

Appendix Two: 'Cumeroogunga Mission – Story of Its Early Days, Tribute to Teacher'

RIVERINE HERALD, Thursday, August 16, 1946.

CUMEROOGUNGA MISSION

Story of Its Early Days

TRIBUTE TO TEACHER

Early this year there passed away in the Mooropopha Hospital a man who for many years was school teacher at the Cumeroogunga Aboriginal Mission—Mr. T. S. James. Little reference to his life and character appeared at the time. The Rev J. K. Matthews, now living at Payneham South Australia, however, is desirous that "a unique life in the history of the aboriginal race of the Riverina district" should not be entirely forgotten and he has forwarded to us a personal tribute.

More than 60 years ago Mr. Matthews was one of his earliest scholars. Mr. Matthews subsequently had experiences in education in Melbourne, Adelaide, London and Canada where he was ordained to the ministry of the Canadian church. With gratitude he pays a tribute to his "earliest teacher, who laid the truest and finest foundation" and speaks of him as "a teacher unsurpassed anywhere," and he continues: "There was nothing to regret in those early lessons imparted in the public school" on what was then known as the Mologa Mission and which had been founded by Mr Matthews' parents in 1871. Although nearly all the children were aboriginals the standard of instruction was equal to or above that of the average NSW school and that, Mr Matthews says was due to the character and ability of Mr James.

The late Thomas Shadrack James was born in Mauritius in 1859. His father was of Indian birth and spoke the Tamil language. Thomas, however, with the aid of an English dictionary and the story of "Robinson Crusoe" learnt English. As a young man he left home and landed in Tasmania, where he became a teacher. Later he went to Melbourne and aroused the interest of a merchant, Mr Crosby, who was interested in the mission station and who, when Mr Matthews visited Melbourne and conducted a holiday camp for 25 aborigines at Brighton Beach, brought Mr James into contact with him. The result was that Mr James offered to assist in the mission work without remuneration. At the mission station in 1881 he became a great helper in the Sunday School. He formed the first aboriginal cricket club and

iginies, which land adjoined his private property. The entire village of cottages and school was removed to this land and the name Cumeroogunga was given to it by a Resident appointed by the Aborigines Protection Association in Sydney.

Mr James continued as teacher of the school and it is noteworthy that of all the Mission workers who have been engaged from time to time Mr James had the longest unbroken line of service—from 1881 until he retired on the superannuation fund of the Education Department.

The following letter to Mr. D. Matthews in December 1888 indicates the interest felt by Mr James in preparation of a 'Christmas camp' at the seaside—"I shall be in Melbourne on the 14th with about 80 or 100 of our people. We shall camp at Brighton Beach, the never-to-be-forgotten spot where you first introduced me into this glorious work. I am pleased to find from your own letter, as well as from other sources, that the Lord is wonderfully blessing your tour and that ere long the work will be placed on a systematic basis for the welfare of our much neglected Aborigines. Do come and see us at Brighton. With Christian love etc. Thos. S. James."

Memories

Years have passed, the Rev J. K. Matthews writes. After a lapse of over 30 years I had the pleasure of meeting Mr and Mrs James again in Fitzroy, Melbourne where they were living after his retirement from the school at Cumeroogunga. He wrote me a beautiful letter later. In November 1943 I had occasion to visit Canberra War Cemetery where my second son, Sq.-Ldr. Daniel K. Matthews of the RAAF, is buried, having lost his life in an aircraft accident in NSW, and on my return journey I visited Echuca and the home scenes of my childhood. Through the kindness of Mr Payne I was able to go to Cumeroogunga and in a meeting spoke to the people in the old school house in which I was born and in which Mr and Mrs James were married, the first Mission home. The following day we motored to Shepparton and in the home of his daughter, Mrs Murray, Mr James and I—teacher and scholar of 60 years past—had our last, long talk—memories of the old times, rich and rare. I have now by me, one of the best treasures in my book-shelves, a prize I received from him when 12½ years of age in which is written in his beautiful hand writing "John Kerr Matthews, Mologa Public School, 2nd Jan. 1873."

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The foregoing biographical notes are from the diary of the Rev J. K. Matthews' father upon which the following interesting items are also based:—

Tribute to Aboriginal Children and Their Teacher

A lady from England who visited Malaga writes to a religious journal in London about the school. "Although I have been well acquainted with Muller's Orphan Houses in Bristol and the Homes of Dr. Barnardo, I must say I have never seen a school better conducted, or children under more thorough control than are these juvenile aborigines under the judicious management of Mr James. It is a pleasure to me to visit this school again and again where the Topsy and Andys of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" are represented and to see how these volatile minds can be brought to concentrate themselves on real, hard study, making achievements therein which would well compare with those of their more favored brothers and sisters in England. Their success in mental arithmetic was startling."

A Red Letter Day

On May 7th, 1885, it was recorded that 16 new cottages were being built for the aborigines and a teacher's house for Mr James; and on May 14th—"This is a red letter day for Malaga. Two marriages took place. A minister (Rev Mr Johnstone) came from Echuca to officiate. Great preparations were made. Visitors and our people were all smiles. One of the most important unions that ever took place at the Mission was to be celebrated."

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Mrs James died about four years ago. She and Mr James had a family of five daughters and three sons, two of whom died in infancy. The last years of his life Mr James resided with his daughter (Mrs Murray) at Shepparton. His body was laid to rest in the cemetery at Cumeroogunja, the funeral service being conducted by his nephew, Pastor Eddie

Atkinson. We, who knew him, deeply mourn his loss, but we look forward to the glorious reunion with our Savior and the redeemed.

R.S.L. AND COMMUNISTS

Discussion at Deniliquin

At a meeting of the Deniliquin branch of the RSL, Mr L. G. Donovan on behalf of a member, questioned the President regarding the recent decision of the RSL conference in Melbourne, asking for the resignation of Communist members. He said, "As the Federal Government had not declared the Communist Party an illegal organisation, any man, be he Liberal, Country Party, Labour, or Communist was entitled to vote that way at the ballot box simply because this was a democracy." He asked the chairman if the member concerned was named, would he withdraw his badge?

The chairman said the RSL conference in Victoria was only a State affair and he would not commit himself until after the general conference of all States in September.

Mr J. Bass then moved that the discussion cease immediately as it

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Mr James had provided a real bride cake, and everything else was most becoming, and attractive to the taste. Everyone acknowledged it was most enjoyable, and some went so far as to say we ought to have it oftener!

Bishop of Riverina's Testimony

Many fine testimonies of visitors were written in a "Visitor's Book." The Bishop of Riverina wrote:—"Heard some of the elder scholars read, parse, and do mental arithmetic and was much pleased at the intelligence shown, and the thoroughness of the teaching."

New Property Acquired

In 1888 a great change took place in the Mission Station. Mr Matthews acquired from the NSW Government a reserve of 1800 acres for the abor-

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Mr J. Bass then moved that the discussion cease immediately as it was against the league rules to discuss politics at a meeting. If the discussion continued, he for one, would walk out immediately.

When Mr Donovan questioned Mr Bass, "Was the discussion at the conference in Melbourne out of order?" Mr Bass replied very emphatically in the affirmative and said he still upheld his earlier motion.

The motion was placed before the meeting and carried unanimously.

Mechanics' Library.—

Following are additions to the Mechanics' Institute Library: First Love, Mary Burchell; Put Off Thy Shoes, E. L. Voynich; The Ten Commandments, (ten short novels of Hitler's war against the moral code); Plantation Guns, William Macleod Raine; The Cat Jumps, Miles Burton; Kid Cyclone, Lester Gregory; Of Many Men, James Aldridge; The Golden Hills, Dane Vander; Brides of Doom, Mary Richmond; Murder at Benfleet, George Bettany; A Bunch of Crooks, Roland Daxiel; Plowing the Arctic, G. J. Tranter; Red in the Morning, Darnford Yates; Romantic Fugitive, Sholla Burns; London Belongs to Me, Norman Collins; Can I Go There?, Anne Hepple.

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