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Mohican Aboriginal Station: 'Forced miles from the spot they cherished'

After the Taungurung clans had been evicted from Acheron Aboriginal Station, the majority refused to relocate to the new site at Mohican Station, despite instruction to do so by authorities. Forced to abandon their crops and infrastructure on their chosen reserve, Taungurung leaders made it known that they considered Mohican Station, just over 3 miles (5 km) to the south, to be unsuitable for agriculture and too cold for permanent occupation. Superintendent Robert Hickson reported the en masse departure of Taungurung people to his superiors in December 1860, noting that '48 blacks left in a body and are now scattered'.¹ Oral knowledge handed down to Uncle Roy Patterson suggests, to the contrary, that the clans had not scattered 'as heretofore among the neighbouring stations'.² Instead, they had regrouped at another culturally significant camping site. Uncle Roy narrates the impetus for this decision:

1 Robert Hickson, Report to Peter Snodgrass Esq, 5 December 1860, Mohican/Acheron Station January–June 1860, NAA, B312, Item 3, Folios 46A–49.

2 William Thomas, Report, 10 November 1860, Mohican/Acheron Station January–June 1860, NAA, B312, Item 3, Folio 41.

Just when the Aboriginal people thought, ‘We have got a good place here’ they pushed them off. They went down to Narbethong where the old hotel is. It’s a good camp, plenty of water, plenty of food, flat land and the old man said, ‘Sit down, we make camp’, so the white people left them there on their own.³

Guardian William Thomas believed that further efforts to relocate the Aboriginal community would ‘prove an utter failure’, not due to ‘any act of the Aborigines’, but as the result of ‘being forced miles from the spot they cherished and which I assured them Government would most sacredly retain for them’. Nevertheless, Thomas considered it to be ‘much regretted that the Goulburn Blacks continue in their present state of mind’. According to Thomas, their stubborn resolve threatened the viability of the relocated reserve. Rather than focusing on the circumstances that prompted the Taungurung to boycott the move, officials fretted over ‘all the expense laid upon the Acheron River reserve’ and the likely loss of progress towards the stated goal of civilisation.⁴

The most significant outcome of the Taungurung refusal to relocate to the new station (referred to variously as ‘Jones’s station’, ‘Upper Acheron Station’ and ‘Mohican Station’) by ‘the majority of the young men and children’ was that Superintendent Hickson was deprived of able-bodied workers. In January 1861, Hickson reported that these workers had ‘not returned since the removal of the station’ and made several urgent requests to employ a European labourer to assist him with the ‘great deal of clearing and fencing to be done before any crops can be put in’. Extra assistance was also required because, in Hickson’s view, ‘the Blacks are so lazy and there is much to be done’.⁵ Hickson’s opinion of Aboriginal workers was common among Europeans at the time. Such views overlooked or misunderstood cultural differences that influenced Aboriginal attitudes to participation in the capitalist economy. Capitalism is future-oriented and based upon personal acquisition, while Aboriginal work, including labour-intensive ceremony, food gathering and the social exchange of goods, is shaped by spiritual meaning and obligations oriented towards clan welfare. Aboriginal labour is also governed by the need to sustain rather than exploit finite natural resources.⁶ The enthusiastic investment

3 Roy Patterson, in conversation with Jennifer Jones, 3 March 2016, DS3001137.

4 William Thomas, Report, 8 October 1860, Mohican/Acheron Station June–December 1860, NAA, B312, Item 3, Folio 33-33A.

5 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 28 February 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folios 11–11A.

6 Broome, ‘Aboriginal Workers’, 207; Pascoe, *Dark Emu*.

of Aboriginal labour in the preparation of Acheron Station for long-term settlement, and obvious disappointment of Taungurung farmers when their crops were abandoned to hungry cattle, indicates that Aboriginal people entered the settler economy motivated by their own philosophy of work. Taungurung understanding of farming clearly focused less upon the production of a saleable harvest than it did upon the capacity to maintain community life on culturally significant land.

Robert Hickson's own peculiar contribution to the labour shortage at the new Mohican Aboriginal Station (explained below) also deserves consideration because it draws attention to complex multilateral relationships between local settlers, Aboriginal people and the officials employed to protect and improve them.⁷ In early 1861, Trustee Peter Snodgrass had finally heeded Hickson's complaints and appointed a European worker to assist with the development of the new run. This worker resigned within the month, after Hickson accused him of 'neglect of duty', and 'denounce[d] the agricultural labourer as a spy'.⁸ Hickson's sense of embattlement reflected the widening breach between himself and Trustee Peter Snodgrass, who had recruited the worker. Hickson's paranoia centred around Aboriginal independence and the influence of local squatters on daily operations at the settlement.

Hickson needed to harness free Aboriginal labour to develop required infrastructure without incurring expense beyond that of materials. Missionaries and protectors then believed that cash payments were inappropriate for Aboriginal people. As Christina Twomey has noted, rations were viewed as a more suitable form of recompense because of the low position of Aboriginal people on an 'imagined "scale" of civilisation'.⁹ Hickson had to secure this free labour in competition with local squatters, who sought Aboriginal seasonal workers for waged roles that also promised a degree of autonomy. This offsite work also increased Aboriginal contact with the wider settler community. Hickson's attempts to control Aboriginal labour and manage tensions caused by cross-racial proximity undermined his relationships with local settlers, alienated the Aboriginal community and frustrated the trustees who held authority over him.

7 Twomey, 'Vagrancy, Indolence and Ignorance', 105.

8 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 28 February 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folios 11–11A; Peter Snodgrass to Robert Brough Smyth, 13 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 33.

9 Twomey, 'Vagrancy, Indolence and Ignorance', 103.

From ‘the most comfortable house on the River Goulburn’ to ‘living under bark’

Robert Hickson was still struggling to establish infrastructure and order on the Aboriginal station after three months at the new location. Housing was an acute concern, as Hickson’s family had been ‘living under bark’ or had been ‘dependent upon casual accommodation [provided] by neighbouring settlers’.¹⁰ Hickson’s first child, Elizabeth Adelaide, was born at Acheron on 28 January 1860, and his second, Frances Mary, at Yea on 8 July 1861. In this colder country, Hickson was likely anxious to secure a basic hut for his toddler and pregnant wife ‘prior to the commencement of the winter’. Works had been underway for such a hut at Acheron, but the commissioner of lands and survey had ordered ‘the suspension of building operations’ once squatter objections to the settlement came to notice.¹¹ Hickson reminded the Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of Aborigines of his need for building materials, arguing that in this colder location it would be ‘impossible to pass the winter in our house without doors or floors’.¹² Hickson was an educated and respectable man drawn from an elevated social background, but his commitment to Christian duty led him to accept the meagre station accommodation. Both Hickson and his wife were apparently motivated by ‘a passionate connection’ to evangelical Anglicanism.¹³

Robert Hickson was granted the role as superintendent of Acheron Aboriginal Station on 15 April 1859, aged 22. He married 26-year-old Emily Villeneuve Watton just a few weeks later, on 4 May 1859, at Warrenbayne, a station held by Emily’s brother-in-law, James Moore, near Violet Town.¹⁴ Hickson and Emily came from gentle families that were well connected in Britain and within the colonies. Hickson’s family has been described as ‘Anglo-Irish elite’ and Emily’s as ‘landed gentry’.¹⁵ Although hailing from privileged origins, Emily had already experienced

10 Subjects comprised in papers handed to Mr Brough Smyth for the consideration of the Board for Protection of Aborigines, 5 June 1860, Board Meeting Minutes 1860–1862, NAA, B335/0, Box 1, Folios 44–43.

11 Minute, 5 June 1860, Board Meeting Minutes 1860–1862, NAA, B335/0, Box 1, Folios 44–43.

12 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 26 March 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 16.

13 Hickson was paid £183 in 1860 and £200 in 1861, Victoria, Parliament, *First Report of Central Board*, 35, 10; Hutchinson, ‘The Worcester Circle’.

14 Registration Number 1251.

15 Hutchinson, ‘The Worcester Circle’.

seven years living and working on an Aboriginal station. Her father, Dr John Edward Watton, replaced the 'hated protector' Charles Sievwright at Mount Rouse Aboriginal Station in the Western District and served as medical officer/assistant protector from 1842 to 1849.¹⁶ William Thomas noted in his journal on 21 May 1859 that Emily Hickson had 'for years had Blacks under her charge teaching tiny children to needlework, wash and read at Mount Rouse Aboriginal Station being the daughter of the late Amiable Protector there Dr Wooton [sic]'.¹⁷ John Watton, 'squatter and doctor', arrived in Victoria in 1839 and established his family in the Western District. As Paul de Serville noted, his family soon 'made good matches', with his elder daughters 'integrated with the squattocracy' in the Western District.¹⁸ These connections explain why Watton was perceived to be 'more popular with the local squatters' than the vilified Sievwright.¹⁹ The family moved to the Goulburn River Valley when son-in-law James Moore invested in Barjarg Station near Mansfield in 1849.²⁰ Another of John Watton's daughters, Mary Sophia, made a less elevated match when she wed John Mayne Conolly in 1857. Connolly, a station manager in the Western District, moved to Hugh Glass's Niagaroon Station in the Upper Goulburn in 1856, a position he then held for seven years.²¹ Conolly thus had oversight of the run during the tumultuous period when his new brother-in-law, Robert Hickson, established Acheron Aboriginal Station within the boundaries of Niagaroon. This familial relationship advantaged both parties, as they were privy to insider information. For example, Mary Sophia Conolly, who was 'the lessee of part of the Niagaroon Station', petitioned for compensation after a fence was destroyed by fire on the property. She argued that she had information that 'the fire originated at the Reserve occupied by the Blacks' to support her claim.²² The same channels alerted Hickson to the manoeuvres of local squatters as they attempted to undermine the Aboriginal station. Such knowledge perhaps explains why Hickson did not display the shocked surprise experienced

16 Victoria, Parliament, *First Report of Central Board*.

17 Journal entry, 21 May 1859, in Thomas, *Journal of William Thomas*, 212.

18 de Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, 205; *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 10 February 1842, 2.

19 *Mount Rouse Aboriginal Protectorate (Former)*, Victorian Heritage Database Report, 22 March 2004, accessed 13 June 2018, vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/23746/download-report.

20 He later bought 'Benalla' on the Broken River and 'Warrenbayne' near Violet Town. Moore's close associates included Redmond Barry and Sir William Stawell, second chief justice of Victoria. Billis and Kenyon, *Pastoral Pioneers*.

21 Sutherland, *Victoria and its Metropolis*, 407.

22 Minute, 17 September 1860, Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria, NAA, B314, Item 1.

by Guardian William Thomas upon the forced relocation of the station.²³ Tensions caused by the controversial location of the Aboriginal station may also have affected the Conolly's tenure at Niagaroon. Conolly built a house between Niagaroon and Thornton stations prior to 1861, and was acknowledged as 'the first settler near Acheron township'.²⁴ Although well established and connected in the district, the family left the Upper Goulburn suddenly in 1862. The events that prompted this swift departure are discussed below. Conolly then selected land at Christmas Hills in the Upper Yarra region and called the property Niagaroon, perhaps indicating a degree of fond remembrance and regret over the relocation.²⁵

Emily Hickson's brothers, John Ludlow Watton and William Henry Watton, also held property on the Upper Goulburn from 1854 to 1861 at Balham Hill (with various partners), 6 miles (9.6 km) east of Yea. The purchase of Balham Hill established the family in the best house of the district, a 'commodious' home built by Edward Cotton in 1843.²⁶ His brother John Cotton described Balham Hill as 'the most comfortable house on the River Goulburn'.²⁷ This 'brick dwelling house, woolshed, outhouses and stables' was Emily Watton's home for some three years until her mother's death in 1857.²⁸ She then lived 'with friends' at Warrenbayne until her marriage in 1859.²⁹ These Upper Goulburn connections explain how the couple came to be 'strongly recommended' by local dignitaries 'W. L. Ker Esqr JP, Aitkin Esqr JP and Snodgrass JP' when they applied for the positions of superintendent and matron of the Aboriginal station.³⁰ Robert and Emily Hickson were thus embedded in good society within

23 Thomas's letters of protest suggest that he was taken completely unawares. See, for example, William Thomas to Central Board, 22 November 1860, Mohican/Acheron Station June–December 1860, NAA, B312, Item 3, Folio 44.

24 The house is shown on Thomas Nixon's 1861 map of Niagaroon's pre-emptive section. Noble, *The Red Gate*, 26.

25 Noble, *The Red Gate*, 26; Sutherland, *Victoria and its Metropolis*; Ngaire von Sturmer to M. Rosalyn Shennan, 2 August 1983, Correspondence with Ngarie von Sturmer 1983–1986, State Library of Victoria (hereafter SLV), MS 12242, Box 2799/6.

26 John Cotton to William Cotton, 2 September 1843, Mackaness, *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, 26.

27 John Cotton to Marian Cotton December 1846, Mackaness, *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, 49.

28 'Squatting Run Files Balham Hill (No.171)', in Ngaire von Sturmer to M. Rosalyn Shennan, 29 December 1984, Correspondence with Ngarie von Sturmer 1983–1986, SLV, MS 12242, Box 2799/6.

29 Harriet Maria Ludlow Watton, Probate and Administration Files, PROV, VPRS 28/P1, Unit 4, Item 2/505.

30 Mohican/Acheron Station 1859, NAA, B312, Item 1, Folio 16.

the district when they accepted their posts, much as Dr John Watton had been integrated into Western District's squattocracy when he assumed his duties at Mount Rouse.

Religion, social status and mission outreach

Even in this early colonial period, when religion held a strong influence over life choices, Emily Hickson's move from the 'best house' in the Upper Goulburn district to living 'under bark' on Acheron Aboriginal Station might have provoked negative comment. A common prejudice fostered by early mission efforts to convert and civilise Aboriginal people, for example by Rev. Samuel Marsden, was the view that Aboriginal people were unresponsive to the gospel because, as 'degraded descendants of Ham', they were positioned so lowly on the chain of being.³¹ This status made outreach by worker-missionaries drawn from the middle and lower classes most appropriate. The assistant protectors employed under the Port Phillip Protectorate system were characterised by this class positioning. The efforts of educated and cultured missionaries were thought more suitable among those perceived to be advanced on the cultural hierarchy, such as the Chinese or Maori.³² Similar hierarchy-based arguments rationalised the muted success of the Church of England in colonial Australia. Upper Goulburn squatter John Cotton reflected in 1849, for example, that clergy of the Church of England 'do not go so much amongst the lower class of people as those of other sects. Is this from their having generally received a better education?' According to this reckoning, clergy without 'refinement of manners', including Roman Catholics and dissenters, were willing to send 'their emissaries throughout the country to procure the adherence of the great mass of people'.³³ Meanwhile, the Church of England hierarchy in Melbourne worried about the standard of available housing for clergy and refused to 'send a clergyman up here until a sufficient sum is raised to build a comfortable house for him'.³⁴ Hierarchical sensibilities were likely offended by Robert and Emily Hickson's acceptance of living

31 Harris, *One Blood*, 45.

32 See, for example, the arguments of Reverend Samuel Marsden in Yarwood, *Samuel Marsden*, 102, 112.

33 John Cotton to William Cotton, July 1849, in Mackaness, *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, 45.

34 Letter no. 53, John Cotton to William Cotton, July 1849, in Mackaness, *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, 45.

conditions little above that afforded Indigenous residents. Such personal sacrifice aligned with the emergent principles of evangelical 'faith mission' ideals, as expounded by Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission in 1865.³⁵

Religion in the Upper Goulburn in the period was closely linked to social status and responsibility. By 1857, when attempts by locals to attract a permanent minister from any Protestant tradition had failed, a group of 'prominent Protestant squatters' became sufficiently concerned for the 'religious training of their children' that they collaborated to engage a lay preacher in the Upper Goulburn.³⁶ The Muddy Creek Mission, an interdenominational evangelical outreach, offered the first permanent religious services in the Upper Goulburn in January 1857. The mission subscription list provides insight into both the religious feelings and the social hierarchy of squatters neighbouring the Aboriginal station. Religious subscription lists of the period, according to Rowan Strong, can be read as reflecting social position and degree of personal wealth, as well as interest in religious affairs.³⁷ It is, therefore, pertinent to note the contribution of locals who had an association with both the Aboriginal station and the religious mission. Hugh Glass, who orchestrated the swift removal of the Aboriginal station from Acheron to Mohican, made the largest annual subscription to the Muddy Creek Mission, at £67. Trustee of Acheron/Mohican Aboriginal Station Donald Mackenzie pledged £35, and fellow Trustee John Christie Aitken pledged £25. The Watton brothers of Balham Hill also pledged £25, as did Henry Johnson, whose family association with the Aboriginal station was to cause significant reputational damage in 1861. John Mayne Conolly, manager of Niagaroon and a Watton brother-in-law, donated £15, and Stephen Jones, then owner of Mohican Station, gave £1.³⁸ Any contribution by Robert and Emily Hickson, who married one year prior to the closure of this mission outreach, is unrecorded. The couple were not, however, without income, as were many who adhered to faith mission principles. The Central Board's budget estimates for 1861 record that the 'teacher and matron' at Acheron Station were allocated £200 per annum. This suggests that Hickson's acceptance of rustic housing conditions on the station represented an ethical choice, rather than a financial necessity. The standard of housing among upper-class

35 Longworth, 'Upon Past Ebenezers', 176.

36 Blanks, *The Story of Yea*, 177.

37 See, for example, Strong, 'The Colonial Religion of the Anglican Clergy'.

38 Noble, *The Red Gate*, 57; Blanks, *The Story of Yea*, 177.

rural families was then improving. By 1844, 'some settlers' were 'erecting good and substantial houses, some of wood, some of brick, and some of stone'. Upper Goulburn squatter John Cotton made these observations by way of comparison, concluding with satisfaction, 'but mine is at present the largest on the river'.³⁹

The Hicksons' choice to undertake self-denying practices for the sake of their mission might have fostered and/or disappointed other expectations in their set. The local men who recommended their appointment, for example, may have anticipated grateful deference from Hickson. It might also have been expected that Hickson would emulate the management strategies of his late father-in-law Dr Watton at Mount Rouse Aboriginal Station. According to Lindsey Arkley, Watton consistently prioritised settler needs and sought government protection for settlers, even though evidence suggested that it was Aboriginal people who needed protection from lethal settler aggression. Watton also restricted his attentions to those within the reserve and 'never concern[ed] himself much with the blacks elsewhere in the district'.⁴⁰ Robert Hickson's understanding of his duties on Mohican Aboriginal Station, by contrast, set him in direct conflict with squatter interests. The resulting clash was exacerbated by a sex scandal, discussed below, that shocked gendered and racialised propriety, threatening the longevity of Hickson's tenure and the viability of the Aboriginal station itself. I suggest that the crisis of September 1861 might also have contributed to the withdrawal of Emily Hickson's extended family from the district. Genealogists puzzled at the sudden corporate removal of the Wattons from the Upper Goulburn when they studied the extended family, noting that the Watton circle apparently 'all left the area around 1862–1864'.⁴¹ Shennan and von Sturmer observed that the family held firm opinions regarding their elevated social standing. Although the squattocracy was quite mobile in the period, as land reform legislation influenced relocation decisions, social embarrassment may have played a part in the relocation of Watton family members. This is particularly the case, according to Shennan and von Sturmer, when the behaviour of

39 John Cotton to William Cotton, April 1844, in Mackaness, *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, 48.

40 Arkley, *The Hated Protector*, 456.

41 Ngaire von Sturmer to M. Rosalyn Shennan, 29 March 1984, Correspondence with Ngaire von Sturmer 1983–1986, SLV, MS 12242, Box 2799/6; Ngaire von Sturmer to M. Rosalyn Shennan, 30 August 1984, Correspondence with Ngaire von Sturmer 1983–1986, SLV, MS 12242, Box 2799/6.

a brother-in-law was ‘not up to the standard of the rest of the Watton clan families’.⁴² Robert Hickson’s management of Mohican Aboriginal Station in 1861–62 may have provided an exemplar.

‘Mr Hickson’s disagreement with Mr Snodgrass’: Masculine leadership and deference

Robert Hickson had several pressing aims for the development of Mohican Aboriginal Station in the autumn of 1861, in addition to securing more adequate housing for his pregnant wife and young child. He needed to clear and enclose enough land for cereal crops prior to the onset of winter. Containing cattle was particularly urgent, as poor or absent fencing made it difficult to keep the station herd out of the crops, or from joining wild mobs in the surrounding hills. Extensive fencing was not yet a profitable investment for squatters without secure tenure, so they ‘had no incentive to fence’.⁴³ According to Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh, ‘the Wattons of Balham Hill were the first in the district to fence their run in stringy bark saplings laid end on end—what was called a “snake fence”. This was in 1854’.⁴⁴ As neighbouring squatters did not necessarily invest in fencing, it was still imperative, six years later, to protect seasonal plantings on Mohican Aboriginal Station. These infrastructure efforts were tested by unexpected calls upon able-bodied Aboriginal workers. Hickson complained to William Thomas of:

Strangers constantly coming to this station tempting away either as guides or bullock drivers the natives who are the most useful and the most constant [in] attendance here. I am now left with a few aged blacks and a few young children who are too young to instruct. There are only two men who are able to work they are too much distracted to do so in consequence of this, and William Riching [the European labourer] leaves in a few days.⁴⁵

42 von Sturmer and Shennan are referring here to J. M. Conelly, who they speculate was a ‘drunkard ner-do-well’ and extend pity to his wife ‘poor Mary Sophia, with seven children and running a boarding house at Christmas Hills 1884–1891/2’. Ngairé von Sturmer to M. Rosalyn Shennan, 30 August 1984, Correspondence with Ngairé von Sturmer 1983–1986, SLV, MS 12242, Box 2799/6.

43 Pickard, ‘The Transition from Shepherding’, 155.

44 Fetherstonhaugh, *After Many Days*, 74.

45 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 26 March 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 16.

William Thomas sympathised with Hickson's plight, as he noted in his letter to the Central Board:

I can readily feel the position Mr Hickson, all Aboriginal establishments labour more or less under the like annoyance—nor do I know how in the present state of the law with Aborigines it can be prevented.⁴⁶

Hickson was also annoyed that he could not make any expenditure or decisions about the development of the station without permission from the local trustees, who in turn could not distribute funds 'unless previously sanctioned by the Board'.⁴⁷ Hickson chafed under such restrictions, particularly when expenditure was necessary, in his view, to develop station self-sufficiency. Although Hickson was aware of the need to seek 'authority' before undertaking development decisions, in March 1861 he was 'obliged to hire a European labourer for a few weeks enclosing a paddock for the cattle which must be completed at once'; he could not wait for the reply of his superior.⁴⁸

Hickson's class and education probably influenced his desire to exercise leadership and to assume financial autonomy.⁴⁹ His father, John Annesley Hickson, was a military man from County Kerry, Ireland, who led a company of 'pensioner' soldiers to New Zealand in his retirement. Arriving in 1848 to serve in The Royal New Zealand Fencible Corps, men like Hickson's father illustrated the 'usefulness of the settled soldier' by protecting early settlers from dispossessed Maori, whose acts of retaliation had 'crystallize[d] settler antagonism' towards philanthropic efforts to protect Indigenous peoples.⁵⁰ John Hickson apparently expanded this

46 William Thomas to Mr R. B. Smyth, Secretary Central Aboriginal Board, 9 April 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folios 19–20A.

47 Minute, 20 August 1860, Board Meeting Minutes 1860–1862, B335/0 Box 1, Folio 27.

48 Robert Hickson, Acheron Station, 26 March 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 16.

49 Hickson's younger brother, Charles Alfred St George Hickson, was 'educated chiefly by his father, but completed his education at the Auckland Wesley College', which was established in 1844 and is New Zealand's oldest registered school. Robert Hickson presumably received a similar education. 'Stamp, Land Transfer, Etc., Departments', *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, accessed 7 February 2019, nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d3-d15-d14.html. Two of Hickson's brothers became men of note in New Zealand, Charles Alfred St George Hickson was commissioner of stamps, and Richard J.S. Hickson obtained senior rank in the Treasury Department. *The Auckland Star*, 20 June 1907, 5.

50 Lester and Dussart, 'Trajectories of Protection', 216. Enlistees in the Royal New Zealand Fencibles, including Lieutenant Hickson, were granted a cottage and 1 acre of land in return for seven years of service. Wards, *The Shadow of the Land*, 373, 375.

landholding sufficiently to provide his son Robert (who was 11 when the family migrated to New Zealand) with the ‘experience of agriculture from his youth’ that convinced Guardian William Thomas to appoint him as supervisor of Acheron Aboriginal Station.⁵¹ It thus becomes apparent that both Superintendent Robert Hickson and Matron Emily Hickson had childhoods that intersected with, and were shaped by, redemptive Indigenous protection projects, as well as settler campaigns against them.

From January to June 1861, Robert Hickson chose to exercise leadership at the Aboriginal station by commissioning a blacksmith to undertake necessary work, by hiring a European labourer to complete station fencing and by purchasing seed wheat for winter cropping—all without the permission of his superiors. These actions soon came to the notice of Peter Snodgrass, as on two occasions Hickson authorised salary expenditure and ordered contingencies to the value of £8/60 by countersigning Snodgrass’s name on his behalf and purportedly without his knowledge.⁵² Snodgrass subsequently wrote to the board complaining about mismanagement of the station:

It has become my duty to point out to your Board that the Acheron Aboriginal Station cannot with advantage to the natives or my credit be permitted to remain under the management of the present superintendent Mr Hickson that gentleman being so deficient of those qualities upon which such a position requir[es] strength of mind, forbearance and common sense.

I now request that your Board will be pleased to place some person in charge whose personal character will be some guarantee of his fitness for the management of the Acheron Station. My official connection with Mr Hickson has been a source of annoyance to me from the first and it is due to the Board that I should inform them that under no circumstances can it longer continue.⁵³

This strongly worded complaint gained a swift response from the board, who were aware that a dispute between two local men of high standing would damage the Aboriginal station. The chair of the Central Board, Brough Smyth, wrote privately to Snodgrass, noting that:

51 Wards, *The Shadow of the Land*; journal entry, 21 May 1859, in Thomas, *Journal of William Thomas*, 212.

52 Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 11; Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folios 9–10.

53 Peter Snodgrass to the Secretary, Central Aboriginal Board, 11 April 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folios 23–22.

The observations on Mr Hickson's character would have been of smaller consequence and might have been overlooked by the Board if they had been made by a person occupying a different position to yours—but coming from you they have a peculiar force and significance—and if you persist in the statement, and satisfy the Board that Mr Hickson is wanting ... the Board, I feel assured, will dismiss Mr Hickson.⁵⁴

Given the seriousness of the charges, Smyth felt that Hickson's dismissal would occasion 'result[s]' that Snodgrass would 'not desire'. He therefore begged Snodgrass 'to be so good as to reconsider the charge you have made'.⁵⁵ Not sharing this interpretation of the matter, Snodgrass pursued Hickson's dismissal, informing him on 18 April 1861 that his employment would be terminated. The board then asked Hickson to travel to Melbourne to 'exculpate himself from complaints and charges brought against him'.⁵⁶ As Hickson had missed the scheduled coach from Yea to Melbourne, he hastily purchased a horse, but his choice was poor, and the horse died on the return journey.⁵⁷ Hickson then asked the board to pay £35 for the dead horse. This might be the circumstance Snodgrass was alluding to when he wrote to the board on 13 May 1861 incensed that Hickson had not been relieved of his post: 'the same abuses of system and worth of public money without any corresponding benefit [are] still to be continued under Mr Hickson's mismanagement'.⁵⁸ Snodgrass then resigned his custodianship of the Aboriginal station, relinquishing 'the responsibility which I have felt was attached to my position', and disassociated himself from Hickson, announcing that his letter 'terminates my correspondence upon this subject'.⁵⁹ When Hickson fronted the Central Board, he argued that 'all sinister results' at the station could be attributed:

To the removal of the aborigines from the site of their predilection to Jones' Station which was much higher and colder and which had only a small patch of good land near it.⁶⁰

54 Copy of letter, Robert Brough Smyth to Peter Snodgrass, 3 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folios 25–25A.

55 Copy of letter, Robert Brough Smyth to Peter Snodgrass, 3 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folios 25–25A.

56 Minute, 15 April 1861, Board Meeting Minutes 1860–1862, NAA, B335/0, Box 1, Folio 4.

57 Robert Hickson, 21 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 35.

58 Peter Snodgrass to Robert Brough Smyth, 13 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 33.

59 Peter Snodgrass to Robert Brough Smyth, 13 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 33.

60 Minute, 3 May 1860, Board Meeting Minutes 1860–1862, NAA, B335/0, Box 1, Folio 2.

The Central Board concurred with Hickson's view, and he remained unchastened by the disagreement with Snodgrass. Hickson therefore continued in his efforts to gain financial authority over the station, unabashed.

Hickson had clashed with Snodgrass over requests for necessary stores, including seed wheat and fresh bullocks required to plant winter crops. Snodgrass explained that such requests would 'have to wait [until] the estimates had passed for the aborigines'.⁶¹ However, Hickson pressed for the provision regardless, writing to William Thomas in May 1861 and arguing that there was 'no time to be wasted putting [the crop] into the ground'.⁶² Unbeknown to Hickson, Guardian William Thomas had suffered a stroke and was unable to respond. Hickson proceeded to buy wheat from neighbouring squatter Henry Johnson, without the required authority.

Hickson's purchase was noted on 14 June 1861: 'R. Hickson has purchased wheat and employed a labourer for field work in anticipation of authority'. The Central Board responded by directing Hickson 'not to purchase anything without authority'.⁶³ Denied monies for wheat he had already purchased and sown, Hickson borrowed funds to repay the debt from John Mayne Conolly, his brother-in-law, describing him as 'a neighbouring settler'.⁶⁴ To minimise unauthorised outlay, Hickson was obliged to discharge the ploughman, but he noted that the wheat he had sown 'is above ground and promises to be a fine crop'. He also suggested that 'if it is intended that the workings of this station should be continued I would request authority to hire European labour as it cannot be conducted without'.⁶⁵ Hickson's quest for authority was in vain, as the board had already taken a decision regarding future management of the Aboriginal station.

61 Robert Hickson to William Thomas, 23 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 37.

62 Robert Hickson to William Thomas, 23 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 37.

63 Note, 14 June 1861, re Robert Hickson to William Thomas, 23 May 1861, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 4.

64 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 23 December 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 48–48A.

65 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 18 July 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 3.

On 9 July 1861, the Central Board identified John Green as a suitable alternative manager. Green was a Scottish lay preacher working with Wurundjeri people on the Upper Yarra. He had been lobbying for an Aboriginal ‘refuge and school’ in the district since November 1860. The Central Board had been slow in their consideration of Green’s proposal, twice postponing site visits and delaying a decision. They noted their ‘reconsideration of a site for an aboriginal establishment at Upper Yarra’ just days after complaints were raised against Robert Hickson at Acheron Aboriginal Station. John Green was offered the role of Inspector for Aborigines, which included some of the ailing William Thomas’s duties.⁶⁶ Instead of establishing an Aboriginal station in the Upper Yarra, the board instructed Green to move to the Upper Goulburn and to assume oversight of Acheron/Mohican Aboriginal Station.

Records do not indicate when or how Robert Hickson heard of these decisions. Unfortunately for Hickson, a cross-racial sex scandal would further ‘upset the settlers’ and undermine his precarious tenure. On 2 September 1861, Hickson wrote to Brough Smyth informing him of a ‘case having occurred on the Aboriginal Station under my charge’. The circumstance drew attention to the impossible demands of Hickson’s position: making Aboriginal labour readily available to squatters, while simultaneously containing the same Aboriginal people on the station and preventing interactions between the races. Most feared was a cross-racial romantic liaison, such as that formed between Selina Johnson and Davy Hunter. The daughter of neighbouring squatter Henry Johnson, Selina ‘about 19 years of age had gone missing from her home’ and it was feared that she had ‘gone off with the blacks’.⁶⁷

‘A white girl has gone off with the blacks and her father is anxious’

Selina Johnson disappeared from her home at Taggerty Station, which neighboured the Aboriginal reserve, just days after giving birth to an illegitimate child of mixed racial heritage. Her father Henry Johnson was a successful squatter who held Taggerty and Eglington stations. The son of a wealthy English mill owner who had trained as an engineer in Europe and

66 See Board Meeting Minutes 1860–1862, NAA, B335/0, Box 1, Folios 4, 6, 14.

67 Robert Hickson to Brough Smyth, 2 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 9–9A.

migrated to Australia against family wishes, Johnson married beneath his rank and produced an Upper Goulburn dynasty noted for their handsome looks and athletic bearing.⁶⁸ Johnson had objected to being ‘surrounded by an Aboriginal reserve’ when the location of Acheron Aboriginal Station was first surveyed. He complained in January 1860 that the location of the station was ‘a hardship upon him, especially as an equally suitable place is available without interfering with anyone particularly’.⁶⁹ However, this fear of ‘interference’ did not prevent Johnson from employing Taungurung labourers on his station within the month. A ‘mutual frequent connection’ was thus established between young Selina Johnson and a certain ‘young black man’, Davy Hunter, who had been ‘in Mr Johnson’s employment for ... eighteen months’. The couple had formed an understanding—‘she consented to be his wife which he considers her to be’—but the relationship was not supported by Selina’s family.⁷⁰ When Selina became pregnant, she ‘would not acknowledge ... the father of the child’, but ‘in due time the child ... proved a black or half caste’.⁷¹ Guardian Thomas reported that Selina and Davy had run away together after the birth of their baby, who they named James Wilson Boyd Johnson. Anxious to find the ‘place of [Selina’s] concealment’, Henry Johnson contacted Robert Hickson and ‘requested [him] to ask the blacks of her’. With the help of trackers, Robert Hickson discovered the couple and returned Selina to her parents. He noted that ‘the child appeared to be a remarkably fine healthy boy’.⁷² Despite this assessment, the baby died two weeks later, succumbing to an unspecified ‘inflammation’.⁷³ The baby was buried by his grandfather, who eventually registered the birth and death eight weeks later in nearby Yea. Reports of the scandal had by then circulated beyond local confines to official circles, perhaps prompting Johnson to undertake the paperwork. Guardian William Thomas remarked that ‘a highly respectable settler (who has been a judicial magistrate for many years)’ had informed him of the affair. According to Thomas, ‘this is the first instance of this kind in this or any of the neighbouring colonies’ and:

68 Noble, *The Red Gate*.

69 F. Pinnifer, District Surveyor, to the Hon Commissioner of Lands and Survey, 12 January 1860, Mohican/Acheron Station January–June 1860, NAA, B312, Item 2, Folios 3–1A.

70 William Thomas to Robert Brough Smyth, 23 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 13; Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 2 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 9–9A.

71 William Thomas to Robert Brough Smyth, 23 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 13.

72 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 2 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 9–9A.

73 Reed, ‘White Girl’, 12.

Had the child lived I would have suggested (to prevent the disgraceful reoccurrence of the like) that the child should have been sworn to the black for maintenance, which as a matter of course he would not have been able to pay, and place him in prison for default.⁷⁴

Henry Johnson also sought some form of punishment for Davy Hunter; despite the consensual nature of the relationship, he was reportedly ‘very anxious that the case should be inquired into’.⁷⁵ However, Hunter was not apprehended or charged ‘on the account of the girl concealing the circumstances for some months’.⁷⁶ The affair ‘caused great sensation among the settlers in the Upper Goulburn’ and drew further unwanted attention to Robert Hickson’s management at the Aboriginal station.⁷⁷

Embarrassed by this scandal and other failures at Mohican Station the Central Board was forced to make a public statement. Tabled in the Victorian parliament on 24 September 1861 and reproduced in *The Argus* on 15 October 1861, the *First Report of Central Board* argued that the change from Acheron to Mohican had not proven beneficial. The report was careful to exonerate the board and to blame unnamed vested interests:⁷⁸

Having no personal knowledge of the localities, and under the impression that the removal would be beneficial to the blacks, the Board on consideration of the evidence submitted to them, advised the Government to purchase Jones’s Station (an arrangement all but completed when first brought under their notice).⁷⁹

The report continued:

Whether due to improper management, or to the unsuitableness of the site, or both combined, it is certain that the blacks have almost ceased to frequent the new reserve.⁸⁰

74 William Thomas to Robert Brough Smyth, 23 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 13.

75 William Thomas to Robert Brough Smyth, 23 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 13.

76 Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 9A.

77 Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 14.

78 Victoria, Parliament, *The Victorian Hansard*, 23 September, 169; ‘The Aborigines’, *The Argus*, 15 October 1861, 7.

79 Victoria, Parliament, *First Report of Central Board*, 4.

80 Victoria, Parliament, *First Report of Central Board*, 4–5.

The board was also of the view that it was ‘more especially’ concerning that ‘one of the Trustees, Mr. Snodgrass, M.L.A., had expressed himself as dissatisfied with the management of the station generally’. The gentlemen concluded that:

The new station [Mohican] must be abandoned ... The management and general expenses of the establishment have consumed more of the funds placed at the disposal of the Board than the number of blacks frequenting the reserve would warrant, and arrangements are about to be made which, it is hoped, will improve the condition of the natives, and certainly very largely reduce the cost of their maintenance.⁸¹

This public statement represented a significant shift in sentiment, from a board determined to support Hickson and prepared to sacrifice Snodgrass, to a board supportive of Snodgrass and critical of Hickson. Although there is no direct evidence that the Johnson–Hunter scandal influenced this change of mind, the report emphasised that the board sought statements from ‘the gentlemen in the neighbourhood’ and some ‘old settlers’ to establish why there was such an ‘extraordinary change’ in the fortunes of the Aboriginal station.

The board sent Rev. John Green to assess the conditions on Mohican, instructing him to furnish a report. Green arrived at Mohican Station on 10 October 1861, just four weeks after baby James Johnson had died. His roll call of station residents noted with an asterisk that Davy, aged 22, was the ‘father of the white woman’s child’ and that ‘the woman wants to marry him’.⁸² Green also reported that the settlement was in ‘a very unsatisfactory condition’, with numbers dwindling to only 16 people. He observed that gardens and cultivation paddocks that had been prepared by a meagre Taungurung workforce ‘won’t give good crops’.⁸³ Green also recorded Taungurung requests to move back to Acheron Station:

The blacks opinion on the whole matter; they do not like Mr and Mrs Hickson they say that ‘they are no good for black fellow and lubra Hickson too proud’. They say ‘Governor very good to black fellow and black lubra give them plenty food and clothing’. They

81 Victoria, Parliament, *First Report of Central Board*, 5.

82 John Green, Acheron Aboriginal Station, 18 October 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 24.

83 John Green, Acheron Aboriginal Station, 18 October 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 26.

say that this station 'no good too cold plenty work no wheat no potatoes'. They say 'old station very good plenty wheat, potatoes and cabbages plenty everything'. They say the Governor give them the old station that by and by black fellow need no more things from him, black fellow by himself'. They want to get liberty to ride in wild unbranded cattle that are on this station.⁸⁴

Green's transcription of Taungurung opinion provides mediated but nevertheless rare evidence of their assessment of Mohican Station and continuing ambition for self-determination. Taungurung leaders wanted to become self-supporting and to return to their chosen site at Acheron Station. They identified a viable revenue stream, the 'wild unbranded cattle' on the station, and asked for permission to 'ride [the cattle] in' so that 'by and by black fellow need no more things from [the Governor]'. Taungurung men were skilled station hands, working with cattle, sheep and horses prior to the introduction of fences in the Upper Goulburn. Men were 'employed to ride the boundaries' herding stock back onto the runs.⁸⁵ Drives were also intermittently conducted to round up horses and cattle 'gone wild' in the ranges.⁸⁶ For example, Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh recalled the 'fine times' he had helping James Webster of Beaumont near Yea to 'herd some wild cattle on the mountains', mustering them 'out of the scrubby river lands and out of the rough ranges at the head of the Muddy Creek'.⁸⁷ Fetherstonhaugh called to mind the exploits of an unnamed Taungurung man, described only as 'Webster's blackboy', who:

Did a smart thing. He was also heading some cattle on the side of a steep range, and he had either to jump through the fork of a tree about three feet off the ground or pull back and let the cattle go. He never faltered, and the little horse jumped through the fork without grazing the darkie's legs, and the cattle were duly headed.⁸⁸

This feat, c. 1855, suggests that skilled Taungurung workers could have successfully driven unbranded cattle from the hills surrounding Mohican Station in 1861 to secure a more autonomous future.

84 John Green, Acheron Aboriginal Station, 18 October 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 24.

85 Fetherstonhaugh, *After Many Days*, 74.

86 Fetherstonhaugh, *After Many Days*, 76.

87 Fetherstonhaugh, *After Many Days*, 76.

88 Fetherstonhaugh, *After Many Days*, 86–87.

Conclusion: A short career in Aboriginal protection

Robert Hickson's next actions undermined any confidence that the Central Board retained in him. On 30 October 1861, just weeks after Rev. Green's report had reminded the board of the troubles at Mohican, Hickson wrote an impertinent note attempting to curtail Indigenous movement and to retain able-bodied workers for the Aboriginal station. His note was addressed to Trustee John Christie Aitken, a 'considerable pastoralist' and gentlemen who held 'extensive chains of stations comprising all the country east of the Acheron and south of the Goulburn' between 1846 and 1866.⁸⁹ Hickson's letter accused Aitken of interfering with the affairs of the Aboriginal station, even though Aitken held a position as trustee. According to Hickson's account, Aitken already had Aboriginal shearers working on his property when he sought additional labourers to strip bark without authorisation. Therefore, Hickson wrote to Aitken:

I did not understand that you required any blacks but the shearers but I believe your brother came over here on Sunday last by your orders and [requested] King Cotton and [several] lubras to strip bark for you and they left for your station last Thursday. I am sorry to say that I cannot possibly give [my permission] to go with these blacks as it is against the rules of this establishment and I would be obliged if you will send them back at once.⁹⁰

Aitken was infuriated by Hickson's impertinence, replying immediately:

I am in receipt of your extraordinary note. I have always understood that it is the wish of the Central Board that the Blacks should be employed and encouraged to take employment from the neighbouring settlers. It will be my duty to ascertain whether this is the cure or not vis I shall address the Board on the subject. I would only observe that I had relatively little to do with the blacks coming down—all with the exception of Old King and lubra. They intended for weeks past to come down to cut bark.⁹¹

89 de Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*; Noble, *The Red Gate*, 13.

90 Robert Hickson to John C. Aitken Esq., 30 October 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA B312, Item 5, Folio 29.

91 John Aitken [to Robert Hickson], 30 October 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 28–28A.

After noting Taungurung agency and intention, Aitken returned to the impudence of Hickson's intervention in his affairs: 'It seems to me you are out of you[r] [station] writing such a letter and taking upon yourself such a position'.⁹² Aitken was clearly annoyed by Hickson's attempts to curtail autonomous Aboriginal movement, particularly where they impinged upon long established and mutually beneficial understandings about employment on neighbouring stations.

John Green's assessment of Mohican Station, dated 18 October 1861, was penned two weeks before Hickson's clash with John Aitken. This report found Mohican in 'a very unsatisfactory condition', as Hickson had alienated the 'gentlemen in the neighbourhood' and the Taungurung were 'impertinent' in response to his exertions of authority.⁹³ Two months after Green lodged his report, and just over two weeks after his clash with Aitken, Robert Hickson was forced to address persistent local gossip about his alleged deceitful conduct and abuse of financial authority. Hickson wrote to Brough Smyth on 19 November 1861, recounting that:

I have just been told by Mr Ker of Killingsworth near Yea that Mr Snodgrass had informed him that you had shown him an account which I had sent to you for payment in which I had signed. I remember in billing up the account I wrote Mr Snodgrass as my authority for having the work done but I was under the impression that I enquired to do so. It is [quite] impossible that there was any intention to forge Mr Snodgrass' name as I had his authority to have the work performed.⁹⁴

Hickson clearly retained some influential local allies. His informant, William Leyden Ker, a respected gentleman, had been appointed a special territorial magistrate in 1850 and was a member of the first Victorian Roads Board in 1869. A Scottish Episcopalian by background, Ker was known in the Yea district as a 'strong churchman'.⁹⁵ A shared understanding of religious values perhaps supported Hickson's claims to innocence. Records clearly show that Hickson had indeed signed Snodgrass's name on station accounts; Hickson's characteristically severe cursive is

92 John Aitken [to Robert Hickson], 30 October 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 28–28A.

93 John Green, Acheron Aboriginal Station, 18 October 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 26.

94 Robert Hickson to Brough Smyth, 19 November 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 40–40A.

95 Blanks, *The Story of Yea*, 86.

completely undisguised. Hickson signed Snodgrass's name on an account that reached the Central Board on 18 July 1861. He had previously signed accounts totalling £8/60 in the same manner; these reached Treasury on 26 June 1861.⁹⁶ Hickson continued to use Snodgrass's authority to make purchases for several months after Snodgrass had resigned as a trustee. Hickson noted in a letter to Brough Smyth on 6 September 1861 that he had not communicated with Snodgrass since 21 April 1861; yet, he continued to send Snodgrass his monthly report and showed surprise that Snodgrass had not 'acknowledged the receipt of my returns'.⁹⁷ Hickson seemed unaware of Snodgrass's resignation nearly four months after the event. This draws attention to Hickson's isolation within his own very small social circle in the Upper Goulburn, even before the birth and death of baby James Johnson prompted his complete fall from grace.

Hickson was informed on 4 January 1862 that it was the opinion of the Central Board that he was 'unfitted to be the manager of an Aboriginal station'. It was suggested that he should resign his office at the end of three months, but Hickson sought more immediate separation.⁹⁸ He removed his family from the settlement on 9 February 1862, noting that he could no longer 'expose them ... to the impertinence of the Aborigines who will not obey me in anything since they were informed that I had no authority over them'.⁹⁹ On 11 March 1862, Rev. John Green was directed by the board to 'take steps to break up [Mohican] station by dismissing the servants and disposing of the stock'.¹⁰⁰

96 Single salary account £5 William Richings, Mohican Acheron Station January–June 1861, NAA, B312, Item 4, Folio 9; memo for L. Morton, N.D., Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folios 11–11A.

97 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 6 September 1861, Mohican Acheron Station June–December 1861, NAA, B312, Item 5, Folio 12.

98 Robert Hickson to Robert Brough Smyth, 23 January 1862, Acheron Station 1862, NAA, B312, Item 6, Folio 3.

99 Robert Hickson to Brough Smyth, 13 February 1862, Acheron Station 1862, NAA, B312, Item 6, Folio 9.

100 Minute, 11 March 1862, Board Meeting Minutes 1860–1862, NAA, B335/0, Box 1, Folio 76.

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