

Foreword

Eleanor Bourke

Marie Fels has been working in ethno history since her study on the Native Police Corps. The thesis version of her previous publication *Good Men and True* is among the most widely consulted in the archives of The University of Melbourne. It contains over 100 pages of biographical details of individual Aboriginal men. The records she has used in this publication were written in the earliest years of contact with Europeans, before traditional life changed forever. These are rare and valuable records of interest to all Victorians. Though they were written for other purposes, mainly administrative, and by white males of the early 19th century, these early records are the closest we can get to the Indigenous people whose land was taken in the 1830s.

This book contains 20 sets of biographical details, mainly of Bonurong men: as Fels observes, the writers of the records didn't pay much attention to women. These biographical details add wonderfully to our knowledge. Eventually it may assist to bridge the gap of the 1850s between people identified according to custom, and the people at Coranderrk who had acquired European names.

It is all new work, based solely on primary sources, and asks the question 'why was there so little trouble, neither deaths nor hostilities on the Mornington Peninsula, when the rest of Victoria is characterised by trouble'? The reason Fels advances is the nature of the reciprocal relationships between the earliest European occupiers of the Mornington Peninsula and the original owners. In investigating this question, she has discovered much new information which will be of interest to all people with a connection to the land of the Mornington Peninsula. It is an unexpected bonus to find so much 'actual quoted Aboriginal speech' showing opinions and attitudes, which Thomas relates with the use of inverted commas: this is rare and precious.

Marie Fels has decided to present the original evidence to the reader. The observations are filtered through the eyes of the Assistant Protector William Thomas, and Fels has paraphrased his journal so that reading it is easy. Day by day, the little details of some people's lives draw us into understanding of contact experiences. They stood up for their rights; they protested in clear and logical language against the injustice of the white men taking their land; they continued to walk their country even when it displeased Thomas. They continued with their marriage customs, and they never forgave him for the one time he intervened; they continued to be in close contact with other Kulin

nations and the messengers went back and forth in the time honoured way; they taught Thomas about navigating the bush and laughed at his stupidity; they applied their rules of food distribution to the new foods of tea and sugar, flour and damper and mutton; they looked after him as much as, if not more, than he looked after them. They engaged him and other local Mornington Peninsula white men in relationships of some reciprocity.

The book is place based: there are chapters on all three Protectorate sites, Tubberubbabel, Buckermittewarrer and Kangerong, plus one on Kullurk which is the place the Bonurong themselves chose for their reserve, plus one on the site at McCrae where Johnny is buried, the young man whom many people know about from Georgiana McCrae's journal.

Ultimately, the Protectorate was a failure: Fels sees Thomas as a good man who tried his best to get justice for the people, Robinson as a bad administrator and the government as mean. Tragically, programs in Aboriginal affairs continue to receive a meagre portion of resources from governments and therefore like the Protectorate continue to fail.

Many people already interested in this area of Victoria will be keen to read this new publication and read the chapter on the abducted women for new information. This publication is accessible to anyone who is interested in learning more about the Mornington Peninsula and obtaining some understanding of this abduction because it has not been written about before, except in scholarly journals and reports. I hope Yankee Yankee's extraordinary story will move everyone's heart, so young to be kidnapped with his mother, so resourceful in all his travels, so reliable an informant. There will no doubt be interest in the evidence for infanticide. Fels accepts the records and suggests they look persuasive. In her view they appear to offer a different view on the population decline and resurgence.

The scientist Dr Holdgate was generous enough to allow his wonderful map of Lake Phillip to be published. It will be a source of great satisfaction to many that science has confirmed the oral tradition so carefully handed down (and recorded by Europeans) that in past times, Port Phillip was a hunting ground and people walked across it to Corio.

Today the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act of 2006 has altered the framework under which cultural heritage is managed in this State. The Act's objectives include that Aboriginal cultural heritage is to be recognised, protected and conserved in ways based on respect for Aboriginal knowledge and cultural and traditional practices; and that Traditional Owners are to be accorded appropriate status in protecting our heritage.

I am proud to be a member of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council which is established by the Act and is the first decision making body of its kind in Australia. The Council encourages all Shires and Councils in Victoria to establish or revitalise engagement with Traditional Owners under the Act. Though it has a heritage framework for sites and places of European historical importance, the Mornington Peninsula Shire has yet to treat Aboriginal heritage in the same way. Perhaps this book will inspire efforts in this direction.

This book is important, and I have pleasure in recommending it as a good read.



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