

Preface

Volume 38 features a rather serendipitous special section on Western Australian Aboriginal history. Just as I moved back home to Western Australia, the journal coincidentally received a number of submissions exploring diverse Indigenous histories of the state. For me, this was an opportune introduction to the latest research in the field, and for readers, I trust it offers an exciting overview of new insights into Western Australia's Aboriginal past.

This special section begins with Clint Bracknell's commissioned article on nineteenth-century Noongar songs. Through his translations and careful reconstructions of the diverse contexts in which the songs were performed and recorded, Bracknell highlights the Noongar response to the arrival of the Europeans and the early colonisation of the state's south-west.

Amanda Nettelbeck and Anne Scrimgeour both examine the policing and administration of Aboriginal people in the north-west. Nettelbeck considers the role of magistrates and justices of the peace in the 'frontier legal networks' of the Pilbara and Kimberley regions. She reveals that these networks contributed to the government's fraught attempt to pacify and regulate Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth century. Scrimgeour takes us to the middle of the twentieth century, revealing that governmental attempts to legally regulate and administer Aboriginal people in this region were still flawed. She traces the changing approach to the administration of Aboriginal people through the biography of Laurie O'Neill, a former mounted policeman and travelling inspector. Initially renowned and celebrated for his brutal methods of controlling Aboriginal people, his heavy-handed response to the Pilbara Strike demonstrated that he was distastefully out of step with the Department of Native Welfare's policy shift away from the punitive control of Aboriginal people towards new post-World-War II concerns for their welfare and 'advancement', so was removed from the region.

Finally, this special section concludes with Craig Muller's detailed study on the history of the Wongatha of the north-east part of the Goldfields. This is not just a meticulous history, but also an important critique of the *prima facie* acceptance of the research of 'bygone anthropologists' in Native Title cases. Muller finds that Elkin's account of his brief 1930 visit to the region was used as evidence in the recent Wongatha native title case without sufficient historical contextualisation. He demonstrates that there is significant historical documentary evidence that challenges Elkin's assertions, and questions the privileged status that historic anthropological accounts have in the native title process, over that of other historical evidence.

These four stimulating studies illustrate the vitality of current research on Western Australian Aboriginal history. Together, the papers draw on rich archival sources, complicate our understandings of the way in which Aboriginal lives were controlled in the past, and highlight Aboriginal voices and perspectives. These

studies also reveal the material impact historical research has on Aboriginal lives today in terms of the recognition of native title and the revival of Aboriginal languages.

Volume 38 also features four fascinating articles exploring Aboriginal histories from other parts of Australia. Two of the articles have a biographical focus. Nicholas Brodie reconstructs the life of Dalrymple Briggs, a Vandemonian woman of mixed-descent whose biography has been contorted in a number of primary and secondary sources. His painstaking study not only adds to our understating of Tasmanian frontier history, but also, like Muller's, cautions us on the *prima facie* acceptance of well-known primary sources. Noah Riseman in turn examines the lives of three Aboriginal servicemen who all had media profiles as successful examples of assimilation. In his discussion of their experiences of assimilation, he highlights the way in which these men, despite being 'success stories', experienced the policy's shortcomings.

The other two articles examine different non-Indigenous accounts of Aboriginal people and culture. Marguerita Stephens critically examines discourses on Aboriginal infanticide in colonial Victoria. Beginning with a study of imperial discourses on Indigenous infanticide, she then closely analyses the accounts of William Thomas, the assistant protector of the Port Phillip Protectorate and later Guardian of Aborigines, and William Buckley, a former convict who escaped and lived with the Wathaurung people for over 30 years before he 'came in'. Noting how such accounts were second-hand reports, relating instances of infanticide 'unseen' by the two witnesses, Stephens observes that these accounts reveal not only the power and endurance of this colonial trope, but also through the Aboriginal testimony provided by Thomas, reveals the way in which Aboriginal people struggled to make sense of the tragic deaths of children in the wake of colonisation. The history of tourist visits to Palm Island, an Aboriginal reserve in Queensland is the focus of Toby Martin's article. He explores the diverse reasons tourists visited and analyses the various tropes through which they perceived and made sense of the reserve and its Aboriginal inmates.

This is the last volume of *Aboriginal History* that I will edit, before handing over the editor's role to Dr Liz Conor. Editing this journal has been an enriching experience, and I am constantly reminded that the field of *Aboriginal History* is ever expanding, and incredibly diverse in its focus and approach. The articles published by early career researchers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous have been particularly innovative and exciting, and highlight the healthy state of the field as new scholars make important contributions to our understanding of Aboriginal lives, experiences, treatment, and discourses in the past.

In this, my last preface, I would like to firstly thank the authors for their contributions, and the referees who have generously shared their expertise in offering guidance to the authors. I must also thank the Aboriginal History Inc

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