

# Preface

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Liz Conor

Contributions to this issue of *Aboriginal History* range over the following topics: senior public servants in the state protection administrations, the voices of Aboriginal workers and mission residents in remembering and advocacy, institutionalisation and the sociospatial historiography of conflict, and the relation between policy and popular exhibitions. The diversity of encounter and the multiple impacts of violence, removal, isolation and surveillance are presented in fine-grained and quite revelatory scholarship that we are honoured to circulate.

A little-known, yet watershed, legal decision in the Northern Territory is presented in detail by Katharine Booth and Lisa Ford, which underscores the ideological paradox of mid-century Aboriginal welfare administration. A civil suit was brought by the federal government against the assailants of Aboriginal pastoral workers after they had been convicted in 1955. Through delving into previously untitled archives of interdepartmental correspondence, the authors find that the administration under Paul Hasluck sought to annul Aboriginal agency by insisting on the status of Aborigines as wards.

The interpretation of 'assimilation' by Stanley Middleton, Western Australia's most senior public servant, is examined by Angela Lapham. Middleton administered over 20,000 Aboriginal people between 1948 and 1962 but he had already served 22 years as a patrol officer in the Australian protectorate of Papua. Dismayed by the ruination of the Kamilaroi, people he had grown up among, he abhorred discrimination. As Lapham writes, Middleton reached beyond his role as a civil servant to recommend unconditional citizenship rights, access to social security benefits, housing and education to tertiary

level. But his discouragement of collective modes of living and unrelenting surveillance of people's 'progress' contradicted his relatively progressive stance – and challenges our understanding of the term 'assimilation'.

Isolation in leprosariums continued for Indigenous patients until 1986, four decades after effective treatment became available in Australia in 1948. Charmaine Robson queries this divergence of Australian leprosy control policy and argues it was clearly demarked by race. Indigenous Australians, particularly from remote communities, incurred the cultural and social impacts of leprosarium institutionalisation. During the assimilation era, when Indigenous healthcare was ostensibly being incorporated into mainstream medical services, a racialised medical and bureaucratic discourse in the 1950s and early 1960s characterised Indigenous people as a public health risk and as unfit to live outside institutional oversight.

The 'entanglements' of Aboriginal and European people within farming and pastoral industries are recorded by Belinda Liebelt, Amy Roberts, Clem O'Loughlin and Doug Milera. They argue the local farming narratives on Yorke Peninsula (Guuranda), South Australia, between Narungga Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal settlers were 'mutually constituted'. Aboriginal people's roles and lived experiences are accentuated, including geographic and social segregation and structural discrimination, in the establishment and development of Australia's agricultural enterprises.

The positive memories of Aboriginal residents on missions are interrogated by Laura Rademaker by sifting through their petitions to mission authorities in the 1960s. She uncovers rare instances of Aboriginal say-so asserted within the missionary archives. The petitions indicate the high expectations and indeed ownership residents felt over these missions, demonstrating their sense of agency. Authorities rarely responded to their demands however, yet the author observes the collective past of structural inequality can be remembered concurrently with a nostalgic past of personal meaning and agency.

In a collaborative article, Heather Burke, Amy Roberts, Mick Morrison, Vanessa Sullivan and the River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (RMMAC) investigate Aboriginal–European early contact on the western Central Murray. Adopting an innovative methodology, they visualise the sociospatial processes of violent engagement that occurred between Aboriginal and European people along the Overland Stock Route. This explicitly landscape perspective on the nature and scale of frontier conflict introduces a broader geographic scale and finds that certain spaces altered, affected or promoted certain actions.

The irrepressible Archibald Meston, Southern Protector of Queensland Aborigines from 1898 to 1904, is brought to life by Judith McKay and Paul Memmott. Meston is oft remembered as the major architect of Queensland's 1897 legislation that was to regulate its Indigenous people for almost a century. Yet Meston's bizarre venture as a showman of live Indigenous people, who he publicly paraded as 'noble savages', is shown to have shaped his policies leading to removal and institutionalisation. The authors argue Meston's often coercive rounding up and removal of people off their lands to perform as racialised 'other' in his exhibits informed his formulation of Queensland's *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897*, which he co-drafted. This influential legislation then served as a model for the institutionalisation of Indigenous people in other states.

In 1838, French Captain Abel du Petit-Thouars called on these shores and recorded his impressions. Colin Dyer provides a translation of the captain's journal. While it rehearses much of the already entrenched leitmotifs of Aborigines such as polygamy and dying race theory, this translation provides a new resource in English for researchers.

Early this year an esteemed and much cherished colleague, Patrick Wolfe, died unexpectedly, leaving the discipline of Aboriginal history bereft of an *éparter* thinker and an unassuming leading light. We include a memoriam of tributes in his honour, to acclaim Patrick's immense contribution and celebrate all he imparted to our discipline.

Thanks to our indispensable book review editor, Luise Hercus, assisted by Annemarie McLaren. Appreciation also to copyeditors Maggie Troup and Geoff Hunt and to Emily Tinker at ANU Press, along with the espousal of the board, particularly Maria Nugent and Peter Read. Volume 40 we hope continues our commitment to interdisciplinary, collaborative and inter-cultural history dedicated to Aboriginal voices and experiences.

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