

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission

From: Lyn Jones

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Submission:

Some time ago submissions were invited from non-Indigenous people. I am a descendant of Abraham and Harriet Ward whose toddler daughter was abducted and killed by members of the Gunditjmarra people near Portland in 1843. Her name was Martha Frances Ridley Ward aged nearly 2.

My mother May Jones wrote a one-sided and racist poem about this sad event and had it published in a Portland newspaper in the 1980s. I was visiting my parents when an Aboriginal woman phoned to try to give the other side of the story. Although I had tried to influence my mother to modify her poem she refused to do so, telling me and the caller that it was a matter of her free speech. The caller's contention that many more Aboriginal infants had been killed didn't make any impression on Mum even though she expressed sorrow for our ancestors' loss.

My mother passed away in 2008 but I am still wondering what precipitated the sad event. There were violent reprisals against some Gunditjmarra at the time and the Ward family moved across the state to Gippsland. I am very interested to know whether Abraham Ward, an innkeeper at Arindoovong/Branxholme personally did something to offend the original owners. Or was Martha a casualty of the frontier wars, then continuing in western Victoria? If a descendant of the woman who phoned Mum or any other Gunditjmarra person can share any information I would appreciate it very much. Needless to say I'm totally in favour of the truth.