



Minutes of Evidence Curriculum & TRP

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

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 2: Collaborations

This racial conflict might be seen as the norm in relations between the Indigenous and European populations, particularly in the rural areas of the Port Phillip District. It was not uncommon for Europeans to publicly express views that were highly antagonistic to Aborigines. Charles Franks, who was killed by Aborigines at Mount Cotterell in July 1836, was reported as saying he had lead shot on hand to deal with the local Aborigines (Russell 1935). George Augustus Robinson encountered similar sentiments among squatters in the Sunbury area. On 31 January 1840 he recorded in his diary that he

'was informed by Mr Ward ... that the blacks had been at his run ... Said if they took his sheep he would slaughter them.' (Robinson, 31 January 1840). While this attitude was the more widespread, there were some squatters who took a different view, and managed to develop friendly relations with local clans. Thomas Chirnside encouraged local Aborigines to continue their traditional ways across his western district sheep runs, firstly near Mount William and later on the Wannon River. In return for his friendliness, local men willingly helped out with sheep washing (Chirnside, 1853; Critchett 1990). Similarly, Thomas Baillie allowed Aborigines free access to his station, near present-day Carngham; in three years he suffered no losses to stock or property (Robinson, 9 May 1841).

Although there was much hostility, there were also many episodes of collaboration between the two ethnic groups. Aboriginal society was able to accept and accommodate strangers, where the visitors did not threaten the traditional framework of life. Aboriginal action was mediated through complex sets of rules, which had been created and refined over thousands of years. An individual's life was regulated through strict observance of procedures and forms of behavior (Landau 2009; Stanner 2010). When strangers showed some understanding and observation of the required etiquette or social process it suggested that they had a place within the world, and they were welcomed. In such situations collaboration was the norm (Barwick 1985).

Reciprocity and sharing were central elements in Kulin culture; for example, where hospitality or assistance was given, there was an expectation that the gift would be reciprocated. Time and again in the first decades of European settlement the settlers failed to give their Indigenous hosts the respect due to them, or repay their kindness. Such infringements of protocol were often the basis of violence directed toward Europeans by Aborigines. G A Robinson recorded in August 1841 how a shepherd had been assaulted by an Aboriginal man. The cause was that the European had engaged the services of the man's wife for three days but had ill-treated her and then refused to pay the agreed price. The Aboriginal man took his revenge in what for him was the traditional fashion (Robinson, 9 May 1841; Critchett 1990).

From the beginning of permanent settlement on the Yarra River, Aboriginal individuals and groups willingly assisted the settlers, and shared the resources of their estates. In some instances Aborigines changed their way of life in order to find a place for themselves in what was a rapidly changing world. Some notable instances of such cooperation or collaboration include:

The action of Derrimut and others in saving the Melbourne settlement:

Derrimut was a clan-head of the Yalukit willam clan of Boon wurrung speakers, a young man of some standing within the Kulin world. Following the arrival of settlers within his estate, he formed a close relationship with a young lad in John Pascoe Fawkner's party. This connection was sufficiently important to Derrimut that in October 1835, and again in the following December, he warned Fawkner of impending attacks on the settlement by other Aborigines. (Clark 2005) It is not clear why he acted seemingly against his own people, but in fact he did not act alone; he was only one member of a group of Kulin leaders, including his kinsman Bet Benjee, who allowed the warning. In the following July, Derrimut, along with Bet Benjee and Benbow (all clan-heads) took part in the pursuit of the Aboriginal killers of Franks and Flinders (Fels 1986). A month later both Derrimut and Bet Benjee, clan-head of the neighbouring Woi wurrung clan— the Kurung jang bulluk— accompanied Fawkner to Tasmania, where Derrimut had his portrait painted (Clark 2005 Duttereau picture).

Service in the Native Police Corps: Bet Benjee was also a willing member of the first Native Police Corps which formed in October 1837 but was disbanded in early January 1838. This was the first of three policing units composed principally of Indigenous men. In the first Corps there were 15 men, all of whom were Woi wurrung or Boon wurrung and who voluntarily became involved. A second Corps was formed in September 1838 but lasted only until January 1839. It was the third Native Police Corp, formed in February 1842, that was successful and enduring (Fels 1986; PROV On-line exhibition; Strutt pictures; Gill picture). Once again Kulin men constituted the bulk of the force, but on this occasion Billibelary, the paramount clan-head or

Ngurungæta of the Kulin, also enlisted. Such was his standing that his agreement to be part of the Corps was sufficient to ensure that other Kulin men would follow. Most of the 22 troopers in the first intake were clan elders or their heirs. Benbow, Derrimut's fellow clan-head of the Yalukit willam, was a late inclusion in this third Corps. He was actually in excess of the required number, but he wanted to join and was considered too important to leave out (Fels 1986). Another notable inclusion was a young Wurundjeri balluk man named Beruke. On enrolling in the force he was given the name William Barak. Barak later became the most respected and important of leaders in the continued fight by the Kulin to maintain their identity and presence. It was through his leadership along with that of his cousin Simon Wonga that in 1863 Kulin clanspeople were able to claim for themselves the site of Coranderrk (Nanni and James 2013). He was present as an 11-year-old at the signing of the Batman 'Treaty' and throughout his long life demonstrated time and again that through a collaborative approach he could learn from the Europeans new ways to both assert his traditional rights and find a meaningful place for himself and his people in the new social order.

The clan-heads who joined the Native Police Corps in 1842 were influential and respected figures in the Kulin world. Many of them had petitioned European authorities, arguing on behalf of their people. The fact that they were willing to join such a European institution as a police force suggests that in the wake of the European invasion they were leading their people into new relationships and arrangements with the settlers, in a vastly changed world.

Tracking with Victoria Police: Tracking was a skill that could be exercised by Aboriginal men in a collaborative way and that allowed them a unique place within the European ambit. The ability of Indigenous people to discern and follow tell-tale traces of an individual's movement put them in demand from time to time, particularly with the police. A range of situations called for the services of Aboriginal trackers, including adults and children lost in the bush, the need to follow the path of a suspect away from a crime scene, and the tracking of bushrangers through a landscape (Presland 1998). From the

earliest days of European settlement these needs were filled by recourse to local Aboriginal reserves or settlements.

In perhaps the best-known case, the three Duff children, lost in Victoria's Mallee in August 1864, were found after nine days by three Aboriginal men. The men were brought from a station near Nhill where they were employed. Interestingly, four years later two of the men, known only by their European names as King Richard or Dick-a-Dick and Red-cap, were also members of the Aboriginal cricket team that toured England (Mulvaney 1967; Presland 1998).

In 1879 during the police hunt for the Kelly Gang, a number of Aboriginal men were taken from the Coranderrk station to assist with the hunt. Among the men who took part in the chase were William Barak, Tommy Arnott, from one of the *Kurnai* clans in Gippsland, James Reeze, and Harry Rose. Also involved in the pursuit of the Kelly Gang were two Queensland Aboriginal men (Murriss) – Tommy Spider and Moses Bulla. The latter had lived at Coranderrk since childhood (Longmore Royal Commission 1881). Following the capture of the Kelly Gang in July 1880, both of these men spent some years working with the Victoria Police as trackers (Presland 1998).

Aboriginal guides: From the time of first contacts with Europeans, at the beginning of the 19th century, Aborigines were encountering strangers in a wide range of situations, and doing their best to fit these sudden visitors into a traditional context. In such situations, collaboration was the norm and time and again Aboriginal people went out of their way to assist the immigrants in their endeavours. This is no more apparent than in the way that Indigenous people guided the strangers through their estates on numerous occasions.

This guiding took place when Europeans first came exploring the land in the areas south of the Murray River. Major Thomas Mitchell was able to traverse the District, from the Murray River to Portland Bay and back in 1835, with the assistance of Aboriginal guides (Baker 1997). They were an essential part of all his expeditions, as they were for most previous and later exploring

expeditions. Strzelecki's expedition in Gippsland in 1840 was saved by his Aboriginal guide, Charlie, after their food had run out (Reynolds 1990).

When, in the wake of the explorers, pastoralists came from Van Diemen's Land and from New South Wales looking for pasture for their stock, they were often guided to the best localities for runs by local Indigenous people (Clark 1999). As the Chief Protector of Aborigines wrote, Aborigines led the settlers to 'their rivers, their springs and rich pastures' (GA Robinson, quoted in Reynolds 1990; Clark 1999).

When gold was discovered in the central Victoria in 1851, local Indigenous people, primarily Dja Dja wurrung of the western Kulin (Clark 1990), were of vital importance in assisting the miners. In addition to guiding prospectors to lode-bearing localities, Aborigines showed the Europeans where to find water, and where the easier paths to travel were. When miners became lost or stock strayed, Aborigines were called upon to exercise their tracking skills (Cahir 2010; 2012).