken to not only restrict the movement of Aborigines, but also to prevent their general contact with the white populace. The reserve managers had the right to search Aborigines, their dwellings, and belongings at any time; they could confiscate property, read their personal mail, order medical inspections, confine children to dormitories, and exert control over their movements. They held power over food and distribution, clothing, education, employment and even the right of people to marry. They could expel Aboriginal people from reserves or remove them to another altogether and break up families. Therefore, they had absolute control over the children. Such unabated power progressively took on a sinister nature in the wrong hands.

Initially the 1909 Act was observed to be deficient in the legal powers that the Board wanted to exercise, primarily with their attempts to remove Aboriginal children from their parents. When the new laws came into force in 1909, the Board still had only the power under the State Children's Relief Department to take control of children if they were judged by the courts to be neglected or in moral danger.

The Board knew that these powers were not enough, for the simple reason that the children it wished to take were not neglected. It complained to the Chief Secretary in a further bid to gain the power it wanted:

Under the law these children cannot legally be called neglected... If the Aboriginal child happens to be decently clad and apparently looked after it is very difficult indeed to show that the half-caste or Aboriginal child is actually in a neglected condition and therefore it is impossible to succeed in court.

Amendments to the Act in 1915 and 1918 allowed the Board well-defined and far-reaching powers to remove Aboriginal children from their parents under the guise of the apprenticeship scheme in which the girls were to be trained as domestic servants and the boys trained as labourers. The children received little academic education and their labour was frequently exploited. The effect on Aboriginal family life was devastating. From the 1920's the government's policies took on the shape of enforced assimilation.

The methods that successive governments of New South Wales continued to employ to suppress Aboriginal people were far-reaching:

To speak of reserves as the result of Aboriginal strategies seems incongruous: most Aboriginal speakers today are adamant that the reserves were concentration camps, where no matter how they might have felt about the land itself, their experience was of unrelenting segregation, repression and cultural assault by the agents of the government.

The most lasting legacy of incarceration on these mission 'prisons' has been the bitterness etched into Aboriginal consciousness over their treatment by those supposedly entrusted with their welfare.

In the Upper Hunter two areas were set aside as reserves for Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth century. One was located on the outskirts of Quirindi called Caroona and the other between Muswellbrook and Singleton at Carrowbrook called St. Clair, (later Mount Olive Station). In 1890 land set aside at St. Clair amounted to about 60 acres where Aboriginal people quickly adapted and combined European farming with traditional means of subsistence. They successfully grew and harvested a variety of vegetables, including corn, potatoes and cabbages. A number of Aboriginal people at Singleton and Muswellbrook remember their parents and grandparents living at these places during the twentieth century. From the archival records it is apparent that St Clair was the centre of Aboriginal life in the first half of the century and Caroona succeeded this position in the second half of the century. In 1905 St Clair came under the control of the Aborigines Inland Mission (A.I.M.). A Baptist missionary Retta Dixon founded the Aborigines Inland Mission in 1905, after a split with the Australian Aborigines Mission (A.A.M.) A year later Dixon was instrumental in establishing a female orphanage for Aboriginal girls and these premises were located in George Street Singleton and a second mission at Redonberry on the banks of the Hunter River. The mission at St.Clair became a place for missionaries to recruit. These missionaries came from a variety of religious denominations, including Baptists, Uniting Church, Anglican and Brethren. The A.I.M.'s evangelical role with Aboriginal peoples in New South Wales extended to many communities.



Alice Lester and her daughter Alma from St Clair Mission

The St Clair Mission operated under the control of the Aborigines Inland Mission until 1916 when control was taken over by the Aborigines Protection Board and a station manager was appointed to operate the reserve which became known as Mount Olive. The Aboriginal people at Mount Olive were subjected to the absolute

control of the manager and a significant number were expelled for failing to adhere to the strict regulations. As a result the number of Aboriginal people living at Mount Olive declined during those years. It was completely swallowed up by the Board and closed off to Aboriginal people altogether in 1923. One Aboriginal woman from the Singleton district recalls that her mother and grandparents relocated to the other side of Carrowbrook following the closure of Mount Olive:

When my mother, and my grandmother left the mission, my grandfather got a piece of land across the creek from the mission. They had their own vegetable garden farm down on the creek flat, then it was sold off. When I go back there I always feel welcome. It's a feeling I can't explain to people.

Tom Phillips was a prominent and highly politicised individual who had settled and farmed St Clair reserve outside Singleton during its heyday. James Miller identifies that:

Tom Phillips, an uncle of Jack Miller, chose not to accept the white man's religion. During the 1900s Tom Phillip's name was a very significant one in the Singleton and St Clair areas. His name appeared in several editions of the Singleton Argus in the 1900s while nothing was said of him in the Inland Mission's journal Our Aim. Had Tom Phillips been a Christian, the latter publication would have most certainly written about him'.

The savage experiences of this second "dispossession", including the loss of St Clair and the impact of that event on Tom Phillips was one of the significant catalysts that would trigger Aboriginal political mobilisation and revolt in the mid 1920's.

The Birth of Organised, United Aboriginal Political Activism

Aboriginal people during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began to write and speak out against the horrific inequality of Aboriginal existence. These protests were isolated to individual or community campaigns. This altered with the rise in 1924 of the first united politically organised all-Aboriginal group the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) in Sydney NSW. Hunter Valley Koori Fred Maynard was the President of this organisation. He was a demonstrably exceptional man, an inspiring leader and spokesperson, and a compassionate visionary whom rose up to defend his people's rights. He was born at Hinton in the Hunter Valley on 4 July 1879 and significantly, his uncle was Tom Phillips. The savage removal of the Aboriginal farmers at St Clair including Phillips was undoubtedly one of the triggers that caused the eruption of such vehement and vocal Aboriginal political protest. The AAPA demands centred on Aboriginal rights to land, stopping the practice of taking Aboriginal children, acquiring citizenship rights, and defending Aboriginal cultural identity. They drew their inspiration from international black influences including Marcus Garvey.

Battling to Survive – the Western Front and the Homefront - World Wars, Aboriginal Servicemen and Rose Gold

It has been estimated that around 289 Aboriginal people from NSW, Queensland and Victoria served overseas for the Australian Imperial Force in World War I and 3,000 in the Australian Army, Navy and Air force in World War II. Forty four were listed as killed in action and 59 wounded. The number of Aboriginal and Islander recruits was possibly much higher than these figures suggest because many of them claimed to be Maoris to disguise their racial origins. A number of Aboriginal men from St Clair fought in the Australian Infantry in France in World War I. It was on the Western Front that an Aboriginal man from Mount Olive was killed and a sign of the goodwill existing between Aboriginal people and mainstream society is found in a small medal made of rose gold. The medal was dedicated to Private Alistair Lester by people in the local community and read as follows:

Presented by the Friends of Mount Olive to the Mother of Private A. Lester who nobly fell in Active Duty: 18-4-18.



Alistair Lester



The medal presented to Alistair Lester's Mother

Aboriginal people living in Muswellbrook today recall how their fathers and grandfathers were servicemen in both World Wars as Queenie Robinson stated:

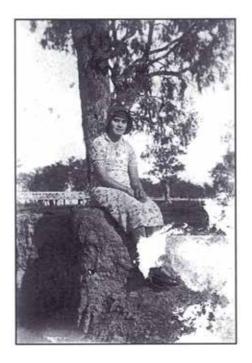
I have reared nine children of my own, two boys and seven girls, and have brought up another twenty. One of my sons has died but the other children are still living and rearing their own families. Of the twenty children I reared, seven were soldiers who fought in the Great War. God took one, Leo Cain, but the others were spared me.

Caroona and St Heliers

The Caroona Mission (originally Walhollow Station) was located about 20 kilometres from Quirindi and was established in the late 1870's. There were usually around 200 Aboriginal people living in accommodation provided by the government under the control of the station manager. The mission had its own school which went to primary level and at one time was used as a showpiece of the fine work undertaken by the Aboriginal Welfare Board as the following extract written by Superintendent A.W.Lipscomb from *The Dawn* attests:

My first visit was to Caroona Station. This settlement is located about nineteen miles from Quirindi, and the same distance from Werris Creek. It is one of our oldest stations, and usually carries a population of over 200 people, although the number at present is somewhat less. Since the War this Station has been entirely rebuilt, and is now a modern up-to-date settlement with lovely homes, School, Hall, Church, Farm buildings and other amenities. A proud record of Caroona Station is that every family has been able to live independently of the Board's assistance throughout the past five years. and not one ration has been issued. Even the old folk are being looked after by their young able-bodied relatives, who are in good steady employment. The homes are nicely furnished: many have wireless sets and refrigerators and nice gardens have been made around the homes.

This reference reveals that Aboriginal people were in 'good steady employment', but it is clear some degree of social alienation from mainstream society was active. The station was a significant distance from Quirindi and all the facilities such as a school, church and a hall reflects a people living in an isolated situation that could be described as sub-cultural and institutional.



Dolly Beale at the Walhollow Station Circa 1933-1935

St Heliers is located on the outskirts of Muswellbrook towards McCullys Gap and was originally a property occupied by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Dumeresq who was part of the colonial force who went to the Upper Hunter Valley in the late 1820's. A section of the property of around 450 acres was purchased by the government in 1945 and served as a child welfare institution until its closure in 1986. As an orphanage this institution has been identified by members of the Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council as a place where Aboriginal children were taken from their parents and was very much a part of the Stolen Generations.

The removal of Aboriginal children from their natural parents was commonplace during the 20th century. It is has been estimated that around 8,000 Aboriginal children in New South Wales were taken from their parents and placed into state institutions. It is widely regarded from an Aboriginal perspective that not one Aboriginal family has escaped from the trauma of having children torn from their parents. As a result thousands of Aboriginal children lost their cultural identity and became alienated from their natural families. Such government action leaves Aboriginal people with no doubt that the process was one of pre-meditated paternalism. The taking of Aboriginal children from their families and placing them in an Institution to weaken resolve would remain at the forefront of government policy well into the late 20th century.

The following extract reveals that the sentiments of the early decades of the twentieth century were still impacting upon Aboriginal life many decades later. The Superintendent of the Aboriginal Welfare Board A. W. Lipscomb in December 1953 reflected this policy:

The Board recognises the generally accepted principle that a child's natural heritage is to be brought up in its own home, under care of its natural

parents. There is no wholly satisfactory substitute for this. Unfortunately, some parents, despite all efforts on their behalf, prove themselves incapable or unsuitable to be entrusted with this important duty, and the Board is forced to take the necessary action for the removal of the child.

The best substitute for its own home is a foster home with competent and sympathetic foster-parents. Failing this, the only alternative is a Home under management of the Board's own offices.

The Aboriginal children that found their way into St. Heliers have a special place in this infamous chapter in Australian history. A retired schoolteacher from Muswellbrook recalls that in the 1960's the average number of Aboriginal children who attended Muswellbrook South Primary School from St. Heliers averaged about eight. According to sources the children were always 'neatly dressed' and travelled to and from the orphanage by bus. It was the role of the teachers to integrate them into mainstream society and to this effect "I think we were successful. A few of them became very good football players and gained employment."

Aboriginal Women, Waitresses and Employment

Aboriginal women were able to find employment in towns such as Muswellbrook and Singleton, but they were always in positions of servitude such as hotel workers, cleaners and maids. Young Aboriginal girls from orphanages at Singleton found their way into the homes of local residents doing cleaning and general duties. One Aboriginal woman recalls her first job was at the Railway Hotel at Muswellbrook where she served drinks and waited on the dinner tables. Another woman from Singleton recalls similar memories gaining her first work experience at the Caledonian Hotel in George Street.

Aboriginal Legal Services

In a very real sense the law was used against Aboriginal people from the early days of colonization, the years of the Aborigines Protection Board and the Aboriginal Welfare Board saw Aboriginal people without any genuine input into the process that ruled over their lives. Denied the full rights of citizenship until 1967 the law was something to be feared by many Aboriginal people. In the 1970's *The Dawn* magazine claimed:

In the early days of white colonisation Aborigines who offended against the new laws were tried according to a new legal system about which they knew nothing. It probably never occurred to them that the legal system could be on their side too. This situation continues today. For many Aborigines, the whole legal process remains a mystery.

In an effort to bring greater equality to Aboriginal people in relation to legal process a specialised legal service was established by Aboriginal people, university academics and law students during the 1970's at Redfern. Founded in 1971 and known as the Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service this organisation has assisted thousands of Aboriginal people across recent decades. As a result of the initial legal service at Sydney there are a number of legal services available to Aboriginal people in NSW, including the Newcastle based Northern Aboriginal Community Legal Centre and the Tamworth based Kamilaroi Aboriginal Legal Service which service Aboriginal communities of the Upper Hunter Valley.

Railway Tents, 14lb Hammers and Assimilation

Following the cessation of the Great Depression in the 1930's and World War II in 1945 full employment was a major goal of every Federal government from the Chifley Labour Government to the Menzies coalition government in the 1960's. Up until this time Aboriginal people survived by predominately gaining seasonal employment particularly in the pastoral industry. From the 1940's this disparity changed with the work of the agencies of Aboriginal Welfare Board who actively sought employment for Aboriginal people. One of the major employers of Aboriginal people in NSW was the Department of Railways who employed thousands of people throughout the state. The Aboriginal Welfare Board was a significant influence in this process in relation to Aboriginal employment in NSW as seen in the following extract from *The Dawn:*

Many have obtained positions with the Railway Department, Main Roads, Local Government bodies, and other work of a stable nature. Every endeavour is made by the Welfare Officers and managers of Stations, for Aborigines to obtain constant employment in skilled, semi-skilled and seasonal work... The Commonwealth Employment Officers do a wonderful job in placing Aborigines, and it is felt that with co-operation from both Government and non-official agencies, much will be done to place the Australian Aborigine in permanent employment, which will without a shadow of a doubt, be a great step towards our policy of assimilation.

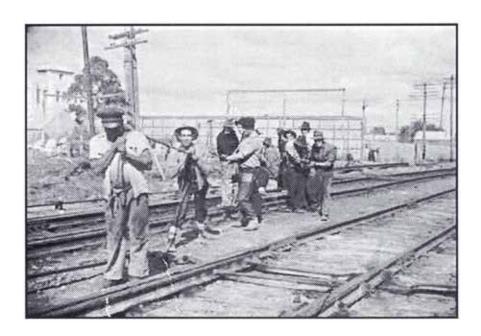
Employment in the railways was a major factor in bringing Aboriginal people to the Upper Hunter Valley and places such as Scone, Aberdeen and Muswellbrook were once the scene of numerous tents sited along the railway tracks. One Aboriginal man recalls that while there was discrimination against his people in the railways there was equal pay. He states:

We camped near Scone, I was 17 I suppose and Old Blue Stewart was the ganger. There was still a stigma about Aboriginal people and we were fighting for just basic individual rights. In the railways you were treated equal as long as you were prepared to sweat it out with others.

Here Aboriginal men worked long hard days on the end of 14lb hammers as labourers and fetters. The following photo was taken at Scone and shows Aboriginal men performing the arduous task of laying railway sleepers following the Great Flood of 1955.



1955 Flood – Garage on the Corner of Bridge and Maitland Streets, Muswellbrook



Aboriginal Railway Workers at Scone after the 1955 Flood

Aboriginal men often lived with their families in the tents, which were hired from the Railway Department for around 5 shillings a week with optional extras such as wooden planks which served as floors and larger two room tents. There was no electricity and kerosene lanterns provided light at night, while food was cooked on fires. Despite employment in the white world Aboriginal people maintained a cultural sense of place and identity:

My father took Rob and I around Murrurundi, Bob Smith Mountain (named after my grandfather) and the Burning Mountain, before it became a tourist attraction, and the significance it meant to our people, my father and grandfather. And old grandfather Archibald who spoke seven languages and travelled through the Upper Hunter Valley in his younger days, took us and showed us where our people camped.

Aboriginal Men, Private Contractors and Liddell Power Station

Liddell Power Station is located between the towns of Muswellbrook and Singleton and during the 1970's Goodsir and Cooper employed an Aboriginal company called Smith's General Contractors to lay rail siding at the power station. A director of the Aboriginal company was called by Goodsir and Cooper a fortnight after the work was completed and was informed:

Two weeks after they called us down and commended the Aboriginal men who did the work as to how well they behaved. There was still a lot of discrimination in those days against Aboriginal people, but they said we were more than welcome back to do more jobs. The men stayed at the Central Hotel in the main street of Singleton and spent their evenings sitting around playing guitars and singing and they never thought Aboriginal people could be so well behaved, and a lot better than some of the other work crews that stayed at the hotel.

Pathways to Recovery, Land Rights and Reconciliation

In the latter half of the 20th century there has been a significant attempt by Australian society to address the issues of past injustices toward Aboriginal people. In NSW the 1983 Land Rights Act was passed following consultation with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and consequently led to the formation of a State Aboriginal Land Council and dozens of Local Aboriginal Land Councils. In Muswellbrook the Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council was established in 1984 and has been active in a number of areas in relation to providing assistance to Aboriginal people. These areas include education, housing, culture, land claims, heritage consultation and employment.

Education, Racism and Sad Memories

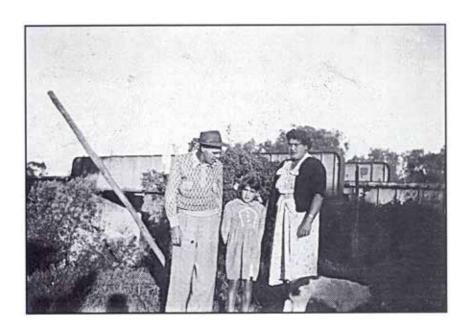
Traditionally Aboriginal people were educated by their elders, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, but this aspect of Aboriginal society was severely disrupted as a result of the impact of colonisation. As a consequence a colonial based system of education was imposed on Aboriginal people and according to one source:

Outcomes for our children were very low and programs were very much based on a totally Western, British-orientated curriculum which took no account of Aboriginal culture. The mistaken belief that as a people we were dying out meant there was no serious attempts to provide lasting education.

Aboriginal children who attended schools throughout the Upper Hunter Valley in the second half of the 20th century, in most cases, left school at the completion of primary school. At Caroona the Aboriginal school only went to primary level and as pointed out in *The Dawn* only a very small percentage of students received bursaries to attend high school. As a result it was common for Aboriginal children to leave school around the age of eleven or twelve and one Aboriginal man who attended primary school in the 1940's recalls he left school at twelve years of age and gained employment on a cattle station working as a labourer, wood cutter, horse trainer and seasonal work such as pea picking. At Muswellbrook an Aboriginal woman remembers her school days during the 1950s with mixed feelings. She recalls walking to school along the creek and her family home was a tent hired from the Railway Department for whom her father worked for over 30 years:

Dad worked for the railways and had an offer for a job at Muswellbrook or Armidale but chose Muswellbrook because he thought us kids would have a better chance there because there was less racist problems. We were living in a tent. It's a caravan park now, but it was all Sydney Street once. It was an island then, Muscle Creek came round one way and the Hunter River the other way. We moved there in 1949 when I was one or two years old. We lived there till I was 13 years old. There was no electricity even though across the other side of the road it was lit up. The railways used to give them a frame and the canvas went over the top and you had your sleepers as the floor.

There was a separate room which my father attached to shower and you had a bucket heated by a wood copper with a lever you turned on and off. We cooked on a wood stove and had kerosene lanterns for light. There was never any blackouts and the radio ran on batteries. I go on alright with the people at school although at times there were silly remarks. I was asked by one kid what I had for breakfast and I said toast and he asked why I wasn't eating witchetty grubs. There were a few times when I was called an abo But overall I had friends then which I still have today. I don't think the teachers held high hopes for me because I was an Aboriginal person. I don't believe they showed a great deal of interest in me. I remember one nun saying to me I'd make a wonderful nun in the islands or with my own people. At the time I thought it was a compliment.



Alfred, Beverley and Dolly Beale Standing at the Railway Camp on "the island", Muswellbrook. Behind them is the Railway Bridge over Muscle Creek.

Another Aboriginal woman has less than fond memories of school because of overt racism. She recalls:

I couldn't wait to leave school, I hated it, I had to put up with racial abuse because I was Aboriginal. You'd be spat on, there was people known to have head lice, you'd see them crawling along the desk, they just stunk, and I'd always get the blame, never had a louse in my head, Mum always made sure we were clean and tidy, and made us polish our shoes. It was awful hard until I started fighting back which I did when I got to High School. That's why I'm like I am. From the early colonial years Governor Macquarie believed that with education Aboriginal people may rise to a level of mechanics and so he established a special school at Parramatta in 1817. The school was a failure with Aboriginal people showing a strong reluctance toward British education. It has been constantly reinforced since those years that expectations on Aboriginal people should not be great and as a result the attitude of teachers may be negatively influenced. According to one assessment:

All evidence suggests that teacher expectations are vital for student success. All to often, teachers expect less from Aboriginal students. The reasons for this may range from a desire not to pressure students because of past injustices, to out-and-out racism resulting in exclusion...Educators should recognise our children's need for cultural recognition and development, but they must further recognise the need to demand their best in academic performance and outcome.

No Time Like the Present : A Personal Note from Deirdre Heitmeyer

The day of 11 September 2003 dawned, promising fine weather. I set off to Muswellbrook South Public School at the invitation of Roz Nean (Aboriginal Studies Teacher). It was the school NAIDOC and Education Week celebrations. The school had decided to combine the two events." that way you get both lots of parents...." (Roz Nean)

On the drive through the valley I think of many things. Life three hundred and fifty years ago. How different things would have been and looked like. The beautiful Coquun (Hunter River) bringing life in all forms to the valley. I thought over the past 20 years spent in Aboriginal education. The days of consultation with community about the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy. Had we come very far? There are many people, albeit scattered, working hard implementing what was dreamed of those seemingly long years ago. We ask so much from the Aboriginal community; asking people to relive horrible memories to add to the pieces of the jigsaw; to help everyone to understand and move forward.

I arrive with these thoughts racing through my head.

I'm guided to the school hall where an Aboriginal performer, Matthew Doyle has turned the students of Muswellbrook South Primary School into kangaroos, emus, and goannas. The childrens' faces capture the future. Australian children sharing in what is their knowledge about their country. Sadness creeps over me as I think

about those terrible years of knowledge lost, all through ignorance and misunderstanding, yet happiness to know that these children will take with them a clearer understanding of who they are, and where they fit in the future.

If we get it right in the schools, the relationships between the Aboriginal and non Aboriginal world will gradually heal. I look at the teachers they are all smiling Is this the generation of teachers and other community members, both black and white that will take the lead forward in implementing the policy in partnership with the Aboriginal community?

The performance ends. Great applause...excited children, faces painted...teachers as well!!!!

Walking out of the hall I run into Ron Powell from Department of Education and Training. This Department administers ASSPA, (Aboriginal Student Support & Parental Awareness). This is the program that causes a lot of misinformation in the community. I hear so often that Aboriginal children get paid to go to school. "They do not" I tell my students. The school receives funding for every identified Aboriginal child that attends the school (\$110). This money is administered by a committee comprised of Aboriginal parents, principal and interested teachers. Decisions are made as to how Aboriginal education is to be presented in the school, a mandatory obligation for all schools in NSW. Ron informs me that part of the funding for the performance has come from ASSPA

Ron:

"Because of NAIDOC Day the school's ASSPA funds can be used for cultural activities. 20% of these funds can be used for cultural activities and they can draw from the parental involvement as well. That's the idea to get parental involvement in the schools.

How many schools receive this funding in the Upper Hunter?

Ron:

"I have 92 schools in my area which includes the Upper Hunter but only 76 applied. Of those 92 schools there are a lot of small schools where they have only 1 or 2 Aboriginal kids and they more than likely have moved on..."

What do you see as the successful programs?

Ron:

"It's really good if you can get the principal on side, if you have a really good principal in the school you don't have the problem of getting the parents involvement with, the ASSPA. If there is no encouragement or perceived support Aboriginal parents will shy away from the schools

Here at Muswellbrook South Public School a lot of parents attend the ASSPA....One of the main reasons is the principal and the involvement of the parents....

I'm looking at the relationships between the Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people of the community. Is there a flow over from ASSPA to the rest of the community?

Ron:

"I think so. Whenever there are ASSPA activities held in the school, the whole school benefits. One of the things that I stress to the ASSPA committees is not just only to get the Indigenous kids and their parents involvement but also to educate the non Indigenous parents and kids in the Aboriginal culture....in some of the schools I have involvement with, you get some of the non Aboriginal parents getting involved in the ASSPA activities and that's not just only those parents who have Indigenous kids....that's parents who don't have Indigenous kids. It's not many but it happens."

Building relationships, that's what can be achieved by this initiative.

I ask Roz Nean how it was decided to combine a celebration of Aboriginal culture with Education Week.

Roz:

"We planned our NAIDOC Day for September and it just happened to coincide with Education Week.

The ASSPA committee and Rotary are supplying the barbecue. The Rotarians and ASSPA committee are cooking for the whole school and guests. The food was donated by businesses in the community and the school pays half of Matthew Doyle's performance and

ASSPA the other half, that way the whole school can have something special for the day.

How do you find the non Aboriginal parents take to the cultural activities?

Roz: "At firs

"At first they didn't 13 years ago, it's taken me 13 years to get the trust of the non Aboriginal community but now they participate in all our activities.

It flows onto the wider community. The school community has input into the community via the Muswellbrook Shire Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee through my membership; and I'm involved in projects with the local Council, with Department Of Community Services in organizing the artwork for the community services building. Our stage 3 children are doing a mural on a fence that many of our students use as a walkway. Muswellbrook South and the High School are participating in this project."

How do the kids feel when they have a lesson with you?

Roz: "I hear the kids say 'Yes she's here.' I teach Aboriginal studies to kids from K-6. The non Aboriginal children get the same lessons."

You've been here 13 years, do you still see the kids from a few years ago in the street?

Roz: "Yes they still say hello. I get invited to non Aboriginal kid's birthday parties, when they turn 18 and 21 education is the backbone to the

building of relationships. It can't happen without it. It has to happen."

The tutors Maureen, Bronwyn and Kelly participate in the Numeracy & Literacy Strategy for the Aboriginal Students at this school. This is a federal initiative to raise the standards of Indigenous children's numeracy & literacy levels.

What got you first into this Maureen?

Maureen: "Well I've always had my name down as a teacher's aide and there were not enough Aboriginal people to participate in the program. I got a phone call to ask if I was interested and I said yes.

Bronwyn: "I'm like Maureen I got the phone call and said yes"

Kelly: "I'm a school bus driver and when I heard about this project I put my name down."

Maureen: "I get so much from working with these kids"

Kelly: It does make a really big difference. The teachers can notice the change. With me being in there the two kids have reached the stage where they help one another and are succeeding which is beautiful

Maureen: "When I first met my two students they were very shy but now we wave in the street."

Kelly: I chat with one of the student's mum...its good

Will reconciliation start with the kids?

Kelly: "Yes the kids will do it, they don't see a problem

they see me as their support."

Is this the future for this community? Moving forward after the bad times?

I see a parent and ask if I can ask a few questions about living in Muswellbrook.

Paula McGrady Swan, parent of Ethan and Liam, is a Kamilaroi woman, originally from Bogabilla.

Paula: "I moved here in 1991 and I've enjoyed living here.

It's different from Moree where there are a lot of Aboriginal people compared to here where there is not so many but most of the people here I'm related to. I moved down here to be with my Mum. We spent most of our time

living in Queensland"

What do you like about Muswellbrook?

Paula: "I like the friendly people. I've never encountered any racism since I've been here. But Moree

has also changed things are much better.

There is some racism here but I've never encountered it, and I'm dark. Coming from Moree I think I would have been one of the first to pick it up and I haven't.

If I hear something I pull them up I tell them if they are being racist. Most people accept this, in fact some of them to this day pull me up in the street to have a chat. It's only about misunderstanding."

As an Aboriginal parent do you think that days like this are a good idea?

Paula:

"I think it's a good idea. I've worked in hospitality for 9 years I think that the participation of Rotary is brilliant. I've worked in restaurants and have met these people. Relations are very good here. Schools have got a lot better. Aboriginal students are being taught within schools and this has made things better. The parents get a lot more involved. The high school where my daughter finished year 12 last year..... I've gone up and taught a few lessons. There are definite people here in the community that can pass on a lot of information to the kids if given the opportunity.

Kids are great they love this information.

They see me in the street they say hello.

My kids are proud that I come up here and get involved.

When I was at school mum and dad didn't feel comfortable to come to school you know how things were back then......

All I remember is Captain Cook discovered Australia and I remember one day thinking where do I fit in? Where am I? But my family has given me my Aboriginality.

I can be very political but things are fairly good today. We need to be open as to what happened in the past. That is what will make things good......"

I think on my way home all the conversations that I have had in the day. The strong confirmation that education is the backbone.....but it is the community that must build the backbone. As I drive back down through the valley I think back on the early Europeans who made such a mess of the relationship building, with the exceptions of a notable few. And now these people who I have just met, ordinary folk, who demonstrate that respecting one another, will bring about change.



Elizabeth Howard carried the Torch for the Paralympics in 2000 & is picture here with her grandmother Beverly van Vliet (Beale)

Services for Aboriginal People in the Upper Hunter

Services are provided directly to Aboriginal people and their communities through two recognised organisations in the Upper Hunter; Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council (WLALC) and Hunter Valley Aboriginal Corporation (HVAC).

As mentioned previously WLALC provides a variety of services in the Upper Hunter. The HVAC provides housing and some other supports

Both organisations have developed partnerships between each other in recent years to improve the delivery of programs to Aboriginal people and the community as a whole, for example Seniors Week 2003 "Gathering of Elders".

Government Departments are recognising that the delivery of services to Aboriginal people can be delivered in a variety of ways, that is through mainstream services or through Aboriginal specific services.

The delivery of programs and services to Aboriginal people is not new in the Upper Hunter. Numerous Aboriginal site school courses, Aboriginal specific employment programs and Aboriginal cultural awareness courses were continuously delivered to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community of the Upper Hunter during 1987 – 2001 through Upper Hunter Community Training (Skillshare etc). These programs were usually run in conjunction with Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council

In the last five years the Upper Hunter has seen the emergence of Aboriginal specific programs to assist people to meet their needs individually and within the community.

Relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services have improved remarkably with partnerships being established to pursue funding together to deliver services in the Upper Hunter area. Some of those partnerships have resulted in the establishment of the following:

- Upper Hunter Aboriginal Family Support Project;
- Mari Ma Aboriginal Community Options Project;
- · SAAP Aboriginal Young Persons Support Worker;
- Aboriginal (HACC) Multi Service Outlet.

Government Departments are increasingly establishing identified Aboriginal positions to work with Aboriginal people and communities. Locally they include:

- Upper Hunter Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer;
- Aboriginal Casework Officer Child Protection;
- Department of Housing Aboriginal Programs Officer;
- Muswellbrook South Public School Aboriginal Studies Teacher.

Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee

Muswellbrook Shire Council has played a leading role in the Upper Hunter communities by establishing a Committee of Council with a goal of pursuing Reconciliation in the community. The Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee has been established since 1997 and consists of representatives from Muswellbrook Council, the Aboriginal community, government and non-government Aboriginal service providers, NSW Police and the local Ministers Association.

Some of the activities that the Committee has carried out have been:

- Celebrations during NAIDOC Week and Aboriginal Week including Aboriginal Flag Raisings and community get togethers.
- · Signing of the "Sorry Day" document;
- Adoption of the "Document for Reconciliation" for the Muswellbrook Shire in the presence of the Honourable Dr Andrew Refshauge, Deputy Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs which is attached;
- The painting and construction of the Aboriginal Reconciliation Mural. The Mural depicts the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history of the Upper Hunter and can be seen in Council's premier park – Simpson Park;
- Choosing local Aboriginal words for the naming of significant new community facilities e.g. Weeraman Fields;
- Significant contribution to Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Plan;

- The development of "Wanin Thanbarra" A History of Aboriginal/European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley (This book);
- Site visits to places that are significant to Aboriginal people;
- Contributions to local schools including the presentation of books and Aboriginal Flags.



Robert Willets, Member for Upper Hunter - George Souris, Deputy Premier & Minister for Aboriginal Affairs – Dr Andrew Refshauge and Giles place their hands on the Reconciliation Mural at a Celebration to adopt Muswellbrook Council's Document for Reconciliation on 14th August, 2001.

Conclusion: What of the future? - Greg Blyton.

The hands of time move slowly forward and it is clear that in the past relations between Aboriginal people and the colonists who occupied their lands in the Upper Hunter Valley were far from ideal, yet in recent times there is evidence of much improvement. It is the responsibility of the current generation and those who follow to ensure the future of relations continue to grow in strength and unity for the betterment of Australian society. This will require a combined effort from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who must nurture a spirit of reconciliation which will facilitate the well being of the children of today and of tomorrow.



Kylie and Krystal Saunders with their trophies

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The Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer

Oral Interviews

George Benson, Barbara Foot, Paula McGrady, Roz Nean, William Smith, Bev Van Vliet, Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council and NSW Department of Corrective Services,

Photos Courtesy of

Barb Foot, Bev Van Vliet, Brad Franks, Greg Blyton, Leo & Nerida Saunders.

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