



Minutes of Evidence Curriculum & TRP

Topic 3: *'Frontier conflict and collaboration' AND/OR 'beginning of Stolen Generation era' (linked to reserves such as Coranderk)*

Key theme(s): Dispossession; collaboration

Additional theme(s): Ownership; tradition; identity; cultural survival

Victorian Curriculum link:

Causes of population movements and settlement patterns during this period and the significant changes to the way of life of groups of people ([VCHHK130](#))

Key social, cultural, economic, and political features of one society at the start of the period ([VCHHK133](#))

Intended and unintended causes and effects of contact and extension of settlement of European power(s), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([VCHHK134](#))

If the above hyperlinks do not work in PDF – visit the curriculum via:

<http://tinyurl.com/j85w2pg>

Part 1: Frontier violence

Violent attacks by Europeans on the Indigenous people of the Port Philip District began with the very first incursions into Kulin clan estates. During the initial European exploration of Port Phillip Bay, in March 1802, two Boon wurrung men were killed as a result of a misreading of Aboriginal actions by members of Lieutenant Bowen's party (Barwick 1998). Then eighteen months later, during the attempt to form a settlement at Sorrento in October 1803, an exploring party led by Lieutenant Tuckey shot dead two Watha wurrung men and wounded several others, on the shore of Corio Bay (Clark 1995).

In the first few decades of the 19th century Europeans set up whaling stations and, during the whaling off season, engaged in bark stripping in coastal areas. Attacks on Aborigines in locations such as Portland (where the Hentys and others had establishments), and in Westernport, continued for some years. In late February 1836 a small group of Boon wurrung was fired on by a group of bark strippers at Westernport Bay (Jones 1981). This followed an attack on local Aborigines in Portland about 18 months earlier.

As news spread during 1835 of the rich pasturelands south of the Murray River, hundreds of Europeans poured into what was soon to become the Port Phillip District. Initially, most came from Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) and began to spread out on to the grassy basalt plains to the west. Within 18 months cattle and sheep were also being driven overland from the Sydney districts, and Kulin land in central and northern areas of the Port Phillip District was being occupied. Conflicts between Indigenous owners and European invaders were soon occurring across the District, wherever the pastoralists invaded Aboriginal land.

The first attacks by Aborigines on Europeans occurred in separate incidents in the first half of 1836. In the first, two men were killed near Indented Head while loading supplies for a station on the Werribee River. In July 1836 a further two Europeans (squatter Charles Franks and his shepherd Flinders) were killed at their station on the Werribee River near Mount Cotterell (PROV Series 4 Item 15). In the latter case two parties of Europeans, each accompanied by Aborigines, set out to seek retribution on the Aboriginal group responsible. The parties returned to Melbourne some days later, having killed at least ten Aborigines (PROV Series 4 Item 15).

One of the more serious early incidents of violence was the 'Faithfull massacre' that took place in the north-east of the Port Phillip District near Benalla in April 1838. A group of unsupervised convicts driving stock from New South Wales for the Faithfull brothers happened upon a gathering of Indigenous people. The Aborigines were preparing for a major round of

ceremonies but their intent was misread by the Europeans, who attacked them (Barwick 1985). Seven of Faithfull's men were killed in the conflict that ensued. Following this incident there were two punitive attacks by Europeans on local Aboriginal groups, resulting in the death of scores of individuals. Much later George Faithfull, who was in one of the parties, admitted to firing his double-barrelled shotgun more than 60 times into groups of attacking Aborigines (Faithfull 1898).

In the following fifteen years conflicts between the settlers and the original owners took place on numerous occasions in all parts of the District. Clark (1995) has documented 105 sites in western Victoria alone where racial conflict resulted in the death of Aborigines. In a number of incidents Europeans also were killed but in almost every case the number of Aborigines slain was much greater. In some instances this ratio was as much as 13 to 1. In most of these violent episodes Europeans initiated the conflicts, which were aimed at retribution for the killing of a one of their own or (more commonly) the stealing of stock by Aborigines. (Gill picture: Avengers).

In some cases, however, attacks on Aborigines were premeditated. In November 1840 a group of Aborigines, possibly as many as 15, were killed by poisoning, near the Wannon River. Thomas Connell, an employee of the Henty Brothers, is believed to have given the Aborigines flour laced with arsenic (frustrated by the theft of his flour, Connell deliberately laced a quantity of flour for the Aboriginal people to find) (Clark 1995; Critchett 1990). There are also documented instances in the western district of settlers forming armed parties for the purpose of simply hunting Aborigines (Critchett 1990). Similar things were also happening through the 1840s in Gippsland (Pepper and De Araugo 1985; Gardner 2001) — with similar results for the local Aboriginal clans.

There can be little doubt that inter-racial violence in the Port Phillip District was greatest on the pastoral frontier, in the rural areas distant from the seat of administrative control in Melbourne (Gill picture: stealing gun).

In the long period before the arrival of Europeans within their estates, Aboriginal clans interacted in a variety of ways. Clans did not always enjoy friendly relations with each other and in all of the nations across the Port Phillip District there were often reasons for fighting. This *inter se* violence was a familiar part of Aboriginal life, brought about by traditional on-going feuds between groups, perceived infringements of protocol and as 'payback' or revenge for the sudden death of an individual. These conflicts were generally small affairs but they regularly resulted in deaths (Nance 1981; Critchett 1990; Broome 2005). With the invasion of Aboriginal estates by Europeans, and the consequent impacts on land and people, the additional stresses placed on the Aboriginal population likely impacted also on such violence. No records exist of the numbers of Aborigines that were killed by members of their own race, so it is impossible to say with certainty whether more or less were killed in this way following European settlement (Broome 2005). It should be noted, however, that every reckoning or estimate of the number of Aborigines killed by *inter se* violence gives a much smaller number than those killed by Europeans (Nance 1981; Broome 2005).