

Notes and Documents

Address on the occasion of the launch of Ann Jackson-Nakano's book *The Kamberri*

The Honourable Sir William Deane

At the outset I acknowledge the traditional custodians upon whose ancestral land we are privileged to gather. In the context of the book which we are launching this evening, I expressly acknowledge not only the Ngunnawal people but also the Kamberri group.

For me it is a particular pleasure that the launch of Ann Jackson-Nakano's book is taking place here at our National Library. I am particularly reminded of an occasion in November 1997 when I was privileged, in this place, to open an Exhibition which had, and has continued to have, a profound effect on me personally. That Exhibition – 'Captive Lives' – dramatically told the story of a group of nine essentially gentle and trusting Aboriginal people who were enticed from their homes in Palm Island in North Queensland in 1893 and taken by an American entrepreneur to the United States where they were exhibited as 'uncivilised savages' in Barnum and Bailey's Circus and in fair grounds and dime museums. Within four years, six were dead and the other three lost to history, presumably also dead.

There were at least two aspects of that Exhibition which have made it particularly memorable for me personally. The first is that the Exhibition, with its unbearably sad story, dramatically illustrated how important it is that we Australians fully and honestly acknowledge the past. For acknowledgment of the past is the starting point towards true reconciliation. The second is that the Exhibition, attended as it was by Palm Island Elders and climaxing in a joint imprint of hands which became its last exhibit, was of itself a powerful instance of grass roots reconciliation.

Similarly this evening Ann Jackson-Nakano's *The Kamberri* discloses and acknowledges another significant part of our Australian story – the story of the Indigenous group upon whose ancestral lands our National Capital has come into being. The launch of the book, in this gathering of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who stretch out the hand of friendship to one another, is of itself a powerful example of grass roots reconciliation. Would that our nation as a whole could be so reconciled.

Needless to say, the beginnings of the story of *The Kamberri* is shrouded in the distant past – long before the arrival of the first Europeans at Weereewaa – or Lake George as we know it – in 1820. Nonetheless, the book is a scholarly achievement and an historical account of the Kamberri in more recent years. It carefully and convincingly

establishes its thesis, namely, that, far from being an extinct people, present day Kamberri or Kamberri Ngunnawal men, women and children remain living in their traditional country which is now the site of our Australian Capital City.

As its cover indicates, the Kamberri is Volume 1 of Ann Jackson-Nakano's Weereewaa History Series. In subsequent volumes she will trace the history of the four other Aboriginal groups whose traditional country, like that of the Kamberri, included parts of Weereewaa.

Views may differ but it seems to me that the imposed name of 'Lake George' has little to recommend it. Most people would guess that it was named after one or other of the kings bearing that name. Comparatively few would know that it was named by Governor Macquarie in October 1820 and accordingly was named after the then current King George, namely George IV. I venture to suggest that it would be far more appropriate for what Macquarie described as 'this grand and magnificent sheet of water' to revert to its traditional name of Weereewaa. The arguments in favour of that are obvious. Perhaps one argument against it is that Weereewaa is said to mean 'bad water' which is perhaps a trifle unfair to the mysterious and beautiful waters of the Lake - when they are there. That argument, however, loses its force if 'bad water' is understood in the sense of 'dangerous waters'. On that approach, the story of the Lake in modern times with its tragic drownings serves only to underline the appropriateness of the Aboriginal name.

There is much about Ann Jackson-Nakano's book which I would commend. To some extent it tells the story of a living people or group. Equally, it tells the story of individuals of that group, some of whom are personally known to some of us. Significantly, with historical accuracy and impartiality, it recounts one important aspect, a local aspect, of the national tragedy of dispossession, with its now discredited doctrine of *terra nullius*, and introduced disease and discrimination which deface our national history. Thankfully, while one might speculate about unrecorded incidents of personal violence, there seems to have been, in this part of our country, an absence of the kind of barbarous massacre that occurred in some other parts of Australia. Nonetheless, the story is one of injustice and oppression.

In that regard, I am reminded of some comments attributed to Nellie Hamilton, a Ngunnawal woman, at the opening of the Tharwa Bridge in 1895:

I don't think much of your law. You come here and take my land, kill my possum, my kangaroo; leave me to starve. Only give me rotten blanket. If I take a calf or a sheep, you shoot me, or put me in jail. You bring your bad sickness among us.

Equally poignant are the comments of Matilda Williams House, quoted by Ann Jackson-Nakano at p281 of *The Kamberri*, in relation to the effect upon her life of the 1967 Referendum removing the constitutional prohibition against including Aborigines in recounting the numbers of people of the Commonwealth:

I think it was then that I realised that we didn't have to hide anymore. There weren't many Aboriginal people in Canberra or Queanbeyan at that time so the Williams and House families stuck out like sore thumbs. There we were, Aboriginal people in our own country, the country of my grandfather and great-grandfather, and I think we still felt that defeat and shame before white people that our ancestors felt.

Let me conclude by offering my warmest congratulations and admiration to Ann Jackson-Nakano for the achievement of this book. She comments that she would have preferred to have waited until some gaps could be filled. Any such gaps are, however, insignificant in the context of the whole and Ann was correctly persuaded that historical works are, of necessity, works in progress. This is an historical work which positively demanded to be published at this time. This city and all of us are enriched by it.

The Kamberri is also the 8th of the Aboriginal History Monograph series. I sincerely congratulate Aboriginal History Incorporated, its Chairman Dr Read, its Committee of Management and Editorial Board, and everyone else associated with the publication and production of the book.

And now, with great pleasure, I officially launch *The Kamberri – a history of the Aboriginal families in the ACT and surrounds*.

Canberra, Wednesday, 6th February 2002

The Weereewaa History Series Volumes I & II: remarks by Ann Jackson-Nakano

Volume I: *The Kamberri: a history of Aboriginal families in the ACT and surrounds*

Volume II: *The Pajong and Wallaballoo: a history of Aboriginal farming families at Blakney and Pudman Creeks*

Writing personal and community histories and compiling genealogies are tasks that are fraught with emotion. Over the past 11 years, during which time I have been researching and writing about Aboriginal groups who now mostly identify as Ngunnawal, I have copped the whole gamut of emotions, from sobs of joy to lashings of abuse. Family, friends and colleagues say, why do it? Its a good question. Certainly, it's not because I desire any personal recognition or gratitude. For me, it's an issue of social justice.

Aboriginal people have a right to their identity. When I first started this research back in early 1991, it was embedded in the community consciousness in the districts west of Weereewaa (Lake George) that the Aboriginal people of this or that area had all died out at the end of the 19th century. Even in 2001, which celebrated the Centenary of Federation, this historical fiction was still being taught to schoolchildren in the Canberra region. It was based on the idea that only Aboriginal people of full descent were 'real Aborigines', an idea that, to our national shame, was enacted through state legislation. In New South Wales (then incorporating the ACT), the relevant legislation was the *Aborigines Protection Act (NSW) 1909* and its later amendments. Under the Commonwealth's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*, the definition of Aboriginality has now been amended. It is defined in three elements in this current Commonwealth legislation: firstly, that a person is of Aboriginal descent; secondly, that s/he identifies as an 'Aborigine' and thirdly, that s/he is accepted as such by the Aboriginal community with which s/he is associated.

Such legislation is far more enlightened than those of its state predecessors but it still creates problems for some people of Aboriginal descent whose Aboriginal ancestors, for one historical reason or another, chose to hide or discard their Aboriginality. For this and other reasons, many people of Aboriginal descent are challenged by others when they identify as Aboriginal and, in some cases, they have difficulties being accepted as Aboriginal even by the modern-day 'communities' with which their ancestors associated.

While I support the establishment of protocols for writing Aboriginal personal or community histories and genealogies, sadly Aboriginal individuals and family lines today often require proof of their identity. Sometimes they find it is their own distant family members who try to cut them off from their rightful position in a modern group that is descended from a common ancestral line. It takes a great deal of tact and diplomacy to right these historical wrongs and I try to do this as best I can in negotiation with all relevant parties. Unfortunately, however, it is usually issues relating to modern politics that stand in the way of descendants of 'lost' generations reclaiming their Aboriginal identity. Various Aboriginal land acts were introduced since the 1960s but the *Native Title Act 1993* in particular has created many divisions in Aboriginal communi-

ties in southeast Australia – the first area of European settlement and therefore the region where Aboriginal people have suffered the worst cases of dispossession.

From the point of view of Aboriginal people who stayed in their traditional country and have managed land issues over the last four decades, it is understandable that strangers who come in and claim to be their long lost relatives are treated with suspicion. It is one thing to embrace a person who can prove that they are a distant relative but quite another to work out how that person now fits into the family and what land and other rights they may be entitled to share. It is dilemmas such as these that affect descendants in particular, people who can prove their continuous ancestral connections to the modern (and prestigious) Australian Capital Territory. Their story is told in volume I of the Weereewaa History Series: *The Kamberri*.

While I was writing volume II, an historical study of the Gundungurra-speaking Pajong or Fish River group and the Ngunnawal-speaking Wallaballoo in the Gunning and Boorowa districts respectively, I realised that a number of Pajong families had been granted land by the NSW government at Pudman Creek in Wallaballoo country. Effectively, this meant that the former had encroached on the country of the latter. To my relief, the historical records revealed that Pajong family members later intermarried with Wallaballoo family members and therefore their descendants could establish a right to be there. On the other hand, these families had more to do with their Fish River compatriots at Blakney Creek than with extended family members in the Boorowa or Yass districts. Over time, they saw themselves as distinct communities that had good relations with the local non-Aboriginal farming families in that district and to some extent they resented the intrusions on their turf by other Wallaballoo families from the 1920s onwards.

Ironically, when the last of the Pudman families left the reserve at Pudman for economic reasons the title to the reserve was passed to the Aboriginal Lands Trust. After the passing of the *NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, this deed was passed on to the Onerwal (Ngunnawal) Local Aboriginal Land Council at Yass. Families who lived on the Pudman Reserve in the buildings that still remain there consider that place to be sacred to them and to their ancestors. They hold reunions there every year and have scattered the ashes of some of their more recently deceased family members over the land. They also tend the graves of earlier ancestors they know to be buried there. Yet, in their view, other Wallaballoo family members have used this site and abused it: the latter leave discarded bongos in the remains of these heritage houses and dump cars on top of ancestral graves.

There are many issues to consider when researching and writing an Aboriginal history and it will never be possible to please everyone concerned. My approach has been to present to relevant families the information I find in the historical records and, where possible, have them validate or amend or update it. Trying to recreate a true vision of an Aboriginal past is almost impossible given the few fragments available, but these fragments are better than nothing. So much has been taken from Aboriginal people and so many lies have been told. I believe it is time to seek new and amended truths and I see my work on the Kamberri and the Pajong and Wallaballoo families as a starting point in that process. It would have been my preference to wait another 20 years to see if I could have found even more evidence to weave into this historical tapestry but

the majority of people portrayed advised me to stop worrying about the risks and publish!

Descendants who read these histories and feel they have been left out, or those who think the histories are flawed in any way, are invited to speak up. In the future, any errors can be updated and amended. These first volumes are just the beginning in the long and necessary process of restoring, where possible, the histories and identities of the Aboriginal peoples they portray.

Discovering my Aboriginal identity

Grant Austin

I have spent all but the past four or five of my 38 years not having a single clue about my Aboriginal ancestry. No person in my immediate family, living or deceased, ever mentioned we had an Aboriginal background. I will never know why this part of my history was not revealed to me. I trust the decision to hide or deny our Aboriginal identity was made out of love or protection by an earlier generation and was an unfortunate necessity in Australian history.

My grandfather, John Carl Berwick, who fought for Australia in Papua New Guinea in World War II, was born on his ancestral lands at Pudman Creek in Boorowa Shire in the early 20th century. As a young teenager, he moved to Sydney with his family. During the last year of his life, we shared a bedroom at my parents' house when he was ill. Although we spent much time talking together about a variety of things, he never once mentioned his Ngunnawal ancestry.

My mother, Margaret Joy Austin, died suddenly at the age of 45 years in 1982. I have no idea whether she knew she had an Aboriginal past before her spirit moved on. If she did, certainly she never mentioned it to me. Mum did retain contact with her Auntie Phyllis, my grandfather's sister, who spent the last years of her life on the lake-front at Avoca Beach. I spent many school holidays there as a teenager and got to know her sons and my cousins. A few years ago her eldest son, now 60 years old, came to visit me because he and his five brothers and sisters were interested in their mother's history and never knew anything about it. Together, we wondered who we were.

One day, while talking to my Mum's sister, I was told the name of my great grandmother. It was Caroline Bell. Mum's sister thought we might have been Maori because there was some talk of Caroline having 'dark blood' but she knew little else other than that Caroline might have lived in Cowra (New South Wales). I tried contacting libraries and other institutions in Cowra and got nowhere, although one contact suggested I try Boorowa. It was while talking to an archivist at Boorowa that I first heard of Ann Jackson-Nakano's work. The archivist asked: 'Do you think your great grandmother might have been Aboriginal?' I was taken aback. I said I really didn't know. The archivist contacted Ann and Ann contacted me. We talked for hours and then Ann suggested we meet at the Rye Park Methodist Church, near Pudman.

With my family, I drove to Rye Park and met Ann at the cemetery. She had some photographs and showed me one of a handsome Aboriginal woman who looked almost regal. 'This is the woman they called 'Queen Caroline',' Ann said. 'She was Caroline Bell's grandmother and therefore your great-great-great-grandmother.' A shiver went down my spine. Ann then took me over to the cemetery and showed me Queen Caroline's grave. Through her extensive research, Ann was able to give me a complete descent line that led to my grandfather Carl. A few weeks later, Ann arranged for me to join a Pudman reunion organised by our Pudman Elder, Elma Pearsall, who is now 82 years old. We all brought photographs and exclaimed in delight to find each other's relatives featured in them. Elma remembered my great-grandmother, Caroline,

who was named after her own grandmother. She said 'We used to call her Auntie Gissie. She was a lot of fun and always told us stories that made us laugh.'

That day, I stood inside the house where my grandfather Carl was born. I was surrounded by family members who I had never seen before yet looked somehow familiar. It was very emotional. The fact that my immediate ancestors thought it best to deny these wonderful people says a lot about the historical times they lived in. I have a lot to catch up on but now the lid has been lifted on my Aboriginal past. Being aware of my Aboriginal ancestry is a very important and special thing to me. The knowing puts into place many things about myself and allows me to feel more whole, and at peace. Everything in my life now has a meaning: the health problems on Mum's side of the family; why I studied geology (the study of the earth), why I've always liked the company of Aboriginal people and feel at ease when we interact, why I had the urge to learn the didgeridoo when I was about 30, why I love the land and the natural environment and why I enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

Instead of hiding these special things, I can now openly share them with my wife and two young children. This means so much to me because we can now proclaim our Aboriginal connection in public. Perhaps I was not meant to know about my Aboriginality before because I might not have appreciated it. I found out about it at a time when I could cherish it the most. Wherever I am now, I know I am part of a long tradition, a fine family and a place – and that place is Pudman.

Aboriginal Genealogy of Grant Austin

Grant Austin

Mother: Margaret Joy Austin, nee Berwick

Grandfather: Carl Berwick

Great-grandmother: Caroline Berwick, nee Bell

Great-great-grandmother: Lexter Bell, nee Lane

Great-great-great-grandmother: Caroline Lane, nee Chisholm (Pajong group)

Great-great-great-grandfather: Albert Lane ('full descent', Wallabalooa)

Great-great-great-great-grandfather: Andy Lane ('full descent', Wallabalooa)

Great-great-great-great-grandmother: Charlotte (Kitty) Lane ('full descent')

(Provided by Ann Jackson-Nakano, 1997)

Exploring communications services for Indigenous Australian audiences: Abstract

Jilda Simpson

My research looks at how media forms act as cultural tools in Indigenous Australian communications. Questions concerning cultural diversity within Indigenous Australia and the changing roles and forms of communications in Indigenous culture follow an examination of three Indigenous news and information services: *Yundiboo*, a community-based newsletter; the *Koori Mail*, a national newspaper and *Message Stick*, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Indigenous online presence.

These three examples have been used to construct three main conceptual frames within which Indigenous communications have worked, and which they continue to draw upon with the development of new media forms.

Theoretical perspectives on time and space distinctions within media forms, as explored by Innis (1972); the transmission and ritual views of communications as investigated by Carey (1968); and the oral/ literate binary as presented by Ong (1982) have also been applied to examples of Indigenous communications.

Drawing together these concepts leads to the consideration of ways in which a first level of media service can be constructed through new media forms that are effective and relevant to Indigenous Australian audiences.

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Jilda Simpson was granted the 2002 Sally White - Diane Barwick Award by the Board of Aboriginal History. She completed her Bachelor of Arts Honours thesis in November 2002 in the School of Media and Communications, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales.

The Sally White - Diane Barwick Award

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Contact Robert Paton 0419 736459 for further details.

Invitation to contribute to an 'Aboriginal historiography' series of articles

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Many current and compelling controversies, such as the campaign for recognition of a treaty; Native Title; representations of Indigeneity; or the status of the Stolen Generations have historiographical implications. In recognition of this, the Board of *Aboriginal History* wishes the journal to foster the exploration of the historiography of Aboriginal Studies.

The Editorial Board invites scholars to contribute articles on these themes. A list, which was far from exhaustive, of possible topics for consideration was published in volume 25 (2001) of the journal.

Intending contributors should contact:

Managing Editor (ingereth.macfarlane@anu.edu.au)
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First formal Australian record of a tree kangaroo: Aboriginal, not European

Jeanette Covacevich

The first published account of a tree kangaroo for Australia was by William Hann, leader of an 1872 'northern Expedition' to southern Cape York Peninsula. Tree kangaroos had been reported from New Guinea in 1828 and two species had been described in 1840.¹ However, the further occurrence of the group in northern Australia was not formally recognised by Europeans until Hann's expedition.

William Hann kept very detailed field records; his unpublished diary and two notebooks have been reconstructed² and both an edited version of his diary and an official report of the expedition were published in 1873.³ There is general agreement between these five accounts.

The Hann expedition is remarkable in many ways. It was dogged by neither heroic or tragic loss of life, nor serious violence towards or from the Aboriginal people whose country it traversed. All participants returned to base in good health, despite some privations. Further, many new discoveries were made: gold, land suitable for grazing, and plants and animals, both fossil and extant. Hann appears to be unusual amongst expedition leaders of his day in recognising and acknowledging, throughout his accounts, the huge contribution made to his successes by the Aboriginal member of his expedition. He singled Jerry out for special praise: 'though all deserve due credit, and my best thanks for that, I would especially refer to the native boy, Jerry, who, unsustained by the same inducements, was faithful and obedient in every difficulty, and staunch in every danger'.⁴

Jerry observed the first tree kangaroo formally recorded in Australia. Hann refers to this on 30 September 1872, in his second notebook, when the expedition was struggling through dense rainforests between the Endeavour and Bloomfield Rivers: 'On our way back Jerry was hunting and saw what he described as a tree kangaroo. He has often spoken of this animal on the journey before'.⁵ An unpublished diary entry for 1 October 1872 reiterates: 'On our way back Jerry saw a new animal which he calls a "kangaroo-lives-in-trees"'.⁶ The tree kangaroo is not mentioned in the official report,⁷ but is well-documented in the published diary entry of 12 October 1872:

Here I may as well mention Jerry told me about an animal found in these scrubs ... He says it is a kangaroo or something like it, and climbs trees, and he was fortunate enough to see one on a day when we were camped among scrubs ... I went

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1. Flannery 1995.
 2. Clarke 1982.
 3. Hann 1873a, b.
 4. Hann 1873b.
 5. Clarke 1982.
 6. Clarke 1982.
 7. Hann 1873b.

the next day with Dr. Tate and Jerry, thinking to see one, but was not fortunate enough in doing so; then Jerry took us to the very tree where he had seen the animal, on the bark of which were two deep scratches, but no other marks by which an animal could assist itself to climb ... To entertain the idea that any kangaroo known to us ... could climb a tree, would be ridiculous; ... but that there is such an animal in these scrubs not known to us, I believe, because I have never found my blackboy to err in his statement or reports; and, more over, he spoke to me about this animal many months previous, when going overland to Melbourne with sheep.⁸

Hann continued with Jerry's observation of the animal's behaviour: 'it chatters ... is very agile in its movements, as it climbs or swings itself among the branches when disappearing'. Bones, possibly from a tree kangaroo, were collected near where Jerry made his observation: 'Some bones were picked up in a native camp near where Jerry had seen his "bunyup", which were collected by Dr Tate; possibly these may throw some light on the mysterious animal found in these scrubs; the bark bearing the two toe marks was also secured'.⁹

That Jerry, the Aboriginal member of the Hann Expedition, made the first recorded sightings of a tree kangaroo in Australia was fully acknowledged by William Hann.¹⁰ However, history has concealed both the name of the man who made the discovery as well as that of the man who first formally reported its presence in Australia. Credit for the discovery of the tree kangaroo has been attributed, instead, to Dr George Tate, 'botanist and naturalist' to the expedition. Tate's role in the discovery of the tree kangaroo in Australia has been lauded by several authors. Cumbrae Stewart erred in detail of the species' Aboriginal name and its date of description, as well as in the name of the species' discoverer: 'Dr Tate was almost certainly the first to observe the bones of the Boongary or Tree Kangaroo, which was only made known to science in 1884'.¹¹ 'Boongarry', *Dendrolagus lumholtzi* Collett, 1884, the other species of tree kangaroo from northeastern Queensland, occurs in rainforest to the south of the Daintree River, which acts as a natural 'barrier' between the two species. 'Viator'¹² repeated Cumbrae Stewart's attribution, as did Pearn: 'Tate discovered the bones of the Tree Kangaroo'.¹³

Jerry's 'kangaroo that lives in trees' was described in the scientific literature 15 years after it had been observed, by the then Director of the Queensland Museum, Charles de Vis.¹⁴ The species, *Dendrolagus bennettianus*, was described from a skin only of a specimen which had died in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens. It had been collected from near the Daintree River, northeastern Queensland, some 80km south of where Jerry first drew the attention of William Hann, and George Tate, to its occurrence.

8. Hann 1873a.

9. Hann 1873b.

10. Hann 1873a, b; Clarke, 1982.

11. Cumbrae Stewart 1914-1919.

12. *Viator* 1934.

13. Pearn 1990.

14. De Vis 1887.

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