6. Truth-Telling and the Frontier

Plate 6.1: The Leap showing the cliffs from which an Aboriginal woman is supposed to have jumped. In the 1860s, Mt Mandurana (The Leap) was on the northern edge of Balnagowan pastoral station.
Source: Clive Moore Collection, 2006.

This chapter is confronting. It discusses 'truth-telling'—explaining what happened to the Indigenous community around Mackay and Nebo. Today's residents are usually not aware of the extent of the original First Nations population and the speed of their decline in numbers, nor the reasons for this. It is also difficult to take ourselves back to the mindsets of both the Aboriginal inhabitants and the European settlers. It is more comfortable to blame the population decline on introduced diseases and the Queensland Native Mounted Police (hereafter the Native Police), than to confront the direct actions of the early colonists in helping to bring about the decimation that occurred. The complicit support by the colonial Government is also hard to accept, but there is no doubt that they orchestrated an armed murderous attack on the Indigenous people of the colony. Trying to understand what occurred is necessary, in hopes that we can find a way ahead for contemporary Australia. There has been some restoration of First Nations sovereignty through the courts, and the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart by our First Nations peoples was intended to be integral to this process. Nevertheless, there is no sign that the need for 'truth-telling' has been accepted by the immigrant majority in Australia.

Our modern-day knowledge of the process of British colonisation in Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries makes clear that the concept of *terra nullius* (declaring Aboriginal Australians to have no legal systems or rights) was a fraud, and that a state of warfare existed, provoked by the British and colonial governments and the colonists. Henry

Reynolds' *Truth-Telling* (2021) is the best (and most scathing) account of what occurred that has ever been written. The original 1780s concept was that First Nations peoples were British subjects (and thus to be protected by British law). This was abandoned in the 1840s to declare war on them as an alien people. Yet, at roughly the same time (after 1849) New South Wales pastoral leases contained clauses which required protection of Aboriginal rights, just as already existed in South Australia and Western Australia. This concept, which carried over into the new colony of Queensland in 1859, was seldom observed. The idea of reserved lands for First Nations Australians, was also imbedded in Colonial Office thinking, but seldom enacted. Once internal self-government began in the Australian colonies, any moral obligation to safeguard the rights of Indigenous people was ignored in favour of the relentless expansion of the pastoral and to a lesser extent the agricultural frontier.

The Pioneer Valley district was part of this rapid expansion, with one major difference. Two of Queensland's largest early Aboriginal reserves were begun in the Pioneer Valley and on the adjacent northern coast in the 1870s and 1880s. An experiment that might have made a difference, they failed and were disbanded. And at the same time there was a conspiracy of silence on the frontier over the killing of the Aboriginal inhabitants. To background this, let us begin with the story of the incident at The Leap mountain in the 1860s.

The Story of The Leap

Twenty kilometres north of Mackay the Bruce Highway goes past a mountain called Mandurana (also Mandarana) by First Nations Australians. It is now known as The Leap. In the 1950s, my father, who had lived in the district since a child in the 1920s, told me that when he was young it was called 'Black Gin's Leap', because a woman had jumped over the cliffs with her baby. Other locals called it 'Blackfellow's Leap'. There is a hotel on the road in front. Fifty years ago, it was a low rambling building with sagging verandas—a favourite stop-over for travellers on the highway. The 'Black Gin' or 'Blackfellow' part of the title has disappeared, probably out of early political correctness, or shame about what took place there in the 1860s. When European settlers first arrived, they called the mountain Mt Johansburgh, and Mandurana is still in use for the name of a small cemetery and a road along the edge of what was the north of Balnagowan station. Today, in front of a new version of the hotel is a weathered statue of an Aboriginal woman wearing a nappy-like modesty garment and holding her baby. She looks desperate, presumably about to jump over the precipice. When I was young, we passed The Leap many times on our way to holidays at nearby Seaforth Beach. There was no statue then, but I was always puzzled and felt a chill at the thought of the woman who jumped off the mountain with her child.

Plate 6.2: The statue of 'Kowaha' outside The Leap Hotel. Supposedly, this is the name of the woman who was forced to jump off The Leap mountain by the Native Police in 1867, with her baby. I have not seen the name used elsewhere.
Source: Clive Moore Collection, 2006.

In my childhood there seemed to be no First Nations Australians around Mackay, or at least it looked that way to me. There was however a large Black population, descendants of the Pacific Islander workforce, some of whom had part-Indigenous ancestry. I began school in 1957 and have no memory of any Indigenous students at Victoria Park Primary School, until Grade Seven when one arrived from another district. I never wondered why; it was just the way Mackay was. Of course, small numbers were still living in the valley, mainly further down to the west, and to the north and south of the river, and a few Torres Strait Islanders were in the district as part of a post-1950s move to the mainland. Some Indigenous Australians had married South Sea Islanders and Asians and were incorporated into those communities, cloaked by similar skin colour. The Yuwibara in the Pioneer Valley have survived, although their numbers were reduced to a small fraction of the pre-1860s population. First Nations people in the Mackay– Nebo area have been resilient and have re-emerged as a distinct community, attested to by the Yuwibara, Widi, and Barada Barna Aboriginal corporations, which hold lands in trust for descendants, and the Reef Catchments Traditional Owner Reference Group. When we drove past The Leap in the 1950s and 1960s, I was correct to wonder, although it took another 40 years until I had a satisfactory answer.

James Cook University

It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that I began to understand why a woman might have jumped off the mountain with her child, or why there seemed to be no Aboriginal children at my primary school. Part of this understanding came with my education at James Cook University, then Australia's most important centre for study of the 'other side' of the colonial frontier. Henry Reynolds, who taught there, became Australia's best-known historian of frontier conflict. And there was another quiet force on campus, Eddie Koki Mabo from Mer (Murray) Island in Torres Strait, who began what was called Townsville's 'Black School', to educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in a supportive environment. For many years, he also worked as a gardener around the central creek that ran through the Douglas

campus. Eddie secured Australian immortality in 1992 when he and his co-plaintiffs won the Mabo Land Rights Case in the High Court against the Queensland Government. This humble Torres Strait Islander changed Australian history and, at James Cook University in the 1970s, he charmed students like me on the way to the library. Eddie was always ready for a chat. Now the main university library carries his name.

With Reynolds as my lecturer, mentor, and later colleague, and Mabo as a friend, I was constantly exposed to other ways of thinking about the settlement of North Queensland. Eddie (Koki, as he was also called) was an unusual man, capable, smart, with an inquiring mind and a ready smile. The History Department was also unusual; where else would a campus gardener arrive to have lunch with the academic staff? Eddie reacted to discussions with Henry Reynolds and Noel Loos in Henry's office, and around the History Department staff room table I shared with them, presided over by Brian Dalton, the benevolent and supportive, but nevertheless 'godly', professor. During these conversations, Eddie first learnt with horror that his people did not 'own' their island—it was classified as Crown land. The Mabo Case was hatched in the History Department. As a result of the ten-year-long court case, finalised in June 1992, for the first time Australian law recognised native title, based on a legal argument which revolved around small Mer (Murray) Island in Torres Strait. Unfortunately, Eddie, born in 1936, died in January 1992, before the High Court judgement was handed down.

The egalitarian spirit in the department shaped my attitude to writing history. Looking back, I was lucky enough to be part of the making of an important change in Australia's history. Much of my formative career as an historian goes back to those James Cook University days when I began to explore the history of Australian South Sea Islanders, many of whom lived in the Mackay district. In recent years, I came to know Bonita Mabo (1943–2018), Eddie's wife, of South Sea Islander descent, and a crusader like Eddie.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, just back from several years teaching at the University of Papua New Guinea, I wrote two academic papers on First Nations Australians in the Mackay district. It was my way of contributing to an understanding of the sadness and resilience of the still largely unwritten history of Indigenous Australians. It was also a way for me to understand what a small boy on the way to a holiday was told about The Leap.

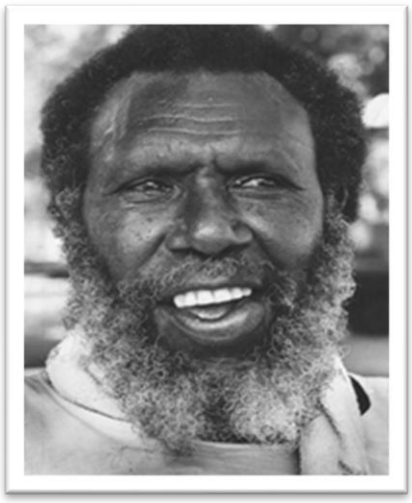


Plate 6.3: Eddie Koki Mabo
Plate 6.4: Bonita Mabo and Clive Moore, Vanuatu Independence Day, Port Vila, 2013.
Source: (6.3) Courtesy of the Australian Government; (6.4) Courtesy of Emelda Davis Collection.

Knotholes and The Leap

Pastoral settlement began over the ranges west of the valley in the second half of the 1850s. Settler colonialism required control of the land and used this need to shape social relations. In 1770, James Cook claimed the east coast of Australia on behalf of the British Crown. After 1788, when New South Wales was settled as a convict colony, and, particularly onwards from the 1820s, Aboriginal land was declared to be *terra nullius*—land that belonged to no one—and was divided into British colonies and their land districts. The Indigenous inhabitants were separated from their land and were forced to come to an accommodation with the settlers. Queensland's South Kennedy Land District, in which the isolated Pioneer Valley sits, was not officially open for selection until early 1861. The relationship that developed between the First Nations Australians and the Europeans in this area passed through several stages: first contact and initial resistance (1860–64); evenly matched warfare (1864–68); Native Police ascendancy (1862–80); 'letting in' (1864–70s); attempts to create local reserves (1870s–80s); First Nation refugees left marginalised in the valley, and also working on pastoral stations (1880s–90s); and deportation to other reserves and missions (1910s–20s). There was never a smooth transition from initial contact, cautious meetings, puzzlement and suspicion, overtures of friendship, anger, and warfare, leading to European ascendancy. The 1860s were difficult years for the early White settlements when Aboriginal resistance thoroughly demoralised the colonists, and for a time, seemed to have the upper hand over the pastoral stations. However, as early as 1864, some Aboriginal people were 'let in' (allowed to return to their own land to work as labourers) to newly settled areas. The 1870s and 1880s also saw the development of small-scale gold mining in the hinterland, which meant high concentrations of Europeans in some areas around Nebo, as well as at Mt Britton and on Eungella Plateau.

Research by Raymond Evans, Henry Reynolds, Noel Loos, Robert Ørsted-Jensen, Timothy Bottoms, Jonathan Richards, Ray Kerkhove, David Marr and others suggests that 60,000 to possibly 100,000 Aboriginal inhabitants of colonial Queensland were deliberately killed—murdered—by the Native Police and settlers, or died from introduced diseases. At least 20,000 of these deaths were at the hands of the colonists. One of the hardest things to understand today is the inhumanity of the settlers who murdered First Nations Australians, then later chose to forget that they were involved. The role of the average settler has also been deliberately obscured in subsequent memory. Ken Manning, journalist, farmer, and local historian, who knew many of the older settlers around Mackay in the first half of the twentieth century, explained it this way:

> Blacks killed many cattle in the early years. The punitive expeditions which followed [the killing of cattle] all too often degenerated into murderous hunts. Old timers later were loath to recall details and many station workers, after participating once or twice in the line of duty, found they had little stomach for cold blooded killing excursions… .
>
> Old bushmen would guardedly concede the worst excesses of action against Aboriginals were unpardonable over-reaction, which nevertheless took place in circumstances in which economic survival of herds and runs, as well as white lives, were threatened.[1]

Henry Reynolds, the most accomplished scholar of First Nations people in colonial history, placed what occurred into wider context:

> The great forgetting is one of the most important aspects of Australian intellectual and cultural life during the first sixty years of the twentieth century. How on earth did it

> happen? And why? This was the time when the ANZAC legend was evolving and the phrase 'Lest We Forget' acquired iconic status. It meant that two or three generations of Australians were nurtured with a national story that left out much of the most significant aspects of their colonial heritage. Why did they become less able to deal with the reality of the killing times than their fathers and grandfathers who had been there and who had acquired a reputation for exaggerated reticence?[2]

There is no doubt that colonists killed huge numbers. Motivations differed but were not class related. Lease owners and managers were defending property, while shepherds and stockmen were more often just defending their own lives. Settlers understood that they were doing wrong, and, given that the philosophy behind Christianity was more dominant then than now, they must have been troubled by the taking of so many human lives. Their justification was that Aboriginal Australians were a more primitive form of human. They seldom left evidence, which enabled their descendants to deny settler involvement. Neither did the Native Police leave evidence, as they usually burnt the bodies of those they killed. Either by accident or design, most of the Government records of the activities of the Native Police no longer exist. Just as the first chapter attempted to understand the background of the Indigenous people before 1860, and Chapters 2 to 5 outline the European motivations in settling, this chapter attempts to understand why British colonists were so violent in their invasion of the continent. Reynolds suggests that in part it relates to the 'overwhelming belief that the Aboriginal people were a dying race with no long-term future':

> Shrinking populations in many parts of the country pointed in this direction. But arching over observed demographic developments was the all-pervasive influence of Social Darwinism, which provided what was thought to be the scientific evidence for the inevitable decline and eventual passing of the race.[3]

Since the 1970s, there has been a constant rewriting of the history of the Australian frontier. The highest pre-contact population levels were in the tropical parts of Western Australia, the Northern Territory (then part of South Australia), and Queensland. The destruction was high in the north of Australia, and totally calculated. Reynolds correctly described Queensland's Native Police as the most violent organisation in Australian history. Jonathan Richards and David Marr's histories of the Native Police are relentless in their forensic uncovering of the activities of this military arm of the Queensland colonial state. The Native Police operated more like a unit of a defence force than a police force, consisting of Aboriginal troopers from much further south, usually from around the Murray River system, under White officers. They patrolled recently settled areas 'pacifying' and 'dispersing' the local Aboriginal people. These were euphemisms for exterminating whole communities. The Leap massacre was one of many similar events. The Kennedy division of the Native Police was formed in 1862, although it was not an effective force before about 1866, assisted after that by the introduction of electric telegraph stations, which speeded communications. Sydney and Brisbane were connected by telegraph in November 1861, with Townsville and Brisbane and points between connected by 1869. (A link with Europe, via South Australia and what is now the Northern Territory, followed in 1872.) In the second half of the 1860s, the telegraph was available throughout central and north Queensland. The extension from St Lawrence to Nebo, Greenmount, and Mackay occurred in 1865, then north to the Bloomsbury homestead in 1866, and on to Bowen.

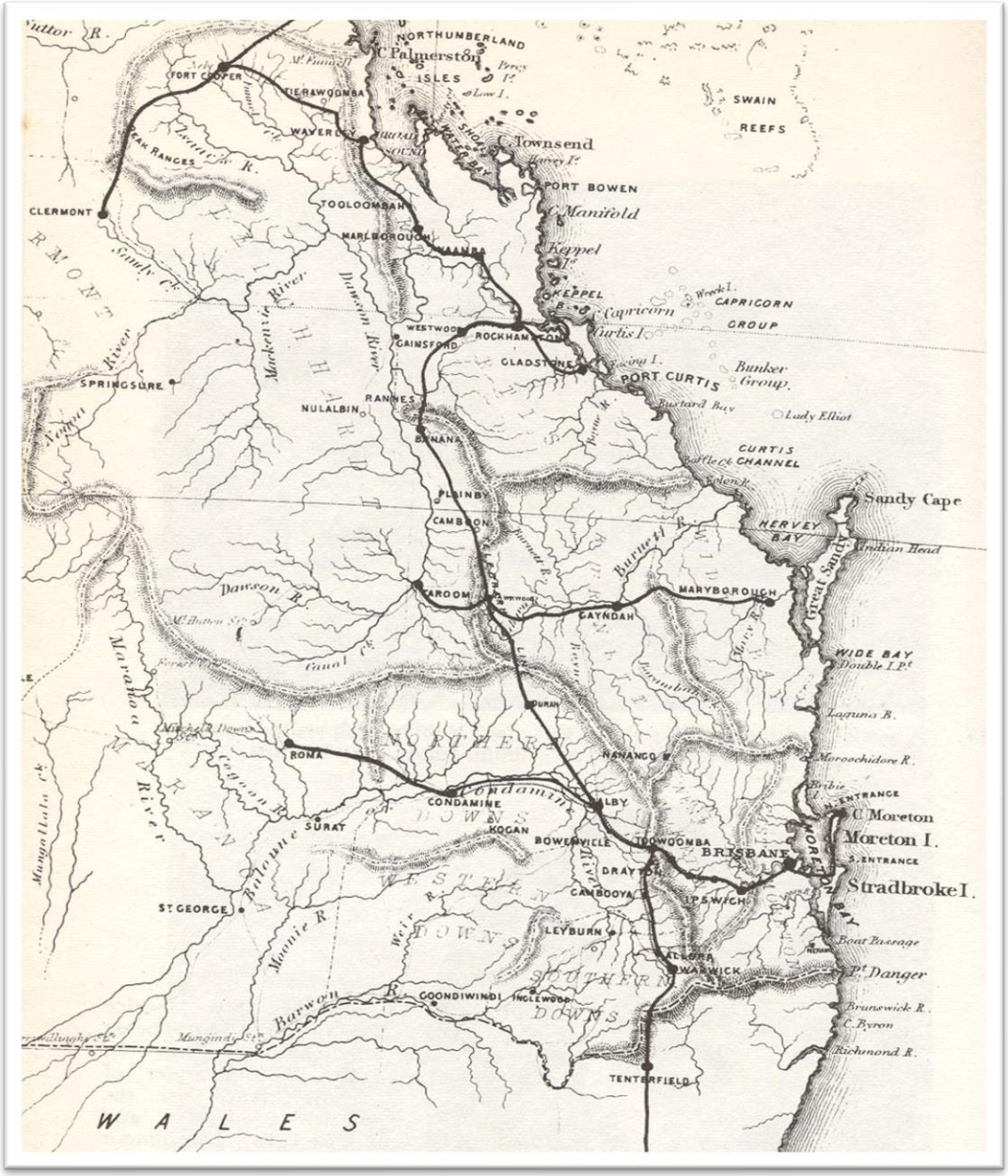
During the years that the Native Police operated, inefficient muzzle-loading weapons were replaced by the ancestors of modern rifles using bullets. The Native Police were first armed with 'cape' pattern double barrel smooth 20-bore carbines, then from 1862 with

'Native Foot Police' pattern 20-bore carbines with single barrels, which in about 1870 were replaced by .577-calibre Snider carbines using fixed ammunition. These were still in use in the 1900s. In the 1860s, officers were issued with bayonets and percussion revolvers, and sabres, or cavalry swords, for use when mounted. The settlers had better weapons: Breech loading revolvers—American Colts, British Beaumont-Adams and Tranter weapons—were available, as were British Calisher and Terry 30-bore carbines. Setters also used Sniders, Enfields, Winchesters, and a range of other rifles. The richer the colonists, the more expensive and deadly were their weapons.

1860s: Settling the Valley

The Pioneer Valley changed from being Yuwibara country where the people were as one with the environment, to an area mapped as land blocks recorded by the colonial Lands Department. Next, the leases were stocked with non-indigenous animals—sheep, cattle, and horses—and the land was altered irreparably from the way it existed before the 1860s. From the point of view of the immigrants to colonial Queensland, the land was vacant and unused. They were able, willing, and had the legal right to shape the land for their own needs: to stock it with tens of thousands of cattle and sheep, to fence it, and to plant crops. Because the burgeoning sugar industry bolstered the surrounding pastoral and mining industries, the Pioneer Valley had a more secure economy in the 1860s and 1870s than did most areas of the Queensland frontier. On all four nineteenth century North Queensland frontiers—pastoral, mining, maritime, and agricultural—the primary goal was to dispossess First Nations people from their land, and coastal seas and reefs, and to utilise its resources. In the early years on the pastoral frontier, to safeguard the livestock, extermination of the Indigenous people was often preferred to 'letting in'. The pattern was different in the other three areas. Mining occurred at sites in the hinterland during the 1880s and 1890s, creating the highest concentrations of Europeans and Chinese outside urban areas. However, the early hopes for local (Mackay–Mt Britton–Eungella) gold-mining wealth soon faded. The third area was the maritime frontier where fishermen used Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour, co-opted by force, or working for meagre recompense of supplies or wages.

On the agricultural (mainly sugarcane) frontier, Aboriginal labour was used until immigrant Melanesian labour was well-established. There was also a rainforest frontier—which in its southern extreme included the lands on Eungella Plateau and parts of the western end of the Pioneer Valley, which were used for mining, pastoral, and later agricultural industries. Europeans always complained that in rainforest and heavy scrub areas Aboriginal people could attack and then melt away into the undergrowth. Settlers knew they were being watched, although they could only locate the Indigenous inhabitants if they wanted to be found. In the dense rainforest and mountain areas the usual pattern of extermination was too difficult, too slow, and too costly. Here, settlers were forced to enter arrangements with First Nations Australians.



Map 6.1: The Overland Telegraph system in about 1865. The Overland telegraph (shown as a solid dark line) was constructed between 1861 and the late 1860s. One result of the improved communications was that the Native Police could then be called quickly to any area. Mackay is just off the top of the map.
Source: Skinner 1975, Map 19, 224.

A combination of factors pushed the early settlers into genocidal behaviour. First, it was a raw frontier situation with no real government regulations in place. The New South Wales and Queensland governments were under the British legal system and could not officially countenance murder of Aboriginal people. An 1849 Order-in-Council under the 1847 *Australian Waste Lands Act* (Imperial) confirmed that First Nations Australians had continuing rights of access on leased land. However, these rights were ignored, and governments pretended not to know about killings, as long as no one drew the deaths to their attention. The settlers knew that the Native Police were available as execution squads that never took prisoners, yet it could be weeks or even months before they arrived after being called on the telegraph. In the 1860s and 1870s, isolated colonists found it more efficient to deal with the issue themselves. While the 1850s and 1860s northern frontier was

unsupervised, this was no longer the case onwards from the 1880s, once government administration was well-established. By this time, most of the deliberate killing was over, continuing only in more isolated areas in the far north or west. Second, it was about power and control of land. The European mindset was that Indigenous people were racially inferior—barely human—and that they were not 'owners' of the land; they merely roamed over it. The settlers wanted to possess and control the land, which could not occur until the original occupants were either removed or subdued. Colonists with large financial investments had no intention of being bankrupted by small groups of First Nations people for whom they had no respect. Settlers were also frightened, seeing Aboriginal people as a danger to their new patterns of life. They were considered to have no rights and it was thought better that they 'moved on', either off the settlers' land, or if unable to be subdued, then exterminated. If they resisted, it was the First Nations Australians who were breaking the law, not the settlers. The only 'authority' on the frontier lay with those that possessed the guns and the poisons.

By luck, the border between the South Kennedy Land District and northern half of the Leichhardt Land District is over the ranges south-west of the Pioneer Valley. This impinged on the development of the valley. The way settlement progressed conformed to the general Australian pastoral frontier pattern, with some local differences. The settlers' response to the original inhabitants was not surprising, given the isolation from government authority, the shaky beginnings of the pastoral industry in the late 1850s and early 1860s, attitudes to race, and the widespread drought that depressed the industry in the late 1860s. In the early 1860s, Aborigines killed large numbers of stock and enough settlers to cause concern, ensuring that they were 'removed' from their lands.

After a decade, the pastoral leases were reduced in size and agriculture was soon the equal of pastoralism, at least along the coast. Onwards from the 1870s, agriculture became the overwhelming industry in the Pioneer Valley, except in the western end. There was not the same sense of economic insecurity in the valley as over the ranges to the west, where the initial livestock (sheep) were not successful, and fortunes were lost. Although there were stock losses in the valley, fewer Europeans there lost their lives from Aboriginal attacks, which meant that settlers on the floor of the valley had less direct motivation to kill Aboriginal people. By the end of the 1860s and into the 1870s, settlers had a strong economic incentive to employ Aboriginal people as pastoral and agricultural labourers. The early 'letting in' around Fort Cooper (Nebo) in the north of the Leichhardt District, and in the Pioneer Valley, relates to the influence of two men, Frank Bridgman and Pierre-Marie Bucas (both discussed below), and to the labour requirements of the nascent but fast-growing sugarcane industry. Despite these ameliorating factors, in the valley and its surrounds, Aboriginal people died in large numbers by means similar to those in other frontier districts.

The changes to land use and control were accomplished in several ways. One was the spread of introduced epidemic diseases, which travelled ahead of, as well as with explorers, and settlers. Another was outright violence and extermination by settlers and the Native Police. Improvements in armament technology during the 1860s and 1870s, including the invention of repeating rifles and revolvers that were more accurate over long distances and were quicker to load, also aided the extermination. The Indigenous people were deliberately shot by settlers and the Native Police, as well as poisoned with strychnine by settlers who laced bags of flour or prepared baked 'dampers' (flour, baking soda, salt, and strychnine), which they left for Aboriginal people to find.

As well, damage was done to the natural environment by introducing hooved livestock, which compacted porous soils, changing the ability of the land to produce some plants, removing indigenous vegetation, and planting new crops such as cane. Noxious weeds such as spear grass were also introduced. Just as occurred over the ranges, the hooves

of the new livestock compacted the valley soil, changed the types of grasses predominating, and made root-gathering for food more difficult. Changing the environment made quite large changes to the ability of the land to support sheep. After a decade of settlement, by the end of the 1860s spear grass began to dominate the ground cover over the ranges; meaning that the region was no longer suitable for sheep because spear grass became imbedded in fleeces and the barbs worked their way through the skin. Mining for gold, silver and copper in the hinterland ranges involved puddling, sluicing and dredging, which altered the flow of creeks and used timber in large amounts. Over-stocking of fragile environments, and the end of most periodic burning—an Indigenous method of vegetation control and regeneration—also caused decline in land fertility. Some of the pastoralists soon realised the necessity to burn the grasses—for instance, the Martins on Hamilton took up the practice, and it was also done at Mt Spencer. Often, old ecosystems were destroyed, replaced by new European commercial and domestic animals, and new invasive species of plants, weeds, and diseases. And there was another less obvious form of settler violence—denial and forgetting of what had occurred. The result was that, by the twentieth century, the children and grandchildren of the early immigrant population had no memory of the frontier wars. This was not true of nineteenth century settlers. They knew very well what happened.

In the 1860s, Aboriginal people reconnoitred the strangers and their animals. In the earliest meetings, First Nations Australians usually observed but avoided the new arrivals, and when they met expressed fear and amazement. Sometimes there were early formal approaches—attempts at negotiation with the strangers entering their land. We can get some idea of how Birrigubba (also Birri Gubba) people (the wider group between Townsville and Gladstone, described in Chapter 1) attempted to negotiate, by examining the life of James Morrill who was shipwrecked in 1846 and lived with them between the Burdekin River and Townsville for the next 17 years. He was always treated with care and respect, learnt the language and adapted to the lifestyle. When settlers arrived, Morrill became a sort of ambassador between the Birrigubba and the Queensland Government, organising a ‘ceasefire’ agreement to try to halt the slaughter. As Bruce Breslin describes, he travelled to Brisbane, and talked with the Governor and colonial officials, with the aim of sharing sovereignty and what amounted to a ‘demilitarised zone’. In the end this failed, but the Birrigubba had tried.

Gifts from the newcomers, such as iron tomahawks, were accepted, interpreted as appropriate tribute to enable safe passage across their land. If Aboriginal people approached too close to European huts or stock, they were made to feel unwanted and guns were fired to frighten them, or worse. Andrew Henderson remembered his first arrival at what became Mackay in September 1862. After a few days, First Nations men came to visit, indicating that they wanted to stay, while the Europeans indicated that they should leave. Eventually, James Robb fired his carbine over their heads, at which they ran off. He then followed them down the river and found a large armed group waiting just out of sight. Later seen fishing on the river, they did not return to the tiny settlement that year.

The Aboriginal population did not recognise sheep, cattle, and horses as private property (they had no similar concept), although once they became used to the strange beasts, they recognised their value as food, no different from indigenous animals. Increasingly, they became hostile, killing and maiming the new animals, not only for food, but to cause destruction and disruption to settlement. They used fires to clear areas for regrowth to attract animals for hunting, or to show that they were trailing and watching Europeans, or as signals. Colonists interpreted the fires as forms of intimidation. Overall, the Indigenous people displayed effective economic and military strategies, and adapted to the new source of food as their supply of indigenous animals declined. They soon learnt to corral sheep into holding pens that they built, or into natural enclosures.

What was the First Nations strategy for dealing with the intruders? They would have been aware that their numbers had been weakened by recently introduced diseases, and that the newly arrived stock was beginning to affect their livelihood. First, they studied the settlers, hoping they would not stay, then, realised that they were not leaving. Initially, they feared the new animals, then they realised that the livestock was the crucial way to sabotage the colonists. They began to kill, maim, and eat the sheep and cattle as a defensive strategy and a food supply. This compensated for their own dwindling food resources as the colonists shot wild game. They also made direct attacks on the settlers, particularly on isolated shepherds and other employees on outstations. To a lesser extent the central homesteads were also under siege. Travellers on horseback or on drays were also attacked as they were easy isolated targets. Firing had always been part of the First Nations land-management system and was mistaken by settlers as deliberate aggression. Firing was also used to drive away colonists. There is evidence from the 1860s to 1870s of rising intensity of violent resistance, and some of the pastoralists were forced to abandon their holdings. The warriors in each nation turned their skills to protecting and providing for their people in all ways possible. They used smoke signals for communication, and made targeted killings, which were usually payback for against specific settlers for destructive actions they had undertaken. British livestock destroyed much of the ecology that Aboriginal Australians had fostered. The settlers and their animals took over plainland that had been carefully created by First Nations inhabitants, and caused the destruction of Indigenous plants, animals, and people. What First Nations groups accomplished was warfare, although probably best described as very effective guerrilla warfare. Colonisation was no respecter of Aboriginal boundaries and needed to operate across Indigenous territories, which called into play relationships between neighbouring First Nations peoples.

The first deaths from contact occurred on islands off the coast. Michael Rowland's research outlines that, in October 1854, the *Vision* was attacked by Aboriginal people at Middle Percy Island. Of the nine crew and passengers, four were killed, as was one Aboriginal man. In late December, HMS *Torch* destroyed four canoes and captured five Aboriginal adults, two males and three females, and four children of about two to four years of age. Two other men evaded capture. Sent to Sydney for trial, they were released after five months. At least one child died in Sydney and the others refused to eat regularly, becoming ill. They were sent back to Port Curtis (Gladstone) to be returned to their island. Terrified, they jumped overboard in Gladstone harbour and escaped, never to be seen again.

By the late 1850s, there was regular sailing traffic along the coast. As contact intensified, there are several (often unsubstantiated) reports of Europeans killed by Aboriginal people on the coast and on the Cumberland and Northumberland islands. In October 1859, the *Santa Barbara*'s captain was attacked in the Cumberland Group and later died from his wounds. In the same year, the schooner *Caroline* was said to have been attacked at St Bees in the Northumberland Group and the shore party of four killed. Likewise, in August 1861, the ketch *Ellida* was mentioned as attacked at either Shaw or Linderman island in the Cumberland Group. Two of the crew were killed. George Dalrymple, the new Commissioner of Lands and Police Magistrate at Bowen, led a retaliatory group of Native Police to the islands, although the Aboriginal inhabitants escaped. A year later, the crew of the ketch *Dundas* was said to have been killed on South Molle Island in the Cumberland Group, with only the captain surviving. Next, in 1864 during a cyclone, the schooner *Nightingale* was beached on Long Island. The crew made a raft to escape to Bowen, and on the way were attacked by people from Lindeman Island. John B. Macartney sailed in the Whitsundays for seven weeks in about 1861. In 1909, he wrote that 'All the islands then had blacks on them'[4] and mentioned sighting several wrecks. Rather strangely, he also mentioned seeing a Newfoundland dog and a King Charles Spaniel, probably survivors from wrecks.

In 1878, Captain McIvor's vessel the *Louisa Maria* was careening at Whitsunday Island, being assisted by some Ngaro people from Whitsunday Island and one of the Molle Islands, when news came from Bowen that some Aboriginal men had been killed there. The Ngaro attacked and burnt the vessel, killed another crew member and speared McIvor, who escaped with other crew members. He returned with Sub-Inspector George Nowlan and the Native Police, who attacked the Ngaro, killing many, and attempting to disperse' them. The survivors fled to the mainland near Mackay, further pursued by the troopers.[5]

During the early years there were confrontations at the Mackay settlement and few of the early residents ventured out into the surrounding long grass unless they were armed. On his 1862 trip to the Pioneer Valley, John Mackay found it necessary to mount a constant guard against hostile Yuwibara. As mentioned in Chapter 3, in June, short of supplies, he attempted to travel north to newly established Bowen, accompanied by his two Macleay River Aboriginal employees. They turned back when confronted by hostile local Aboriginal people. Also, in June that year, a European man named Roberts, a passenger on the cutter *Presto*, was killed when the vessel anchored near Shoal Point. In the same year the Yuwibara speared cattle mustered on the riverbank at Mackay, killed two horses and maimed another. The first Aboriginal death recorded at Mackay was of a woman shot in the stomach. The Yuwibara had been observing the settlement and in September 1863 made an approach across the river, meeting a group of settlers midstream, with 100 eventually making their first visit. A wary truce was established, at least until that night, when, unbeknownst to the settlers, the Yuwibara returned to steal as much property as they could manage to carry away.

1860s: The Hamilton station slab hut

Isolated shepherds frequently were killed and had their belongings stolen, and their flocks killed, maimed, or stolen. In May 1867, there was an Aboriginal attack on a Fort Cooper outstation, 10 kilometres from the Nebo Native Police barracks at Tongwarry, which drove away 2,000 sheep, killing 200. A later reminiscence about Fort Cooper suggested that Aboriginal people drove sheep up a steep mountain, from which they could see any European movements, then feasted on the animals in safety. Two German brothers, George and John Hess purchased Lake Elphinstone station west of Nebo in 1867. John ran the station and George established a carrying business between the surrounding stations and Mackay, bringing down wool bales and taking back supplies. In 1912 reminiscences, George mentioned 500 sheep and two shepherds killed by Aboriginal people on Cotherstone station, where he was based before Lake Elphinstone, as well as about a dozen other deaths in the 1860s among shepherds and other station employees in the area west of the ranges.

The lease for Hamilton station in the west of the valley was granted in September 1864 when the Martin brothers, James and Robert, had been there for about one year. On the second Sunday in December 1864, the primitive homestead was attacked by the local leader Mungo and his men. Mungo was shot dead during the attack, although the onslaught did not stop. By September 1867, the Martins' cattle had been stampeded for the twentieth time in four years. Large groups of Aboriginal people regularly appeared around the homestead. When pursued, as usual, they disappeared into thick scrub in the foothills of the ranges. The Martins only legal option was to ride about 45 kilometres to Mackay to telegraph for the Native Police, which they did on this occasion, or take the law into their own hands. As the *Mackay Mercury* warned in 1866, unless the settlers were better protected, their only choice was to begin their own war of extermination. Two years later, although the attacks had lessened, the Martins came across the remains of 10 bullocks which had been driven off to an isolated part of the run and slaughtered. This time the *Queenslander* carried a similar warning to the Mackay paper: 'Either the Government will have to afford squatters increased police to

check these oft-repeated outrages or allow the sufferers license to protect their property without fear of endangering their liberty.'[6]

The main building on the first Hamilton pastoral lease was constructed like a block house with holes bored through the slab walls. The Martins fought a running battle against Aboriginals for the first 18 months. Although they managed to drive most of the Indigenous inhabitants off the land, attacks on their animals continued for many years. By the 1880s, the fighting was over, and in 1883 Mungo's son Spoonbill became a stockman on Hamilton, seemingly accepting the inevitable.

John A. Macartney faced a similar situation at Waverley homestead at Broadsound. He built his house beside a lagoon which had been used constantly by the local people. The attacks were so frequent that Macartney is said to have kept a small cannon for defence, mounted in his back garden, loaded with ball shot and scrap iron. At night, savage dogs were released to prowl. He was not without experience. There had been an earlier incident at Glenmore (now part of North Rockhampton) when J.A. Macartney came back from a day's duck-shooting to find his camp destroyed and his shepherd dead. He escaped contact by swimming the Fitzroy nude, holding his clothes and empty gun over his head. Sir Alexander Miller Macartney (son of J.A. Macartney's stepcousin John B. Macartney) said that in retribution the Native Police shot 35 men and women.

Conflict over the position of buildings seems also to have occurred at another Macartney property, St Helens No. 2 lease, north of Mackay, settled in 1863 by J. B. Macartney, his younger brother William, and Robert Graham. The first St Helen's homestead, a slab hut, was positioned next to coastal estuaries and mangroves, a highly productive Indigenous food source. The site had been selected because it was conveniently on an inlet on the coast and enabled use of sea transport to Mackay. However, their boat always had to be hauled up to the house on a bullock dray to prevent pilfering and destruction from what Sir Alexander described as 'wild and hostile aborigines in great numbers'.[7] The first Jolimount house on the St Helens No. 1 lease had holes bored in the slabs through which to defend against Aboriginal attacks. Similarly, James Ready's original 1862–63 slab-walled hut, later part of The Travellers Rest Hotel, had 12 small square portholes, equipped with guns and ammunition hung alongside.

These defensive structures were used on all early pastoral properties, and even as pastoral buildings became more sophisticated, each homestead room usually had heavy wooden shutters that opened upwards and outwards onto the verandahs. They never opened inwards, as once closed they had to be able to be secured by heavy wooden bars and wooden latches. Each shutter had round auger holes bored into it, one high to look through and one low to shoot through. This was to secure the buildings during Aboriginal attacks.

Strychnine crystals were available onwards from the late 1810s, replacing arsenic as the favourite poison used in rural areas. Strychnine was commonly found in all rural homes. Pastoralist with herds of sheep and no fences used the poison constantly to kill dingoes; they could not have succeeded without it. Extending the use of strychnine to kill Aboriginal people was not a great leap, particularly when the settlers had no respect for their humanity and resented their taking or maiming livestock. Using strychnine must have been the easiest method of extermination, as it did not involve armed confrontation. It was indirect, in that the settlers did not have to do anything other than leave the baited flour or dampers where they would be found. There is a classic local example in the pages of Hon. Harold Finch-Hatton's *Advance Australia!* where he describes a nameless 'gentleman' (possibly his brother) who poisoned a group of about 100 Aborigines at Long Lagoon, which seems to have been the homestead lagoon on Mt Spencer station. It is written about in a part humorous manner, not much different from killing native animals or birds. There are many similar examples from all over Australia which leave no doubt of what occurred.

All of this is background to a request I received in 1989 from the Mirani Museum to assess an old slab hut on the Hamilton property to see if it would be suitable to shift to the museum. I was amazed at what I found. It was clearly part of the first fortified structure on Hamilton, built for defence against local Aboriginal people. Unmistakably, there were holes bored in all the walls at two levels: one row to look through and one row to shoot through. It was a chilling piece of frontier history. I told the museum staff what I had found and of its great historical significance, as few of these early buildings have survived. They arranged to have it moved to the museum. I did not visit the museum again until 2006 and was disappointed at what I found. Using the excuse that its final purpose was as a dairy building, this is what it was labelled, with no attempt to explain its real history. This was dishonest and failed to face up to what really occurred in the beautiful valley with its substantial Aboriginal population. However, the museum is now one of four under the auspices of the Mackay Regional Council, and the 'dairy' is under investigation.

Plate 6.5: The old 'dairy' on Hamilton Station in 1989.
Source: Clive Moore Collection, 1989.

Plate 6.6: Some of the holes in the walls of the Hamilton Station 'dairy' are visible in this photograph. The high holes are to look through and the low holes to shoot through. These reoccur around the walls. The boards may once have been part of a larger building, as similar boards with knotholes seem to have been included in what became the slaughterhouse for Hamilton station.
Source: Clive Moore Collection, 1989.

Plate 6.7: The Hamilton structure was moved and is now part of Mirani Museum, labelled as a 'dairy'. Some of the defence holes are visible in this photograph.
Source: Clive Moore Collection, 2006.

1867: The Leap Baby

Another raw piece of history can be found in The Leap story which began this chapter. Back in the 1860s, the mountain was on the northern boundary of Balnagowan pastoral lease, held by Louis Ross and John Cook.

There was drought in 1866, a commercial banking crisis, and then bad local flooding in January 1867, none of which would have helped the mood of the pastoralists. The incident that led to The Leap massacre can be pinpointed to April 1867, when some of the Yuwibara were hunting and spearing cattle on Balnagowan. In February, Cook found one cow dead from spear wounds and one speared and hamstrung, but alive. This was a favourite Aboriginal method of immobilising stock, either for their own purposes for later capture, or to make the animals useless to their European owners. John Cook was already well schooled in tales of how to deal with First Nations Australians asserting their rights. (A generation earlier, his father had faced similar issues in the 1840s when he took up several pastoral runs in New South Wales, and his uncle Henry Dangar owned Myall Creek station in New England where an infamous massacre took place in 1838.) In this instance, he did not take the law into his own hands and instead, rode to Mackay and telegraphed for the Nebo Native Police, who did not arrive until late April, led by acting Sub-Inspector Robert Johnstone, Scottish-educated and the son of a Victorian pastoralist, who had managed a pastoral station near Rockhampton until he joined the Native Police in 1867. They patrolled for several days along the north side of the river, coming across several Yuwibara camps, one unusually large with upwards of 200 inhabitants. Perhaps they had gathered for a ceremonial occasion. The *Mackay Mercury* reported that: 'They were dealt with in the usual and only effectual mode of restraining their savage propensities by the officer and party, so that we may now hope that life and property will be safe for a time on the other side of the river.'[8] This was typical coded language for attacking Aboriginal camps and destroying as many inhabitants as possible. The Leap legend is probably based on these incidents.

The oldest written version of The Leap story is by George Hess in 1912, when he was 73 years old. He told the Mackay *Daily Mercury* that the attack took place in February 1867:

> One Sunday morning John Muggleton and Mr Hess were fishing on the town side of the river, when they saw blacks running up towards where Barnes had his home on the opposite bank, and they gave the alarm. He was speared through the arm and was left for dead. Hess and Muggleton pulled across the river in an open boat and rendered assistance. A lieutenant in the Native Police named Johnson [*sic*] went in pursuit, and the male and female blacks separated. Some of the latter climbed on to the summit of The Leap, and one of them, rather than be captured, jumped from the top of the mountain and was smashed to pieces—hence the name.[9]

Hess, a pastoralist, is being coy. Although, in theory, the Native Police were supposed to say, 'Stop in the name of the Queen', in fact they took no prisoners and always shot at any Aboriginal person they pursued. Hess does not mention an Aboriginal child surviving, and it may be that he is describing an earlier incident, or his memory may have run two incidents together. Another account in the same 1912 newspaper issue, by Thomas Butterworth, who arrived in Mackay in October 1866, records that the day after he and his wife arrived, they heard shots across the river, saw Aborigines running off and later heard that John Greenwood Barnes had shot one of them. Barnes, born in England in 1832, had arrived in Mackay in 1863. He settled on flood prone land across the river from the tiny settlement, planting fruit trees and vegetables, establishing Cremorne Gardens. (The Cremorne is still the name of the area.) Yuwibara passing by from fishing at the mouth of the river were said to have liked to collect his produce, much to Barnes' dismay. They were armed with spears and clubs, and

there were many altercations. Barnes' house was isolated, and there have been suggestions that he built on a ceremonial site, or had desecrated one, although his agricultural produce would have been enough inducement for the attacks. Under constant threat in the early years, Barnes fought back, reporting in 1866 that he had dislodged an Aboriginal man from his roof with a charge of No. 4 shot which 'tatooed (*sic.*) him like a New Zealander'.[10]

The Leap story has attracted several historians and one famous novelist, Thea Astley, who wrote *A Kindness Cup*, a fictionalised version of the events. Nicole J. Tareha examined the background for Astley's story and provided detailed newspaper references on local Native Police activities in the 1860s. Tareha said that there were two officers involved, both from the district: acting Sub-Inspector Johnstone, and William Fraser, the latter a survivor of the 1857 Hornet Bank massacre, both 'well qualified to protect the interests of the squatters.'[11]

There seems to be no doubt that a girl baby did survive a fall from the mountain, as we know that she was brought up by James and Mary Ready (mentioned in Chapter 4) who were among the earliest settlers in 1862, first as part of Dick Spencer's expedition and then in 1864 as owners of the Travellers Rest Hotel (later the Range Hotel) at Black Waterhole Creek, Hazeldean, near the top of Eton Range on what is now the Peak Downs Highway. A colourful version of the events comes from Bryan Scott, a great-grandson of the Ready couple. He suggested that the Yuwibara were being pursued after the massacre of a family named Price, and that the baby, wrapped in a shawl which had belonged to the family, was rescued by James Ready:

> Jimmy Ready rode, after cornering the tribe under police supervision, unarmed bar a bullwhip and mounted on a black thoroughbred stallion, up the side of what was known as Mt Johansburgh, and now The Leap, after the gin jumped with her child clad in the shawl of the Price family, and was picked up from the scrub bushes at full gallop and riding life and death under a hail of spears.
>
> The child was reared with the Readys and was educated and became later a talented singer, and married a white man, and shared equal cut to the properties, cattle and monies. Her son, a half caste, received a distinguished medal from the Queen, in rescuing a man who lost a leg when he fought off a shark with a pocket knife. [12]

Scott rephrased and embroidered the words of Eileen Scott, Mary Coughlin's daughter, who in 1956 said that James Ready had rescued the baby girl 'with spears flying all around'.[13]

John Williams, Mackay's leading local historian over several decades, had questioned members of the Ready, Martin, Macartney and Cook families. He concluded that there was an incident at The Leap, although he said that there was no community memory of a child surviving. This is odd, as it contradicts the memory of the Ready family and Catholic baptism and marriage records. Williams suggested another variation: that the event took place in 1865 and that during a 'dispersal' after an attack on Barnes, the Yuwibara split into two groups, one climbing The Leap with the Native Police in pursuit, the other heading off to Crow Hill near Walkerston. The Native Police are supposed to have massacred the Yuwibara at The Leap, then moved on to Crow Hill where a child was found by Johnstone after the next 'dispersal'. Williams' version seems to combine elements of the Hess story and his own research as it includes details of the first baptism performed by the newly arrived Church of England Minister at Mackay in April 1865. This was for Lucy Landsdown (*sic*), a five-year-old girl 'taken after a displacement of natives by native police'[14] at Crow Hill. The 1865 year is puzzling, as other evidence indicates 1867. Barnes was often under attack, which makes any description including him hard to date. Perhaps the five-year-old Crow Hill girl was the survivor of an earlier massacre.

To further complicate matters, Henry Roth, who lived in the district in the 1870s and 1880s, and in 1908 published the first history of Mackay, wrote that it was an Aboriginal man who jumped over the cliff, not a woman. There is also a story from the Shepherd family that The Leap child was a boy named Billy Howard, later placed into the care of Father Pierre-Maria Bucas, although this may have been a son of the child rescued at The Leap. The Shepherd family memories also recognise the existence of a girl brought up by the Ready family. Ken Manning, another local Mackay historian, was told by an Aboriginal family that the woman in the incident had been living nearby Mt Johansburgh with a European man and the child was theirs. After a domestic quarrel she is supposed to have climbed the mountain and suicided. This does not ring true as it seems too early for such cohabitation and exonerates the Native Police.

The Ready family version has some flaws. The Native Police usually tried not to let their activities be observed by any outside witnesses, so why was James Ready with them? As well, the scrub would have been too thick to ride through at full gallop and the infant would have needed to find her way through about three kilometres of scrub to be picked up. It also seems unlikely that a small child would survive a long fall. (It is possible that the mother jumped from a lower section of the rock wall.) Some locals say that the Price family's shawl was found close to the baby, but that the child was not wrapped in it. Others suggest what seems to be too precise a memory—that the baby in the shawl was caught in a tree which broke the fall.

There is no inquest file on the deaths of the Price family nor have any contemporary Government or newspaper reports been located. However, oral testimony collected by Ken Manning in the 1940s and 1950s alerted me that a Price family did disappear while travelling overland in the early 1860s. Price may have worked for J.A. Macartney on Waverley station at Broadsound in about 1861–62 and been so taken with the country that in 1862 or 1863 he set off overland northward with his wife and child, presumably heading for what became St Helen's station, which initially may have involved J.A. Macartney. When the Macartney brothers and Robert Graham established St Helens in 1863, they employed J.C. Binney to drive their first mob of cattle north. In about 1959, Binney's daughter told Manning that a man named Price had arranged to pick up some overlanding gear at Rockhampton on behalf of her father but had subsequently gone missing.

The most substantial evidence for the survival of a child after an 1867 massacre at The Leap comes from baptismal and marriage registers. These are different sources from the 1865 Anglican baptism mentioned above. The Readys were staunch Irish Catholics. Their daughter Mary was born at their hotel at the top of Eton Range in 1867. The baptismal register at St Patrick's Catholic church at Mackay shows Mary Ready and Johanna Hazeldine (*sic*), an Aboriginal child, both christened on 22 July 1867, with James and Mary Ready as Johanna's Godparents. Johanna was always known as Judy. Mary Ready was reared with the Aboriginal girl and said that her father and a man named Allen rescued the child when her mother jumped to her death. I have seen the Catholic records, which are too clear to be wrong, although the Mary Coughlin (née Ready) account could be tainted by family memory of the massacre of the Fraser family at Hornet Bank station on the upper Dawson River in 1857, or the larger massacre of 19 on Cullin-la-Ringo station on the Nogoa River in October 1861.[15] The Readys knew William Fraser, the son who was away from Hornet Bank at the time of the massacre. He was manager of Grosvenor station on the upper Isaac River in the early 1860s, when the Readys were based at The Travellers Rest Hotel.

Johanna Hazeldine's husband is sometimes identified as George Howard, although their 17 October 1887 marriage certificate shows him as George Howes, a labourer and widower aged 30, born in Oxfordshire, England. Johanna Hazeldine had no parents recorded and was then a 21-year-old domestic servant. This would make her three years old in 1867,

and from the Yuwi nation. Mary Coughlin identified Johanna and George's children as Bill, who saved a man from shark attack at Eimeo near Mackay, and Esme, who became a Sister of Mercy. Nicola Tareha suggests that Esme may have been a domestic servant for the Sisters.

1860s–1880s: The Native Mounted Police

Harold Finch-Hatton from Mt Spencer station in the 1880s was in regular contact with the Native Police:

> …there are native-police stations at tolerable intervals all over the country. At each of these are stationed a few black troopers, under the charge of a white man. These troopers become perfect devils for hunting down and killing the wild tribes from which they have themselves been taken while young. The duty of the white man who commands them is a very unpleasant one. Whenever the wild Blacks in the neighbourhood become troublesome, and take to spearing cattle, or otherwise misbehave themselves, it is his business to sally out with his mounted troopers and "disperse" them, the meaning of which is well known all through the colony. If it can be proved that in "dispersing" a mob of Blacks he has killed a single one except in self-defence, he is liable by the laws of the country to be hanged. On the other hand, he knows perfectly well that unless he manages to shoot down a decent number of them before they escape, his services will soon be dispensed with.[16]

The Mounted Native Police used to conduct punitive expeditions against local Aboriginal people who opposed the pastoralists. The first Native Police headquarters in the area was between Oxford Downs and Grosvenor Downs stations, 56 kilometres away from Fort Cooper (Nebo), then in 1862 it was moved to the old Fort Cooper headstation at Tongwarry, a few kilometres from modern Nebo, where the base remained until 1878.

The newspapers and government records are full of reports of attacks by and on Aboriginal people. Shepherds were becoming too frightened to work far away from the head stations. The Native Police were in the Pioneer Valley again in October 1867, although they did not return to Balnagowan until December, much to John Cook's disgust. Aboriginal resistance was still causing trouble, his cattle hunted and stampeded and generally wild and uncontrollable. When he pursued his tormentors, they disappeared into impenetrable scrub. In the same month, the *Mackay Mercury* made local feelings clear after a similar attack on another pastoral property. Unusually, the humanity of the Indigenous people was acknowledged:

> Human beings are being destroyed in as ruthless a manner, and even with grosser barbarity than was used to these poor sheep, but the hideous details of this savage inroad are unfit for general perusal. We cannot say that the recent outrage causes us any great surprise. It is well known that the coast blacks are a very fierce bloodthirsty race, they have much greater personal strength and courage than the blacks of the interior.[17]

Attacks around Bowen doubled during 1867, and in one incident a shepherd and 400 sheep were killed. Sub-Inspector Marlow of the Native Police suggested removing all Aboriginal women and children between Bowen and Mackay to the offshore islands, thus forcing their menfolk to follow and in the process emptying the mainland coast. In February 1868, Cook telegraphed for the Nebo Native Police again, then, finding them unavailable, contacted another patrol at Bloomsbury. The frequency of the attacks in the district led 28 leading

citizens, including the owners of all pastoral properties as well as the few sugar planters and leading town businessmen to petition the Queensland Colonial Secretary in March 1868 for the immediate establishment of a permanent base at Bloomsbury. The petition said that the coastal tribes were 'numerous and mischievous'.[18] That month, the local newspaper thundered that:

> …The almost daily instances of discovering dead and mutilated cattle on runs within sixty miles of Mackay, proves that the squatter is never at any time secure from the prowlers who destroy his property.[19]

Although initially refused, a short time later this request was agreed to as necessary even in a time of economic recession. This decision was probably influenced by a June report by the Commissioner of Police after a tour of inspection, supporting the petition.

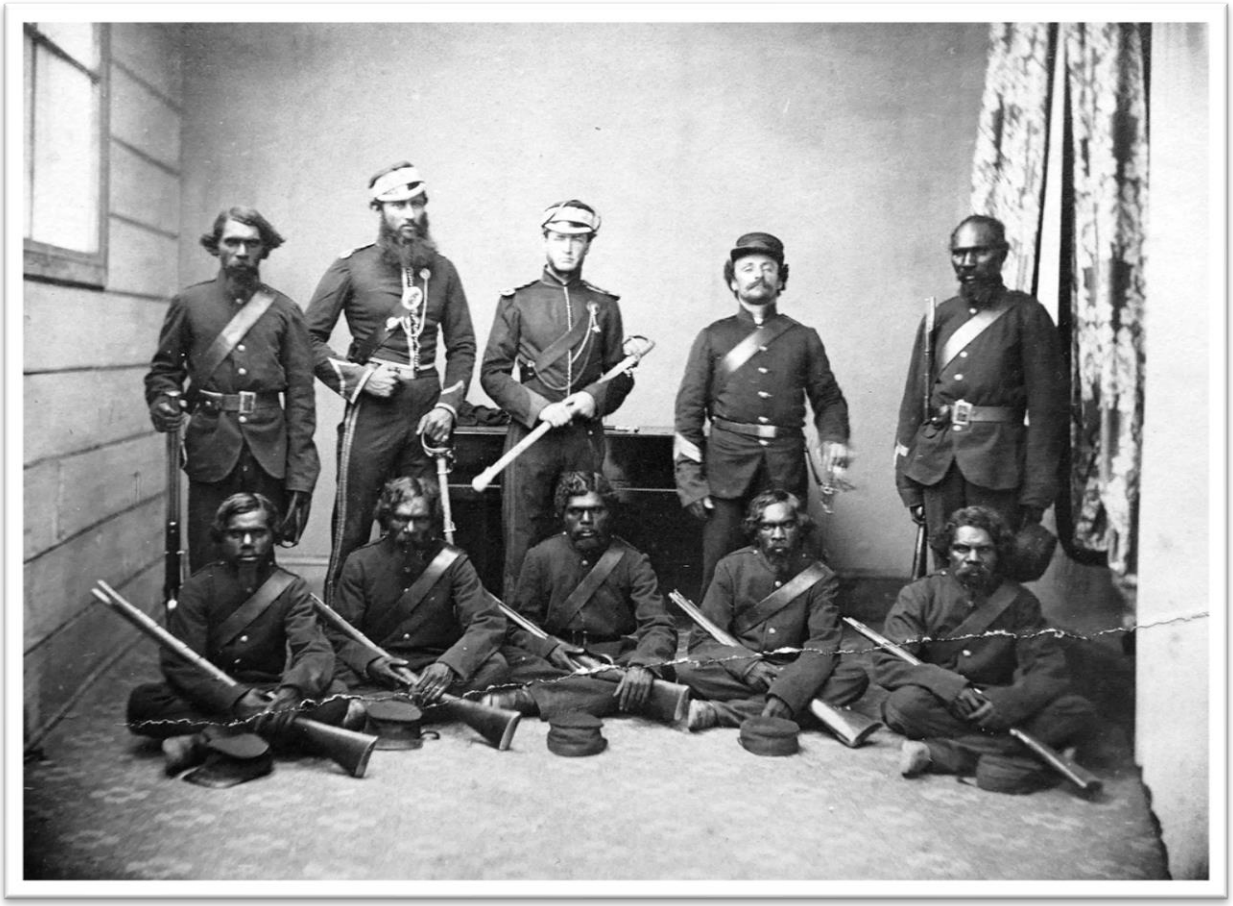


Plate 6.8: There are no known photographs of the Native Police at Nebo or Bloomsbury. This group of Native Police and officers was based at Rockhampton in the 1860s.
Source: Murray Family Album, Mitchell Library, PXE1635.

The Native Police was made up of young Aboriginal men under European officers. They were dislocated from their own lands and used as 'shock troops' in frontier warfare. Their reward was their own survival, status and special privileges, including access to local Aboriginal women. The paradox is that First Nations Australians in uniforms were used to kill other Aboriginal people still living on their ancestral lands. By the middle of 1868, a permanent Bloomsbury barracks had been established close to the coast 77 kilometres north of Mackay. The Kennedy District Native Police were also reorganised with two 'flying

detachments' equipped with double supplies of horses, one group to patrol constantly between Townsville and Bowen, while the other moved between Bowen and Mackay. This redeployment altered the balance in favour of the settlers, although prolonged and determined resistance continued until the 1880s. If they were not out on patrol, onwards from 1865–68 the Native Police at Nebo or Bloomsbury could be telegraphed for and arrive within a week. Other barracks were established at Bowen and Marlborough, which provided back-up support. The Government had created a cordon of strategic cavalry outposts to control and deliberately decimate the Yuwibara in the Pioneer Valley, and the Widi and other surrounding Aboriginal groups.

Plate 6.9: This photograph is of a Native Police barracks, probably in central Queensland in the 1870s. The men are shown with their local wives and at least one child.
Source: Murray Family Album, 1870s. Mitchell Library PXE1635.

During the late 1860s and early 1870s, the Bloomsbury Native Police patrolled the Pioneer Valley and the surrounding coast, forcing the remaining Aboriginal people off pastoral stations and away from settled areas. Some fled to Cape Hillsborough and the coastal islands, while others moved west into the foothills of the ranges, their last stronghold. The Cape Hillsborough, Mt Jukes and Mt Blackwood terrain was very suitable for Aboriginal resistance and conflicts continued there for many years. In 1878, the Nebo Native Police detachment was transferred to Bloomsbury from where they continued to operate until 1880, when the last two troopers there were reassigned to the ordinary police, one at Mackay and one at Bowen. It seldom seems to have occurred to the settlers that they had usurped Aboriginal lands. Harold Finch-Hatton realised, but was blunt in his assessment:

> It is very difficult to know what to do with the Blacks. It seems unjust to drive them out of country to which they have at least as good a right as we have. On the other hand, we know that if they are allowed to remain, they take every opportunity of killing us and our cattle. It is impossible to tame them unless they are caught very young, and even then they are not always to be relied on. Whether the Blacks deserve any mercy at the hands of the pioneering squatters is an open question, but that they get none is certain. They are

a doomed race, and before many years, they will be completely wiped out of the land.[20]

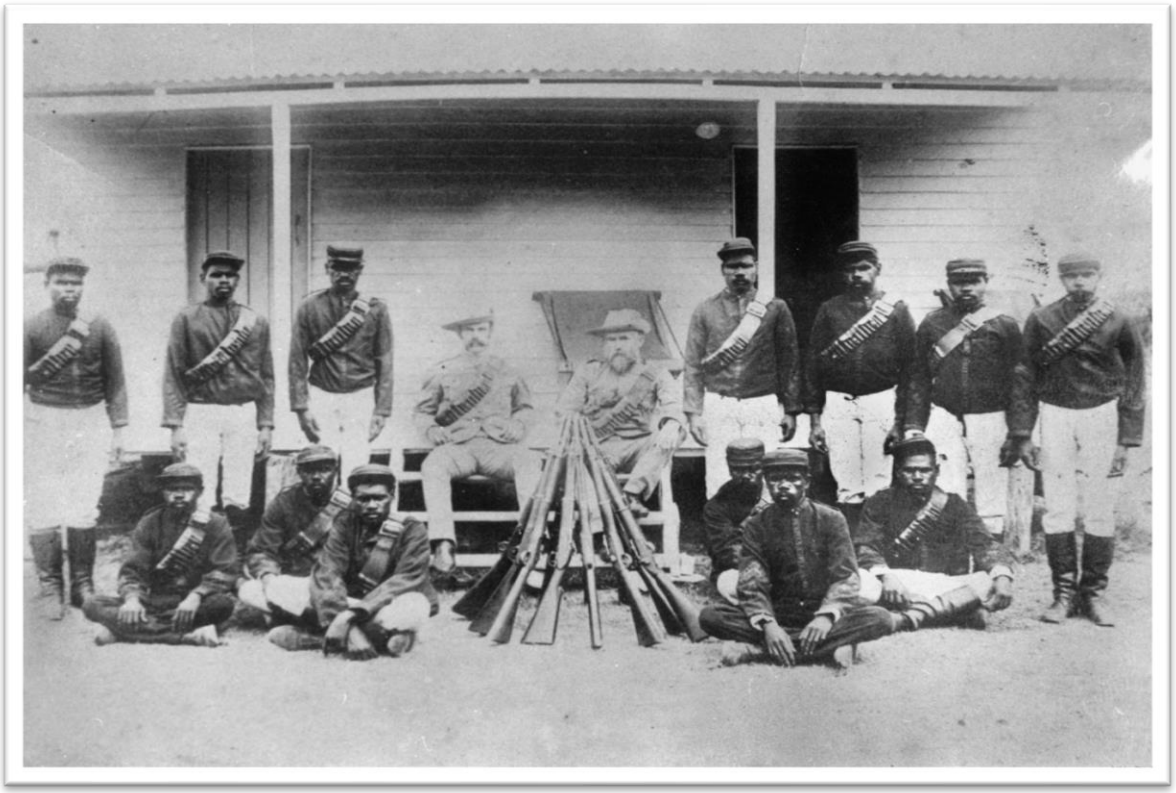


Plate 6.10: Native Mounted Police and officers based at Coen, Cape York, *ca*. 1890. The image is not very different from the 1860s photograph above (Plates 6.8).
Source: State Library of Queensland.

Plate 6.11: Native Police and six of their wives in the Lower Burdekin district.
Source: Photograph by Walter Jervoise Scott.

1870s and 1880s: Bridgman's Reserve and Bucas' Mission

There were two unusual features of Aboriginal–settler relations in the Pioneer Valley. George Francis (Frank) Bridgman (1842–1923), a pastoralist, and Pierre-Maria Bucas (1840–1930), a Catholic priest, created reserves. Between the 1860s and the 1880s, they both tried to find ways of relating to the surviving Indigenous population, ultimately unsuccessfully. Their attempts occurred many years before similar large reserves were begun in other parts of Queensland.

Frank Bridgman

Bridgman, the son of a lawyer, was born in December 1842 in Dartmouth, England. Educated at Exeter Grammar School, he left for Australia at age 14, and from 1857 to 1861 worked on a station on the Macquarie River in New South Wales, owned by his uncle Edward B. Cornish. In 1861, Glen Walker, who was in partnership with Cornish, purchased Oxford Downs station from its founder William Landsborough. The next year, at the age of 19, Bridgman helped overland sheep from Macquarie River to Oxford Downs. Soon after, when John Mackay was leaving the Pioneer Valley in 1862, he sold his Cape Palmerston lease to Cornish, and sold Greenmount to Cornish and Arthur Kemmis. Young Bridgman was sent into the valley with a herd of 15,000 sheep to fulfill stocking regulations.

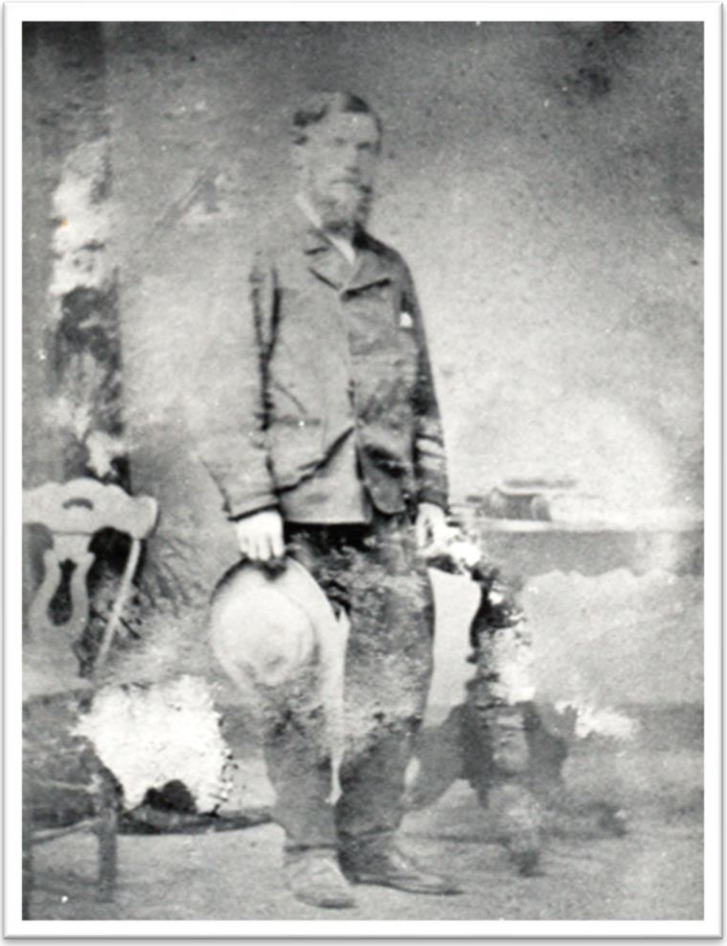


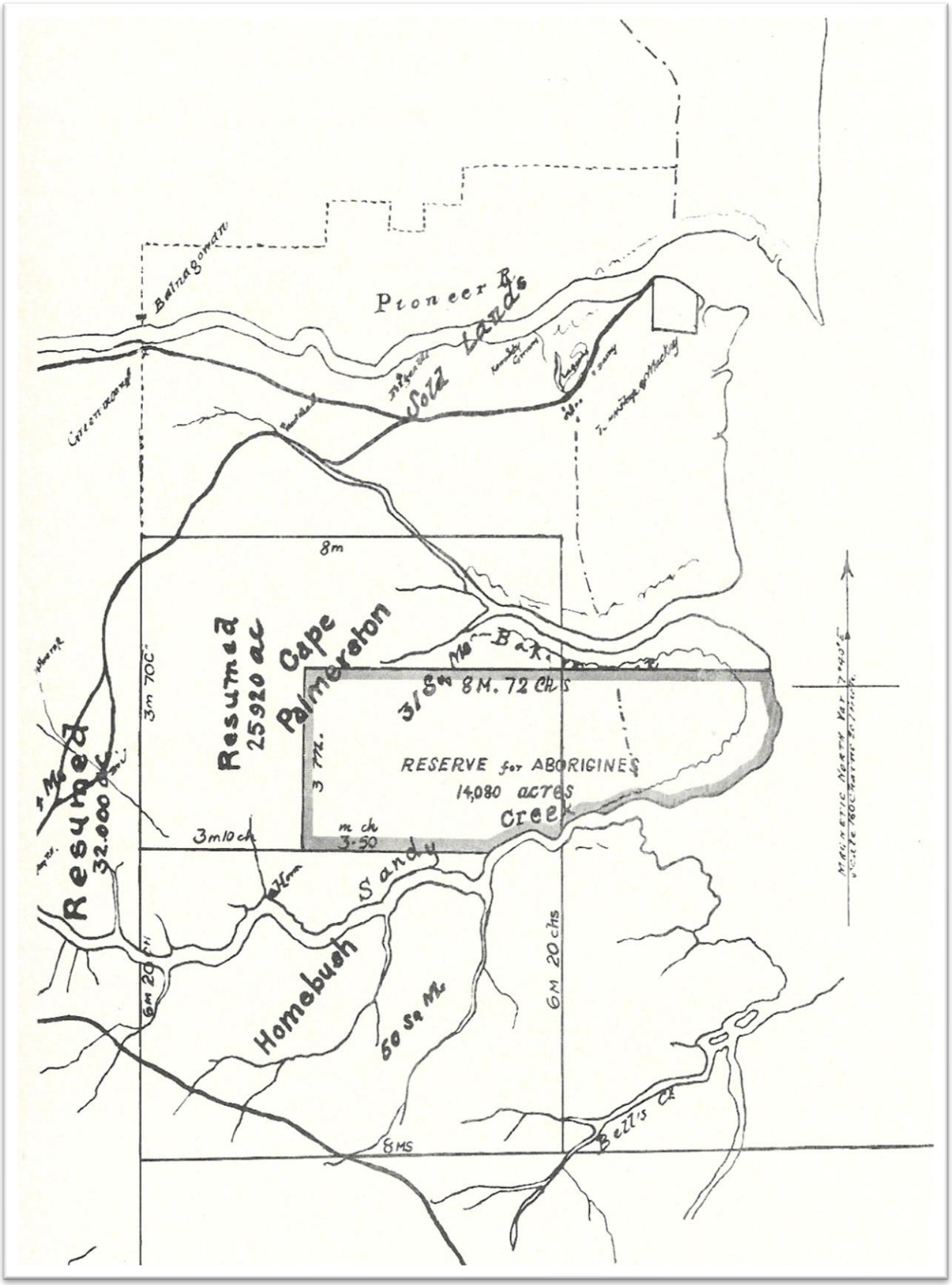
Plate 6.12: Frank Bridgman as a young man.

Source: Mackay City Council Archives, 1976.

In 1864, Bridgman took over management of Fort Cooper station, which also belonged to his uncle. He had shown interest in the Aboriginal people since he first arrived in the district, attempting to learn the local dialect and customs, and create a haven on Fort Cooper. He was in his early twenties and had no training beyond a solid grammar school education. There is no sign that he was overly religious, and his motivation seems to have been based on decency, curiosity, and a young man's desire to make a difference. He was also in a position of power as a nephew of the station owner, and the manager. Bridgman 'let in' 90 Aboriginal people, 40 of them males, mostly boys, to help clear scrub, providing food and paying them with occasional sheep, tobacco, and small items. Bridgman never drank alcohol and attempted to ensure that the Aboriginals he dealt with had no access to alcohol, mainly by keeping them out of towns. In 1869, Bridgman was sent to manage Homebush station in the Pioneer Valley, newly formed, adjoining the southern side of the Cape Palmerston lease, about 25 kilometres from the port. Consolidation took place in 1870 under the Homebush name. Appalled by the deliberate killings around Fort Cooper and the degradation he saw in the Pioneer Valley, particularly the ravages caused by introduced diseases, the consumption of alcohol and from drinking 'opium charcoal' (ash dissolved in water) and chlorodyne. The latter was a mixture of laudanum (an alcohol solution containing opium), tincture of cannabis, and chloroform, used to relieve pain and as a sedative.

Frank Bridgman opened Homebush as a refuge for Aborigines from the valley. His younger brother Robert Newman Bridgman (1847–1917) lived at Mackay and worked with him for many years. By 1871, Frank Bridgman had about half the remaining Aboriginal population of the valley living on Homebush. Once Bucas arrived at Mackay in 1869, the two became acquainted. Bridgman was aware that, with the valley and the surrounding coast selected as pastoral and agricultural properties, there was no longer any place for Aboriginal people to hunt or gather food. Bridgman believed that as their land had been taken from them, the best way to save the remaining Aboriginal people was to create reserved land. Local White opinion was divided: some believed that Aboriginal people would use the reserve as a base to raid cattle on neighbouring properties, while others thought it would be a useful way to keep all First Nations Australians out of the Mackay township, where they invariably wandered with their collection of dogs, begging, drinking alcohol, and causing a nuisance. If there was a loser, the settlers thought it would be Bridgman, whose herds were close by.

Frank Bridgman oversaw the Bakers Creek Aboriginal Reserve in the 1870s and early 1880s. Bridgman knew more about the Nebo and Mackay Indigenous peoples than any other European, although it is not clear if he fully understood the four or five Yuwibara 'skin systems' mentioned in Chapter 1. He believed all the Aboriginal people in the district belonged to one group, the *Kamilaroi*, and then were divided into what he called 'two classes [moiety is the correct term] irrespectively of tribe or location'.[21] Bridgman called these *Youngaroo* and *Wootaroo*.[22] Moieties were split into two halves which complemented and balanced each other in ceremonies, marriages and daily life. Individuals from the same moieties could not marry. Below moieties would have been totems and 'skin' names. A 'skin' name is like a surname and indicates a person's bloodline. It also conveys information about how generations are linked and how they should interact. All their first, second and third cousins were also their siblings. However, known 'skin' divisions do not equate with the information available on the way groups were divided on the reserve, although it may have drawn people from a wide area.



Map 6.2: The coastal Aboriginal Reserve south of Mackay between Bakers and Sandy creeks.
Source: Evans 1971, 31.

Bridgman said the *Youngaroo* were divided into *Gurgela* (today, *Gurelan*) and

Bembia (today, *Bunbai*), and the *Wootaroo* were divided into *Coobaroo* (today, *Koobaroo*), and *Woongoo*. Every man, woman and child belonged to one first division and to one second division. *Gurgela* could only marry *Coobaroo*, and *Bembia* could only marry *Woongoo*. Children belonged to their mother's primary division: thus, according to Bridgman, the children of a *Youngaroo–Gurgela* person married to a *Wootaroo–Coobaroo* person became *Wootaroo–Woongoo*. Bridgman said that these divisions did not just apply to humans. They were also used for animals, trees, plants, stars and constellations. He identified crocodiles as *Youngaroo* and kangaroos as *Wootaroo*, the sun as *Youngaroo* and the moon as *Wootaroo*. He was correct that all relationships between everything in a nation hinged around kinship divisions.

Bridgman believed most Aboriginal people with whom he had dealings had no idea of his proper English name. They called him *Goonurra* (he said this had no special meaning, which is unlikely), or he was called by his kinship category. He said that he was classified as *Youngaroo* and *Bembia*, and once he had children, they were *Wootaroo* and *Coobaroo*. When unknown Aboriginal people approached him, Bridgman could not ask for their personal names or their totem or 'skin' classification. Instead, he knew to ask, 'What am I to call her/him?' If it was a *Coobaroon* girl, he would be told '*Woolbrigan uno nulla*'—meaning 'daughter yours she' (she is your daughter). '*Molle dunilla indu*' meant '*Mollee* say you' (call her your daughter).[23] *Mollee* was the term which all fathers used for their daughters, meaning any young woman belonging to the same 'classification' to which his daughter belonged. First Nations Australians usually called each other by the relationship they had with the other person, not by a personal name.

In October 1870, Bridgman petitioned the Government to assist, which led to the establishment of a local committee consisting of the full bench of magistrates (Justices of the Peace and the Magistrate), chaired by Mackay's Commissioner of Lands. The committee was divided, although the majority supported Bridgman. A government-sponsored 14,080-acre (5,697 ha) temporary reserve was gazetted on 30 June 1871 on the coast between Bakers and Sandy Creeks, part of the coastal area resumed from the Cape Palmerston lease. It was gazetted under the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* of 1868, which contained a clause enabling land to be put aside for Indigenous people. The parcel of ex-Homebush land was combined with a small government coastal reserve. Bridgman was appointed as protector, part of the rationale being to make Aboriginal labour available for pastoralism and agriculture. Bridgman used Aboriginal labour at Homebush, and during 1871 and 1872 arranged for young men from the reserve to work on neighbouring sugarcane plantations, and on a tobacco farm. There were several tobacco growers at Mackay, one of whom was his brother Robert N. Bridgman. In the 1870s, Robert grew cane and 15 acres of tobacco on his farm at Rockleigh.

Aboriginal people from the valley were employed as early as the 1860s, first on the pastoral stations where the men became expert stockmen and fearless horse-riders. In 1867, John E. Davidson employed them to pick cotton at Alexandra. In 1873, local plantation owners formed an Association for the Employment and Protection of Aborigines, to harness their labour for light agricultural field work. Bridgman was its president and presumably one of the motivators for its formation. There is evidence from Bridgman, as well as from an 1874 Inquiry, and an 1876 Royal Commission into reserves, that 200 to 300 Aboriginals each year were working on Mackay plantations in the sugarcane crushing season. Sometimes we get a glimpse of relationships. Harold Finch-Hatton at Mt Spencer station mentioned one man, Wakarra, in the 1880s, whom he taught to read and write.

Bridgman also sent one group to Cooktown to work in the *bêche-de-mer* industry for a year, where each received £6 in wages, and returned. They were well received and were said to have liked the experience, to an extent that a larger group departed for Cooktown the next year. At the beginning of the 1870s, the supply of Pacific Islander indentured labour was

not secure, and the plantation owners were happy to have Aboriginal labour available. Allegations of kidnapping of Pacific Islanders continued all through the 1860s and the early 1870s, when there was a likelihood that future access to Pacific labour would be blocked. Once the supply of Pacific labourers was assured, they were seen as a better source of labour who, although more expensive than Aboriginal labour, could also be used for heavy work clearing land. They were more reliable as they were bound by indenture contracts, and were far from their homes, so had nowhere to escape to. A steadier supply of Pacific labour during the first half of the 1870s lessened the early interest in securing an Aboriginal labour supply.

This was coupled with insecurity in the district's supply of European labour. In late 1873, gold was discovered at the Palmer River in far North Queensland, which attracted thousands of hopeful miners, some from around Mackay. Another northern gold field, the Hodgkinson, opened in 1877, 80 kilometres west of Cairns, also drew away potential White labour. After 1875–76, the northern gold rushes calmed, and obtaining European labour was no longer as difficult, although the Mt Britton goldfield and other gold and copper fields in the hinterland in the 1870s and 1880s still drew some potential labourers away from agriculture in the valley. These wider labour issues—the limited availability of Pacific Islander and European labour—were less of a concern at about the same time that Mackay's experiment with Aboriginal labour began to decline.

Not everyone was in favour of the reserve, as the *Mackay Mercury* recorded in October 1871:

> These dusky wanderers go forth in small parties from their camps and annoy in various ways the settlers around, who find it no easy task to get rid of these unwelcome visitors, ever on the alert to lay hands on any articles that happen to be worth carrying off, or importuning their disgusted white brethren for something in the shape of beef, tobacco, flour etc., articles which few of our struggling agriculturalists can afford to give away without some return.[24]

One reason for granting the Bakers Creek Reserve was that much of it was on inferior land and thought unlikely to be wanted by agricultural selectors. There were mangroves along the coast, a lagoon, and what was described as 'devil-devil' land, a tidal area which was often under water, with the remainder being poor quality sandy soil. However, from an Aboriginal point-of-view, the coastal site was a good marine environment.

In 1874, a government commission was appointed to inquire into the petition from Mackay that had called for the reserve to be established. The report confirmed that Aboriginal numbers were declining fast, that they had ready access to alcohol, which was destroying their health, and that European diseases had ravaged the young and middle-aged. First Nations people lacked immunity to introduced diseases: smallpox epidemics had destroyed perhaps half of the east coast indigenous population between the late 1780s and the early 1830s, then seem to have reoccurred in the 1860s and 1870s, added to by the ravages of chickenpox, measles, and the common cold. The report recommended that reserves and positions for protectors be established in several parts of the colony, to oversee wages and labour agreements, all paid for out of land revenues. The reserve between Bakers and Sandy creeks was supplied with a teacher and manager, and two schools were established. Four settlements were begun on the reserve, which Bridgman called Gooneenberry (Googaburra), Karabaya, Tullaboi (also Tullaboy) and Duara.

Bridgman realised that on the reserve he had to separate the groups from different nations, clans, and 'skins'. As the Bakers Creek Reserve was within the Kungalbara area, they were the main residents at Gooneenberry on Sandy Creek. Because Bridgman had begun at Fort Cooper and spoke the Widi and possibly also the Barada Barna languages, Aboriginal

people from this area followed him to the reserve. Strangely, he seems to have settled them at Tullaboi which was at the mouth of Bakers Creek, an environment surrounded by mangroves and very different from their own. Bridgman also built his own house at Tullaboi, a spacious slab hut with a galvanised ripple iron roof. He chose this site because it was the best place to base the boat that he used to collect supplies from Mackay. There were also some residents from the maritime Googaburra country on the reserve, whom he settled at Karabaya on the coast midway between Sandy and Bakers creeks. Although this was the smallest settlement, they gave him more trouble than any of the other groups. The fourth group were at Duara, on the north side of Bakers Creek (just outside the reserve) which became a school. Between 1877 and 1880, 21 boys and 20 girls were taught drill, literacy, numeracy, and basic geography. Initially, Bridgman did the teaching, then he employed Mrs Barton as teacher and matron for the girls, while her husband, a carpenter, worked erecting buildings on the reserve. One downside of the schools is that the children who attended were separated from their families.

It is not clear how many of the Yuwibara Bridgman managed to settle on the reserve; probably very few as they had retreated to Bucasia and Shoal Point with Father Bucas, to Cape Hillsborough, and further north to R.W. Graham's pastoral property on the St Helens No. 2 lease. Also, on the north side of the river Edward Denman at Etowrie estate (near Habana plantation) provided a home for and employed Aboriginal workers. Denman, along with Bridgman, was appointed by the Government as a Protector of Aborigines.

After a start, drawing a mixed group of Aboriginal people onto the reserve, and arranging for them to work on sugarcane plantations, between 1875 and 1879 Bridgman obtained £1,000 (today about $140,000) in funding from the Government. Local planters had earlier provided another £150. Initially, Bridgman was the superintendent, then he appointed Jocelyn Brooke, a young man who had worked with him for some years and was also supposedly fluent in a local Aboriginal language. When the Government suspended the reserve school in 1880, Brooke wrote to *The Queenslander*:

> …the blacks have not only been well-behaved but very useful to the planters, taking contracts under my supervision, and though earning but small wages, owing to their natural indolence, still being useful and kept out of mischief. I have about 300 blacks in the district at present, many at work trashing cane (stripping off dead leaves), clearing scrub, cutting firewood, hoeing etc.; and I ride round from one to another to see that they are working, and also to see that they get paid fairly for what they do.[25]

There was also an Aboriginal 'head man' named Larry who assisted Bridgman. They travelled to Brisbane together in December 1876, when parliament discussed extending the operations of the reserve's schools. Each of the four settlement areas had vegetable and fruit gardens, fencing, and slab huts and gunyas. Bridgman had always viewed the reserve as an experiment, to be reassessed after several years. By the mid-1870s, the labour supply for the sugar industry was more certain, and in 1877 local pastoralists verbally attacked the reserve concept. Bridgman's energy had dissipated in trying to advise on establishing other reserves in the colony, and a change in the Government meant that official interest in the project waned. As well, much of the early impetus related to Bridgman's direct involvement also waned, because of the trust given him by the Aboriginal people, and likewise by potential employers.

Changes in land holdings also motivated Bridgman. He had been manager of Homebush and Greenmount for Young and Gilchrist, of Gilchrist, Watt, and Co., but they sold out to John Walker in April 1879, who died two months later. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) was moving to diversify away from its New South Wales holdings

to establish mills and plantations in Queensland. They purchased the pre-empted section of Homebush, as well as neighbouring agricultural selections, to begin their Homebush mill, leasing and selling land to farmers. The haven for First Nations Australians no longer existed.

By then, Bridgman was already on the move. He spent part of 1878 in the Barcoo district as manager of a pastoral property, then returned to England between 1880 and 1884, marrying the widow of a Mackay plantation owner while he was there. On his return, he took no leading role in Aboriginal affairs. Once Bridgman ceased to be manager of Homebush and Greenmount, and was no longer closely involved with the reserve, his ability to organise Aboriginal labour for employers ceased. Almost as soon as he settled in the valley, in 1870, Bridgman, like many pastoralists, had diversified his interests, joining in the sugarcane experiment with William Henry Hyne of Lake Elphinstone station to develop Balmoral, a small sugarcane plantation on Nebo Road on the outskirts of Mackay. In 1878, they purchased neighbouring Meadowlands plantation and closed Balmoral, which became the site of Hyne's new home. It is as if the 1860s and 1870s were a youthful humanitarian phase of his life from which he walked away entirely. He became a successful sugar plantation owner, retiring in 1902 to Cowarrie, a small pastoral property outside Toowoomba, where he died in 1923.

By 1880, there was a change in Government which undid five years of work in a five-minute parliamentary debate, more from political spite than anything else. The original reserve was cancelled, then in 1882 was reinstated, reduced to 600 acres (243 ha) at the mouth of Bakers Creek, with the remainder of the land opened for agricultural selection. A year later, Parliament renewed the grant, but the reserve had been dismantled already and its inhabitants had moved on. In 1879, F.T. Amhurst, the local member of parliament, reported to the Government that the Cape Hillsborough Reserve (Map 7.2, on the coastal side of St Helens No. 1), which Bucas had arranged, was a much better site. That year Bridgman seemed sanguine that his reserve experiment had come to an end. He told Amhurst that the older First Nations Australians should be kept under control until they died out, and that, although some of the children had gone back to their 'tribes', a greater number 'have been put out to service'. He also told Amhurst that, without the reserve, the valley's cane farmers could perhaps expect some discontent and instances of 'fire in growing crops'. [26] This forecast proved correct as the Aboriginal people began frightening cattle, pilfering farm produce, and hanging around the towns. The First Nations Australians abandoned the Bakers Creek Reserve, which closed entirely in 1885. A year later, when the Town Clerk complained that a group of around 60 Aboriginal people were back in the town, he was told that if they were clothed and orderly, they could not be arrested by the Native Police.

Pierre-Maria Bucas and Duncan McNab

Two other men made a difference at Mackay, both Catholic priests. In 1869, Pierre-Maria Bucas became Mackay's second resident Catholic priest. A colourful character, from Poterie in Brittany, France, he had begun to study medicine at the Sorbonne (the University of Paris), interrupting his studies to accept a call into the army of Pope Pius IX, during which time he was wounded. He then accepted a call to minister to the Maori during the New Zealand Wars and was ordained as a Catholic priest. One tale is that he was deported to Melbourne for giving military training to the Maori, while another suggests that he was sent to Sydney in July 1867 for medical care. Whichever is correct, in September he moved to a Brisbane parish, where he worked with Aboriginal people before transferring to Mackay.

Working in conjunction with Bridgman at Homebush, in 1876 Bucas obtained permission from Bishop Quinn to apply for 2,800 acres (1,133 ha) of agricultural leases of scrub and coastal wetlands, between Bucasia and Shoal Point, to use as a Catholic Aboriginal

mission, and an orphanage for European children. Covered by blue gums, Moreton Bay gums, bloodwoods, bottlebrush, cocky apple trees, occasional iron barks, and mangroves and swamps, the leases were converted to freehold between 1887 and 1889. The original Aboriginal name of Bucasia seems to have been Uarara or Merara, then it was changed to Seaview and latterly Bucasia, as a memorial to the priest. Bucas had been housing European orphan children at the convent in Mackay and recognised the need for an orphanage in the district, to be run by Catholic Sisters. He encouraged First Nations people from the valley to settle between what is now Bucasia and Shoal Point, providing nets and small boats for their fishing. Bucas arranged work for them cutting cane during the crushing season. They also enclosed the entire property with split post fencing. Bucas was appointed as a government agent for the annual welfare distribution of blankets.[27]

He gained another ally in 1875 when fellow Catholic priest Duncan McNab arrived in Mackay, drawn there by the presence of Bucas, with the intention of ministering to the First Nations people on Bridgman's reserve. However, McNab fell out with Bridgman, claiming that Bridgman would not allow any form of religious instruction on the reserve. The truth is probably that Father McNab, a Scottish Catholic with a fervent belief that he knew how to help First Nations Australians, had little experience and an abrasive personality. Bridgman was an Anglican and although he allowed McNab access to the reserve for three months, was unlikely to have wanted it to become a Catholic mission. As well, his philosophy on Aboriginal policy was quite different from that of McNab, who proposed establishing farming settlements for Aboriginal people, not the supervised reserve system favoured by Bridgman.

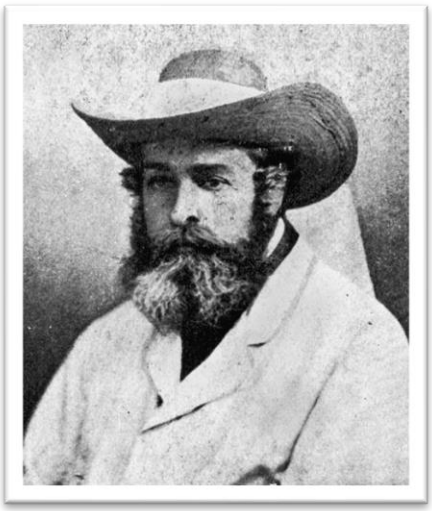


Plate 6.13: Father Pierre-Maria Bucas.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
Plate 6.14: Father Duncan McNab.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

Bucas also negotiated to establish a 14,000 acre (5,665 ha) Aboriginal mission at Cape Hillsborough Reserve, the extensive promontory north of Shoal Point. The coast from Bucasia and Shoal Point to Cape Hillsborough was a perfect marine environment, a traditional fishing area with rock fish traps and shell middens along the beach. These were still present at Bucasia in the middle of the twentieth century, although they have now eroded away. Cape Hillsborough was also a ceremonial and initiation area.

It seems likely that the original Cape Hillsborough plan came from Bucas, with some

involvement from McNab in 1875, with the intention of creating a separate Catholic mission, and that the idea was dropped when Bucas was transferred out of the district. After only a year, McNab retreated to Brisbane in ill health. Bucas was transferred to Cooktown in 1880 with the intention that he join Giovanni (John) Cani, designated as the head of the new Catholic mission to southern New Guinea. However, Cani was appointed Bishop of Rockhampton in 1882, and Bucas was transferred to Charters Towers in the same year, not returning to Mackay until 1887. He ran the parish until ill health caused him to retire in 1912. Even with Bucas' protection, the Aboriginal people living between Bucasia and Shoal Point were forced to move north, first to Cape Hillsborough, and Robert Graham's St Helens No. 2, and finally to William Macartney and Dyson Lacy's Bloomsbury station, the latter on the border between the Yuwibara and the Giya nations. Other groups remained living around Brightly, near Eton. Edmund Denman of Etowrie estate on the Northside continued to provide a haven for First Nations people, and later for elderly Islanders.

Assessing Bridgman, Bucas and McNab

Earlier, the chapter outlined how the Birrigubba peopled used castaway James Morrill to negotiate with settlers and the Queensland Government. This diplomatic initiative would have been known to the First Nations people around Mackay and Nebo. We need to consider how they were using Bridgman, Bucas and McNab in the same way. It is not only one-sided; the local Indigenous people knew they were under serious threat and were utilising friendly Europeans to control and ameliorate the situation.

Bridgman recognised the need for a reserve and had connections to Exeter Hall and the Anti-Slavery Society. A moderate liberal in his views, he had a well-developed social conscience, but did not include Christianity in his reserve concept. Bucas saw the need for a separate Christian mission further away from Mackay. McNab's farming plan never worked, although the reserve-style approach of Bridgman and Bucas was more successful. Bridgman had a humanitarian desire to preserve the remaining Aboriginal population and their culture, protecting them in the short term, and in the long-term leading them towards 'civilisation'. We are left wondering how the Aboriginal participants viewed these foreign institutional concepts, and what was the advantage to them? Bridgman seems to have gathered most remaining Aboriginal people between Nebo and the south side of the Pioneer Valley onto the Government reserve, which created a new focus on the coast between Bakers and Sandy creeks and inland to Homebush. But there were other areas, all on the Northside—Etowrie, Bucasia, Shoal Point and Cape Hillsborough, and the northern St Helens' runs —which also become new Indigenous foci in the valley, all places that united and safe-guarded groups who came from neighbouring Aboriginal nations. Part of the thinking behind the reserves was to provide labour for economic development and increase Christian influence. All three were on coastal sites already in regular use for fishing and gathering from mangroves. The Indigenous nations were refocussed to suit European concepts of space and the almost haphazard nature of European endeavours through the work and places of residence of Bridgman, Denman, Macartney, Lacy, Bucas and McNab.

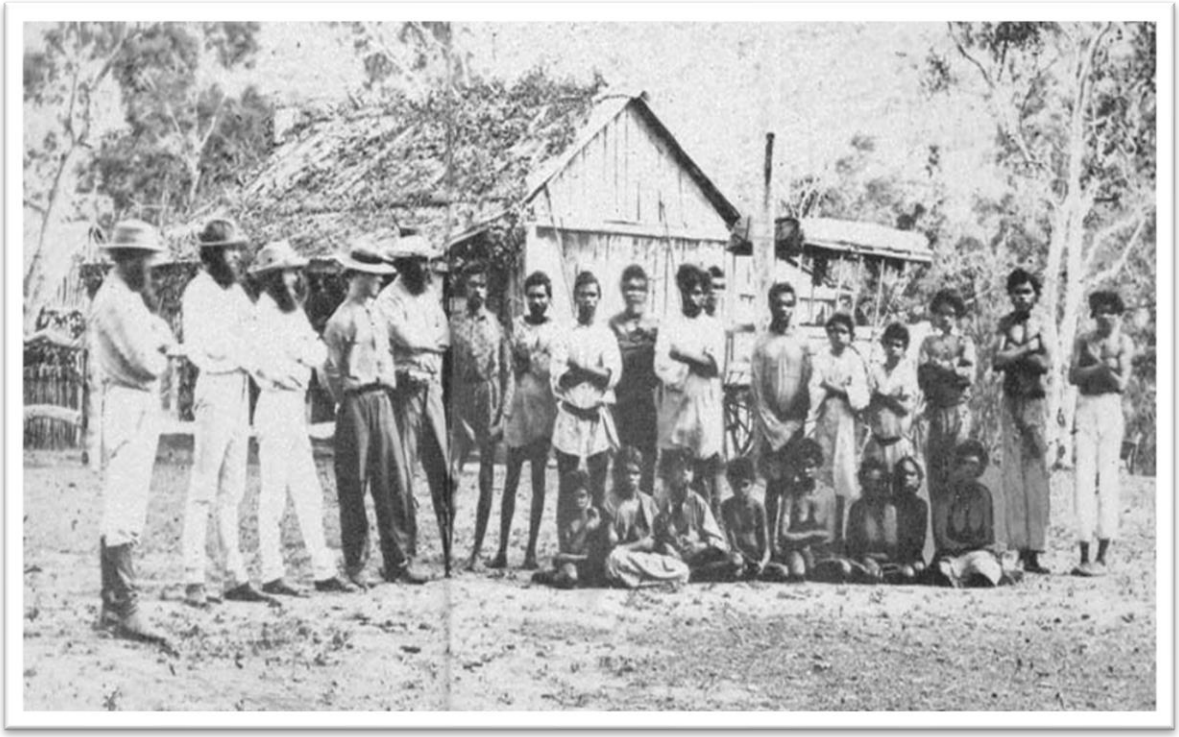


Plate 6.15: Aboriginal men and women, along with some children, employed in the Mackay district in the 1870s, presumably on a pastoral lease or a sugar or tobacco plantation.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Smoothing the Dying Pillow

Reading the writings from the period is quite eye-opening. 'Myalls' or 'wild blacks', and 'station blacks' and their 'gins' (women) were standard terminology. The literature abounds with descriptions of 'station blacks', the Aboriginal men and women who lived and worked on the pastoral stations, usually paid in rations. Rachael Henning described them in a letter dated 28 August 1862 while she was at Yaamba station at the beginning of her Queensland years:

> We saw quantities of blacks that day; a whole tribe seemed to be camped on the station. They are the queerest-looking mortals certainly, with their long lean legs and arms without an atom of flesh on them, more like spiders than anything human. Their costume is usually a shirt and nothing else. Men and women wear the same, and they laugh and show their white teeth whenever you look at them.

Another standard term used in the final decades of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries was to 'smooth the dying pillow', a phrase first used in the 1860s by South Australia's Chief Protector, meaning White 'benevolence' towards the original inhabitants of the continent who were seen as a dying race. In 1897, the Queensland Government passed an Act of Parliament called the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*, which created positions for permanent protectors. Queensland's Chief Protector had enormous powers over Aboriginal people.

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By the end of the 1860s, the pattern of European land use in the valley was changing and with it there was even less Aboriginal access to their lands. Pastoralism was pushed back

from the fertile coastal plains of the Pioneer River, the land allocated to agriculture and urban development. The town of Mackay was growing, as was the sugar industry and cane was being crushed in the first primitive mills. A new labour force had arrived, Pacific Islanders from the Loyalty Islands, the New Hebrides, and the Santa Cruz Group and the Solomon Islands. There were always some Europeans who were honest about the destruction of the Aboriginal population. Henry Roth did his best to record Aboriginal life. He left us this assessment:

> …we must remember that to the best of their very limited knowledge and ability they did what they could to defend *their* country and lives. We were the aggressors and have deprived them of both. It seems the unfortunate fate of the Australian aborigines that he must go down before the white man.[28]

Just as the reserves and 'letting in' on pastoral properties meant negotiating new relationships and networks within Aboriginal nations, so too did other aspects of survival. They also became commodity suppliers to the colonists. There is little direct evidence from Mackay and the Pioneer Valley, although if we go by the pattern uncovered by Ray Kerkhove for Brisbane in the mid-nineteenth century, they became suppliers of fish (in large amounts), oysters, honeycomb, vegetables, domestic firewood and charcoal for forges, plus did menial chores, to an extent that they were integrated into the colonial domestic economy. They were paid in cash and food at rates calculated by the amount of produce or labour. They also appeared in the courts, primarily for drunkenness and stealing.

Not all of the ways Aboriginal people chose to try to regain control are immediately obvious. One was sorcery used against the Europeans, through be-spelling objects, and via rock art and other indirect methods. Sorcery was just as much a strategy of resistance as stealing livestock or direct warfare. It was satisfying, invisible, and restored some equilibrium in a very uneven relationship. Aboriginal Australians also chose to ally themselves to the Europeans, anxious to harness the new source of power to their own ends, and to neutralise its effect on their extended families. Often, they incorporated the new arrivals into their kin networks, either in an honorary capacity (as occurred with Bridgman, and presumably Bucas), or through intimate relationships. As mentioned earlier, they became Black colonists and were the major population on many pastoral stations. Henry Reynolds clearly states the pastoralists' need for Aboriginal labour:

> The pastoralists did not want an empty land but one with a constant ready supply of Aboriginal labour and sexual partners. They did not want dead blacks but biddable and submissive servants; men and women who were committed to their country, would not wander away and would cost very little. Indeed, the northern pastoral industry was totally dependent on Aboriginal labour and remained so until the middle of the 20th century.[29]

Interracial sexual relationships developed. Chapter 2 outlined the overwhelming maleness of the European frontier. While we know little of these cross-race relationships in the valley and over the ranges, they were common in other areas of Australia. As Ann McGrath has pointed out, sexual activity is now recognised as one means by which First Nations Australians attempted to incorporate the strangers into their systems of kinship and reciprocity. Aboriginal women used intimate relationships with the newcomers as part of their negotiations, strategically repositioning Aboriginal communities. Europeans in these relationships often grew tired of the wider demands for food and tobacco, not realising that they had become classificatory members of the women's families. Evidence from elsewhere

suggests that some of these women probably already had Aboriginal husbands and that it was a group decision when women participated in sexual relationships with European men.

One of the side effects was the introduction of syphilis and gonorrhoea, which were then relatively common in European society. One consequence of gonorrhoea was infertility. Syphilis was more invidious and long-lasting, leading eventually to damage to internal organs and often insanity and death. In pre-penicillin days, around 30 percent of those with the disease developed long-term debilitating consequences. The disease killed a similar percentage, and congenital syphilis can pass to a baby during pregnancy.

The common estimate of the size of the Indigenous population of Australia in the eighteenth century is around one million, although, as mentioned in Chapter 1, there are recent calculations that suggest a much higher number in earlier millennia. By the end of the 1860s, the valley and the surrounding coast had been covered by pastoral and agricultural land selections. Chapter 1 attempted to estimate the pre-1860 size of the Mackay–Nebo region Aboriginal population, suggesting that in the mid-nineteenth century, they may have numbered around 4,500 to 5,000. There are no 1860s estimates of the original size of the Aboriginal population in the valley, however in 1880 Bridgman suggested that:

> During the eight or ten years which followed [1860], about one-half of the aboriginal population was either shot down by the Native Mounted Police and their officers, or perished from introduced loathsome diseases before unknown. The Black troopers, however, are said to have been the chief destroyers.[30]

Interestingly, Roth, who lived in the Mackay district, makes no mention of the involvement of the colonists, although clearly, he must have known the truth. The pastoralists had chased the Aboriginal population off their land, shot and poisoned them and their dingoes, and begun to remove many of their other wild animals and food plants. In 1877, the Government passed a *Marsupial Act* to encourage the destruction of native animals which competed for pastures with the introduced livestock. This was aimed particularly at kangaroos and wallabies. The Act was revised in 1895 during an extended drought, increasing the destruction and once more making clear that sheep, cattle, and horses were more important than native animals. The Indigenous people were also deliberately destroyed. There was a veneer of acting legally, whereas in fact it was warfare and genocide. The actions of the pastoral settlers, who also deliberately killed the First Nations people, and inadvertently introduced diseases to which the Indigenous people had little or no immunity, accomplished the rest. The sugar plantation-owners and farmers also destroyed the natural environment, planted sugarcane on their land and soon blanketed most of the valley floor with the new crop. The attempts to establish large reserves in the second half of the 1870s were unique in Queensland, although ultimately a failure.

Once the reserve between Bakers and Sandy creeks collapsed in 1880, the residents went back to their nations or moved north of Mackay, mainly to Bucas' settlements and the northern St Helens' runs. They were utilising prior cultural links, and as they had with Bridgman's reserve, were seeking out the more friendly and powerful settlers who were willing to aid them to some extent. It was a temporary respite from the deliberate decimation to which they had been subjected. The children who went to school achieved basic literacy, although we have no idea how they were able to utilise this in later years. In 1880, about 100 Aboriginal people remained around Nebo and by the late 1880s there were only 100 to 200 in the Pioneer Valley. By the 1900s, the total indigenous population of the Mackay–Nebo region had been reduced to less than 200. The sugarcane industry no longer offered any employment, although some of them continued to work on pastoral stations. Others became fringe-dwellers on the edges of the towns. Population decline in such circumstances is

lamentable, but we need also to consider its wider spiritual and psychological ramifications. Alongside the extreme grief that must have occurred, there were practical and knowledge transfer issues. Elders were lost before their stores of knowledge were passed on, and the sudden removal of most of the productive adults would have left families vulnerable and impoverished. The men were the main hunters, and once they were killed or died from diseases, some of the food sources would have been difficult to obtain. Undue pressure would have fallen onto the surviving women and children. The trauma of loss would have been extreme, doubly so when we consider the meanings inherent in the country concept. Normal mourning procedures may have been suspended due to the overwhelming numbers killed and the deaths of senior figures who previously were needed to conduct mourning ceremonies.

Considering their lack of immunity to common European and Asian diseases, and as we know that new diseases travelled ahead of the frontier, First Nations Australians must have suffered substantially, possibly even before the first pastoral settlers arrived between 1856 and 1860, Based on E.H. Curr's 1880 correspondence with Bridgman and Bucas, we can presume, conservatively, that by 1870 25 percent of the First Nations people in the district had died through violence and another 25 percent or more had died from introduced diseases. An 1874–75 measles epidemic could easily have killed another quarter, although the only contemporary estimates suggest a smaller number. Present-day public commentators often point out that more Aboriginal people died from introduced disease than from violence, which is true. Yet, introduced disease does not spread independent of human agency. Nineteenth century policy makers, even though medical science was far more primitive than it is today, understood the disastrous human consequences for First Nations inhabitants of the unrestrained opening of pastoral land for European use. They never bothered to take it into account.

Deliberate extermination seems largely to have ended in the 1880s. Aboriginal numbers had declined so far that it was no longer necessary. Dispossessed of their best land and forced to congregate in mixed-nation communities and 'town camps', often they lived in what are best described as refugee camps on marginal land without clean water or adequate access to food. Loss of territory and of their original way of life, diseases, malnutrition, hygiene issues caused by being forced to congregate in one place for long periods, and the adoption of clothing, which harboured disease and caused sickness when worn wet, all steadily reduced the remaining numbers. Demoralised, they consumed alcohol and 'opium charcoal', which also destroyed them. Supplying alcohol to Aborigines was illegal but happened constantly, and opium dregs were supplied by Asian and European colonists. It is significant that the title of the 1897 Queensland legislation to control Aboriginal lives was the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*.

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the Government's major 'social service' for Aborigines was to provide each of them with one blanket a year on the public holiday for Queen Victoria's birthday. The records from this annual allocation are useful to chart the size of the remaining population. In 1889, 150 blankets were distributed at Mackay, and 200 the next year. Two years later, only 26 were distributed at Mackay, and similar numbers at Eton and Walkerston. The local newspaper noted that the numbers were small because many of the people were away at Grasstree Beach south of Mackay. This would seem to have been for a ceremonial occasion. In 1902, there were around 184 Aboriginal people living in the Pioneer Valley and around Nebo. There were 20 Aboriginal people at Eton (12 men and 8 women), 50 at Mackay (32 men and 18 women), 29 at Mirani (17 men, 8 women, and 4 children under 16 years old), and there were 85 (49 men, 26 women and 10 children) around Nebo. By 1914, the newspaper noted that only 50 blankets were distributed at Mackay and a similar number at Nebo, whereas 20 years earlier the number would have been 500 to 600. In 1919, the Nebo Protector of Aborigines issued 29 blankets, 5 to men, 13

to women, and 11 to children. There were a few who, for a variety of reasons, had left the district, others were married to Pacific Islanders, and a small number had Tickets of Exemption under the 1897 Act which controlled Aboriginal lives. In 1906, there were only two Aboriginal mixed-race marriages recorded as domiciled at Mackay: Millie, married to a South Sea Islander, and Annie Morton, a 'half-caste', married to a White man.

Plate 6.16: Widi people and others outside the Mackay Hotel at Mount Britton in the early 1880s.
Source: Reckitt & Mills photograph, State Library of Queensland.

Many of those who survived into the twentieth century died in the 1918 cyclone and the 1919–20 Spanish influenza epidemic. Mackay's Aboriginal 'town camps' were on the Pioneer River's northern bank, one opposite the town and another opposite the hospital. In December 1920, Jimmy Porter, and Andrew, said to be the last two Aboriginal people living in the Mackay camps, were removed to Palm Island Reserve off Townsville. To close the era, the Mackay health inspector visited their camp on the bank of the river, destroyed their dogs and burnt down their gunyahs.[31] This was not the end, as other Aboriginal people survived in the valley. In the 1930s, Billy Mugera (mentioned in Chapter 1) and Fred Murray were living at One Tree near Eimeo on the Downie property. They taught one of the Downie sons to speak their language, and the Fatnowna children, from a Solomon Islands family who lived nearby at Eulbertie on Christensen's farm, also learnt a great deal about Aboriginal culture from them.

Plate 6.17: The last of Mackay's Aboriginal people in the 'town camp' beside the river near Powell's farm upstream from the hospital, late nineteenth century.
Source: Clive Moore Collection; and State Library of Queensland.

Plate 6.18: Mackay Aboriginal people roasting clams at a beach, 1906.
Source: Clive Moore Collection; and the State Library of Queensland.

Makarrata and The Voice

In 1967, the Australian nation held a referendum which ensured that First Nations Australians for the first time were counted in the National Census and gave the Commonwealth Government increased power over ensuring their well-being. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, after the First Nations National Constitutional Convention in May 2017, Indigenous Australians released a document called the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart'. Fifty years on, they were seeking to be heard at a constitutional level. As the representatives of the first 'sovereign nations' of Australia, the members of the Convention stressed their attachment to the land and suggested ways forward in the difficult relationship with settler Australians since 1788.

> This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature,' and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.[32]

The statement called for a Makarrata Commission, using a Yolngu word from north-east Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, which means 'healing' or 'coming together after a struggle'.

The history of the Mackay and Nebo districts is a small part of the explanation why the incorporation has been slow. Today, visitors to Pioneer Valley Museum at Mirani can walk around the Hamilton 'dairy' with no idea that they are really looking at wall boards from a defensive structure from which First Nations Australians were shot. Today, commercialism exploits the plight of the woman who jumped off The Leap. The much-photographed statue of her in front of The Leap Hotel remains a tourist attraction. The hotel's internet publicity made this suggestion: 'So why not take The Leap yourself if you're in the area?'[33] In 2018, the woman's descendants complained about an 'Instagram-friendly' tourist sign at the top of The Leap, a life-sized photo frame with the words 'I took the leap'. It had been placed there by a tour guide. Johanna Hazeldine's descendants were appalled. One of them, Deb Netuschil, a great-great granddaughter of the baby who survived, said that the Instagram frame was disrespectful and insensitive: 'That's a place of sorry business for us because of the history and because of what happened. We were one of our lineages to survive, but there is a lot of our mob that didn't.'[34] The Department of Environment and Science announced that the photo frame would be removed.

Reconciliation with Indigenous Australians still has a long way to go, as the 2021–22 discussions about giving First Nations Australians a 'Voice' showed, followed by the 60 percent 'No' vote in the October 2023 national referendum

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Endnotes

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