



Minutes of Evidence Curriculum & TRP

Topic 5: ‘An age of democracy/freedoms. Egalitarianism’ - but again, for whom?

Key theme(s): Justice

Additional theme(s): Ownership; tradition; community; identity

Victorian Curriculum link:

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

Patterns of continuity and change and their effects on influencing movements of people, ways of life and living conditions, political and legal institutions, and cultural expression around the turn of the twentieth century ([VCHHK136](#))

Position of the society in relation to other nations in the world by 1918 including the effects of ideas and movements of people ([VCHHK138](#))

Causes of the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965 ([VCHHK152](#))

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

<http://tinyurl.com/j85w2pg>

Part 3: The closure of Coranderrk and the fate of its residents (undermining the system of Aboriginal Reserves)

As the impacts of the removal of mixed-blood residents from the reserves, and the disruption to family connections of separating children and parents began to take effect, the population on reserves diminished (Broome 2005). This gave BPA ammunition in their endeavours in the 1890s to close most of the reserves and amalgamate the Aboriginal population in one place. Little by little over the next 40 years, stations were closed: Ebenezer in 1904; Ramahyuck in 1908; Lake Condah in 1919; and Coranderrk in 1924. This shedding of establishments began in 1890 when the reserve at Framlingham was disestablished. As the BPA reported in that year (BPA 1890):

The number of pure blacks is constantly decreasing on every establishment. This decrease indicates the necessity that must arise from time to time of reducing the number of stations. This is the policy which ... has been unanimously adopted by the Board...

In each case of closure residents were moved to one of the other government reserves. This was most often Lake Tyers in Gippsland, a mission founded by the Anglican Church in 1861 but that had become a government-run reserve in 1908. As reserves across Victoria were progressively closed some of the remaining residents were transferred to Coranderrk. By 1923 the BPA was operating only two reserves – Coranderrk and Lake Tyers, and it was clear to the aging residents of Coranderrk what the Board had in mind. William Barak had died in 1903 and some of the fight had died with him. But the 44 residents were still able to have a letter published in the *Argus* (4 June 1923, p. 15) eloquently expressing their opposition to being moved from their country.

Sir. - we are very much in sad distress thinking of how the members of the board for the protection of the aborigines are breaking our homes up at Coranderrk, and trying to transfer us natives to Lake Tyers against our wish .

Alluding to the recently concluded World War, the letter went on:

... they [the BPA] are worse than the Germans, taking a poor blackfellow's piece of ground, which is only as large as a sixpenny bit to the whole of Australia. Remember, we are no more slaves because we are coloured. We are under the British flag, too. Our native boys went to fight for the King, home, and country, and now this is how they are treating us-going to shift us from pillar to post, breaking the hearts of our old parents. They might just as well shoot us all than shift us against our will. Will someone fight for us?

The letter elicited some public feeling but the course of the BPA had been set. Dr Argyle, the Chief Secretary, visited the reserve and subsequently proposed that the reserve be reduced in size to 100 ha and that about 12 elderly residents be allowed to live out their days at Coranderrk (*Argus* 1 February 1924, p. 16). Coranderrk was effectively closed some weeks later (Barwick 1998).