

# Facing the taboos of our untold history of culture and multi- culture



## THE SECRET LIFE AND HERITAGE OF PIONEER AUSTRALIANS

I had never really discussed the possibility of my family or other early pioneering families I

had grown up with having mixed heritage and was amazed when I found out that I was now entering a 'taboo' subject - so painful that few could discuss the trauma it caused. In fact , I started to realise that there was a deep cut in the Australian mainstream consciousness regarding this topic; it was a sore that was still weeping profusely & needed proper attention to be cauterized with care before it could be even recognised or treated impartially for healing. Somehow ,we made and accepted excuses which we found plausible for why we had to discriminate against people of different races yet we still believed we treated people equally and were not racist.





*"Much work and discussion has occurred around the "imagining" of Australian identity, with its roots in a defiantly egalitarian and democratic tradition of bush mateship, the birth of trade unions, and Bulletin-style nationalism" Thomson on Sir Walter Scott.*

I think that this is how my extended family saw our upbringing in our Australia- we were proud of being part of this country's growth with its democratic mateship that was fair and treated everyone as equals or at least gave all the battlers a chance if they worked hard.

My father and mother's' family had claimed mainly Scottish Heritage. They both came from early pioneer settlers in Victoria .Although my mother's background had questions about her heritage, they were typical settlers who succeeded in a a robust chaotic lifestyle of the goldrushes of Clunes , Creswick & Boulder City WA before joining the Victorian mainstream.

My fathers family were more formally educated & entrenched in the church of Scotland forming strong allegiances with many notable Australians who came from that heritage and area of Western Victorian sheep country- Mortlake, Terang & Noorat.

Rev James Murdoch Presbyterian Minister Mortlake and later Moderator described them - " they were men of grit, these pathfinders"

I was brought up in this Scottish background with a Scottish great great granmother who started a school in 1870 and a grandfather who became a Presbyterian minister with a social conscience also grew up in this Terang area. They agreed with Murdochs' description

&this is how we saw ourselves- solid hardworking families with the grit and ambition to go forward and achieve in this new continent we had colonised.

This had served us well and we really did not see another side to our legacy other than being taught that the convict colony had been full of convicts who had been sent to Australia unjustly and although treated badly had survived and prospered.

We were not taught about the original inhabitants although we somehow saw them as living in isolated places rather than where we were living and knew that many lived on missions.

I never really considered another side to the Australian story until I worked in Aboriginal Lands with Traditional people and never realised the mainstream bias until I was personally involved in being a recipient of prejudice.

I became bewildered when my mother, who had taught us tolerance to Aborigines and had seen me teaching them for 20 years had a breakdown because her first great grandson had an Aboriginal father. He was her blood, my blood, my grandson. My mother's actions were deplorable and she also commented " I don't know why I am acting like this"

The question then that bothered me was -**What had changed my mothers attitudes?**

Delving into family history, I found out that my mother's' grandmother was probably Aboriginal. Aboriginal births for too many years were not recorded officially until 1967.

It seems this secret had been with my mother all her life. Aborigines were not classified as people or citizens for nigh on 200 years, so a conspiracy of silence reigned over our community our country if one had mixed blood especially Aboriginal. Thus the new Nation consented to unequal treatment of our original inhabitants while exposing an

alternative doctrine to those of Europeans descent.

. We created a mythology & rationalised reasons for this racial prejudice & this was generally accepted and not questioned by the new Colonial Establishment or the later societies after Nationhood.

Some how this racist treatment was legitimised as being the best strategy ,even though before our very eyes ,our conventions of democratic mateship and equality were flaunted , broken and disregarded .

This discriminating treatment meant families resorted to secrecy to avoid the prejudice and this secrecy in turn became entrenched in our psyche so that the discussion of our early history so often left out the true history and gave falsehood we still have trouble admitting.

That a conspiracy of silence about racial backgrounds became entrenched in the psyche of early settlers & still invades our cultural perspectives today .I believe it still interferes with our ability to face our early relationship, struggles and inaccuracies impartially.

-The Summary of the Population of Victoria,according to the Census taken on the 2nd April,1871. shows the Population of Males to Females -(Exclusive of Chinese and Aborigines). was Males 329,016 & Females 43 343 , With this imbalance of men to women there were problems for the men finding European women as partners . So for for the populations to increase it seems that many families had Aboriginal women as their ancestors.

This manufactured account of relationships for acceptance left a legacy of confusion, concealment & shame which I believe still lingers and is entrenched in our institutions and departments .

These centuries and decades of deception have clouded our history and perceptions of ourselves as we still cling to the Colonial cringe and embarrassment for our lowly place in the Empire and Commonwealth.

Our relationships with Aboriginal people who had probably helped us survive as a penal colony that became a Nation was deliberately not discussed or recognised and the waves of immigration who came later accepted this construction of history which mostly served them well Europeans could join in and prosper without thought of the early problems of the colonising the process or the injustices that had occurred. These new immigrants were themselves so often overcoming war , ill treatment, injustice, and poverty, that they easily accepted the new opportunities they had in this new land adopting their prejudices also with ease .

"The early pioneer settlers had unexplained relatives and heritages manipulated for acceptance, especially as they started to prosper , settle and dispossess the inhabitants they called " naked savages" .

For to really become accepted by the British Establishment , the Colonials were not only fighting a racial battle but a class battle where their European background was disapproved of as their status living in Colony founded as a penal Colony was extremely low.

In the eyes of the highly prejudiced hierarchy of class and clan ,this mighty Empire exerted incredible power and from their point of view the European people living in this isolated land were recognised as being on the lowest scale of status as Europeans.

My grandfather's mother had a number of name changes and the notation "mother unknown" when her ,son my grandfather George was born ;his mother was then written as **Phoebe Ann LONGSTAFF**. She had been married as Ann The official record showed [.RENWICK John married Ann LONGSTAFF 1868](#)

**Her Death note.** "Father named as *unknown* LONGSTAFF Mother not recorded.", when she died , 1906,- aged 68 years, Geelong, Victoria. .



Her son ,my grandfather was recorded as the seventh child George Matthew RENWICK

. Born: 1878 Clunes, Victoria.Died: 1930 Hastings, Victoria, aged 51 years.

Because our status was so very low in those early years of Colonisation , we worked hard to develop an economic base and wealth to improve our status. This meant we had to cover up the flaws lawlessness that was rampant and the alcohol fuel society and work to getting a higher status ,& recognition

Thus they created a facade of respectability , a charade of the conventions that Europe and London dictated.

For me ,after I became more familiar with another story about our family's life in the colony , I had to look at how all this came about. It seems that they , the new settlers in this distant land had been struggling to exist in an unknown confusing world. As they had experienced the stain of injustice and ill treatment they understood how an underdog felt.

However they also understood that to be accepted they needed to conform to the values and behaviour of those in control . These opposing attitudes became difficult to live by.

I believe many pioneers made a deliberate compromise to ensure their families would do well and be insulated from the poverty and restrictions of the European Society they had left. Thus those who succeeded in this new continent hid their origins if they were mixed but not Traditional people.

They saw the answer was to build up the new world as a mimic of the old but without the stain of the underclass convict or Aboriginal blood preventing inclusion. The traditional people had no place in this plan so they were separated, segregated and removed from the mainstream society . Their traditional lore & language was systematically destroyed. They were classified as flora and fauna.

The Colonial society to get favour with great Britain had to conform to the demands of

the Empire building propaganda. To maintain a resemblance to what was thought as the "proper life to be accepted..

An impossible task when the population of European women were so limited

.But to admit that there were too few European women and that the colony had to mix with the natives to survive , was taboo.

For the first hundred years it must have been accepted , then as more European women arrived the shame came and the case of men leaving these children abandoning them was so shameful and they orchestrated the missions to be in isolated places .

My mum was born 1913, so i believe she could have easily have been taken away to hide her heritage .Therefore her prioritising the conventions of British Society became a necessity to be accepted & join the mainstream society as equals

. Those who did not conceal the facts of their heritage could not be accepted as citizens. & had restricted access . The insecurity and hypocrisy of these actions in this new Nation that prided itself on equality and opportunity caste a shadow is I believe the achilles heal of our pioneering background.

We still have trouble admitting that inbuilt into the promotion of this new Colonial society was this hidden deception or sham . Seen as an impediment for acceptance , the Australian story removed and concealed the barriers of class and race that were classed as unpleasant facts, that brought shame and embarrassment. In my case, the racial background especially the identification of my grandson was still seen an impediment. Our family's legacy for a better future, meant to successful change or manipulate our background for acceptance. I rejected this but my efforts to disclose what was still classified as a blemish although their true history met resistance.

The British Society behind the new Colony day thrived on their strict prejudices of class and race and so did we.

So lets forget the past that the dispossessed dispossessed ..... that the traumatised caused trauma. So far away from Europe, it was easy to concoct a society that seemed to adhere to the strict strong moral sense of the motherland without the stain of convict ancestors or mixed racial origins, but we were really a hybrid breed with both convict and Aboriginal ancestry . The background of the successful Colonisers was little concern in Britain: they accepted the new Colony and colonists in their seemingly adherence to the same rules and values that governed this far reaching Empire as long as they acted their part. We however were still concerned with keeping our reputation and place in the world and to do this we continued the eurocentric preferences that were now inculcated in our institutions and lives.

No real investigation was made to test the authenticity of how the knowledge and inclusion our native population had had contributed the success of our colonial lifestyle . To maintain respectability much was omitted or manipulated for approval. This had helped create a stable and notable class of people now calling themselves gentleman and women regardless of their background but saw underclass of our original inhabitants who certainly had little opportunity to be treated as equals unless they passed as Europeans. It seemed that few questioned our family stories, as survival depended on having a strong foundation with strong boundaries and laws-a basis to live by in a world that did in fact need grit ,determination to survive and prosper.

yet on futher . introspection of those early days it seems strange that the populations increased when there was so few European women compared to european men .The only conclusion that can be made, since the immigration of women continued to be still less

than the men, was that many men indeed did had relationships with Aboriginal That many families hid their background so their children fitted into the conservative British values of the day.

### REFRAMING HISTORY FOR MORE ACCURACY

The Highland Clearances brought a wave of settlers to Victoria looking for land. This is the background of the dispossessed Scottish settlers when they came to the western district; With their legacy of dispossession, my father's family were part of this colonising group of Scottish settlers. James. E. Murdoch , father of Keith Murdoch who exposed the tragic massacre of our troops at Gallipoli, grandfather the Rupert Murdoch, media baron) was also from this group . They endeavoured to work and follow their new country in the manner of their Scottish cultural roots - " a civilising power for good" but never mentioned the tragedy of the First Nation people from their district that they dispossessed who suffered a similar fate to them as dispossessed Highlanders .Niel Black ,Rev Samuel Fraser, John Thomson elizabeth a d john Stewart,,Sir Frank Rollands,Rev A.J.porter an Mc Farlane Burnet all received a Scots based education that brought intellectual an economic accomplicement to this area , this district and this State of Victoria.

A reference to a curse put on Squatter Neil Black Family at Glenormiston and later support for the establishment and continuation of the missions maybe showed a responsibility for the original inhabitant but the education was eurocentric. They did not to accept the Original culture and imposed their eurocentric values on the original inhabitants apparently for their continued survival, as the alternative methods to dispossess them had

been so brutal.

The Presbyterian church at the turn of the 20th century ran many of the Missions in Queensland. Weipa, Aurukun, Mornington Island and Mapoon.- another strategy to avoid more massacres and keep a blanket of silence on the violence.

The only Missionaries in Cape York to retain language and culture was the Mc Kenzies at Aurukun ( the wik people and Wikmungken)

Sir Walter Scott stated re the Scottish dispossession "In but too many instances the Highlands have been drained, not of their superfluity of population, but of the whole mass of inhabitants, dispossessed by an unrelenting avarice which will be one day found to be short-sighted as it is unjust and selfish".

While Scottish Highlanders were forced to cross the globe, and found themselves working Black's lands( Niel Black), Aboriginal people throughout the western district found themselves equally displaced. As Black and other squatters like him took up more and more land, the original owners of those lands were dispossessed

The new colonisers stated- "The western district of Victoria which is covered by the Presbytery of Mortlake. It is a land which the Lord hath blessed, worthy of the name with which its discoverer joyfully greeted it, Australia Felix. Gently rolling pastures, subsiding inland into great sweeps of plain, the horizon broken with little volcanic cones, but further apart—Mount Elephant, Mount Leura, Mount Shadwell, Mount Warrnambool, and many others ; lakes in the craters or at the bases of some of these cones stony rises' where the lava outcrops, affording material for stone dykes suggestive of Home; toward

the coast wooded ranges.

James Murdoch, Free Church of Scotland minister, and his wife Helen, née Garden ... and moderator-general of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 1905-06 wrote this forward to Fifty Years of Presbyterianism in Mortlake, Victoria 1847 - 1897.

*"Ministers, Elders, and Members of the Congregation, I send forth this slight historic sketch with the hope that it may prove of some interest to friends and fellow-members of the Church"*

J. E. MURDOCH. "Rydal Cottage," 1847-1897

"IT was a most fortunate thing for the Western District that "the early pioneer squatters were men of education and good family, and carried with them into their new surroundings a simple faith in God and a civilizing power for good, for which we, of a later day, owe them much. They were men of grit, these pathfinders. They thought little of the difficulties that beset them in exploring an unknown country, inhabited by naked savages. With cheery optimism they pushed their way through primeval forests and illimitable plains, in search of new homes under the Southern Cross."

The first church was a long thatched house, with a door at either end, ... John M'Nair, James Murdoch, William John Murdoch, W. J. Porter, ... Wm. M'Nutt, B.A., Moderator; Dr. James Munce, clerk; Henry Bell, Robert H. Clarke. Ironically the Aboriginal Background and tragic dispossession was dismissed by the Rev James Murdoch as "inhabited by naked savages" and the massacres were not mentioned.

In fact, the area was inhabited by the Kirrae, Buloke, Tjapwurrong and Gunditjmarra Aborigines who were first sighted by Europeans in 1836 Noorat - in shire of Mortlake" One of the worst massacres in the western district of Victoria allegedly occurred along Mount Emu Creek near Noorat in August 1839.

This was seemingly Noorat is a small town in south western Victoria, Australia.

Noorat is located approximately 240km west of Melbourne. The township is located at the base of Mount Noorat a dormant volcano, which is considered to have Australia's largest dry crater.

Noorat derives its name from Mount Noorat, a dormant volcano named by Major Mitchell after a local Indigenous elder, Ngoora."

Frederick Taylor, MacKillop and Smith's manager at Strathdownie was allegedly responsible or one of the worst massacres in the western district of Victoria somewhere along Mount Emu Creek (once known as Taylor's River) near Noorat in August 1839. This was seemingly verified by Niel Black, who found a mass grave on the Glenormiston property Niel Black too had settled the land through violence.

In Robert Thomsons thesis(his Doctorate Deakin univ )we see Thomson showing how Sir Walter Scott in the Western district,1836-1851 began with the idea that a dominant ideology, or discourse, could be tracked through its informing of popular literary texts ,from its genesis in early capitalist Britain to the early colonial settlement of my own local region of south-west Victoria.

The „imagining“ of the Australian identity, of egalitarian and democratic tradition of bush mateship which I had believed was our family's priority was one viewpoint but .

"An equally potent but less enthusiastically discussed foundation myth in Australian history is that of „private enterprise“, the ethos of individual competition, economic self-interest and „free market“ capitalism.

In the historical context of British occupation of Australia from the 1830s and 1840s, this discourse was known as the Doctrine of Improvement, and its most prominent activists were called „squatters“; small-venture investors with mobs of sheep as their „capital“, who „squatted“ on Aboriginal land until their claims to its economic use were recognised by officers of the Crown.

I have to admit that we in our family used the doctrine of improvement to sustain a respectable position & future .some were farmers, educators and small business men who all prospered and lived comfortable and stable lives while the original inhabitants were still caught in a time warp separated from mainstream society and the legislation and propaganda or social conditioning of the past.

Now in Queensland I have seen a repeat of the Victorian story - the masking of some events and the glorifying of other events. I see the same blaming shaming and construction of our history that is again one sided.

Michael Barnes, Qld State Coroner, Cooktown, 7 April 2005 States

“It is easy to conclude that the deprivations on the Aboriginal Communities in Queensland are the result of the failures of social engineering by successive Queensland Governments over the last two centuries.

Aboriginal policing, from its outset in 1848, has meant Aboriginal people continue to be used for the most difficult, dangerous, or unsavoury tasks without training, without resources, on the cheap, as a pretend alternative to a genuine police service.



**So far as I, (Michael Barnes) have been able to discover, no action has been taken to implement the recommendations of the numerous expert reports cited above that are all highly critical of the current model of community Police service delivery.**

The Cairns Post -published the following on 3 October 1891:

Missions to Blacks<sup>1</sup>

He asks for bread and not for stones.

Some corner where to lay his bones.

We hunt him from the land instead.

And stones we give in place of bread.

And the fair land of Queensland free.

Shall teach the blacks the Litany.

Where now his happy hunting ground?

Those marked with murderous looking mounds?

And what, pray, are the dark contents

Of those sad lonely monuments?

Ah! Sometimes white and oft-time black.

The parsons well may cry, slack!

And the fair land of Queensland free

Resolve to teach the Litany.

He asks for bread sues for life,

And in return we 'nex his wife

A fair exchange for all his sins.

We give him rum, he gives us jins.

And then we prate of freedom tall

While he exclaims you've got 'myall'.

Revenge and murder come accursed

Troopers report 'The blacks dispersed'.

And the fair land of troopers free.

Have taught the blacks their Litany.

The remnant of the outlawed race.

With spindle shanks and monkey face.

Now take their gawdy fluery ease

In towns - in rot - in filth - disease

Followed by vermin stricken curs

Whose lot is happier than theirs.

The earth he cumpers - there's no room.

The white man has pronounced his doom.

And the fair land of Queensland free

To cheer him cross the silent sea

Shall teach the blacks the Litany.^

'GTB' is the author of this literary piece, and one wonders why he would have written JB

Gribble, who was attempting to establish a mission to the Aborigines in the Cairns district.

Gribble's association with Professors Rentoul and Drummond, and the subsequent publicity

given to 'public secrets in Cairns' that is, massacres, may well have been the factor that influenced the negative view of the missionary, by bringing the district into disrepute within the colony.

Gnoble nevertheless went on to establish his mission in 1892 at Cape Grafton.

#### YARRABAH.GUNGGANDJI COUNTRY

WILLIAM WEBB- BATTLE CAMP As the diggers walked the trails towards the Palmer River near Cooktown at Cape York, the local Aboriginal people were warlike and determined to preserve their country from the intruders.

The diggers were just as determined to kill anyone who might get in their way. A terrible massacre of Indigenous Australians was the outcome : European settlement leading to missionary activity in [webjournals.ac.edu.au/.../chapter-one-european-settlement-leading.....](http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/.../chapter-one-european-settlement-leading.....)

Residents of Cairns and Smithfield quickly heard about the new anchorage and came ... Jack Shewan was an early cedar getter in the area and many Aboriginal .... Meston (1896:10) noted the 1885 massacre in which "the Mossman blacks Developing the North

In July 1901, the Mossman Central Mill Company changed its articles to prevent any Chinaman or Asiatic from acquiring shares: in the Company through mortgaging their deed of land. By 1908, the White Australian policy was established, deporting many Chinese and Kanakas, and the Company deleted the clause from their articles.

As restricted numbers of Italian labourers arrived to cut cane, the Bishop of North

Queensland, George Frodsham spoke at the Church of England's 1906 Australian Congress in Melbourne. "We have an airy way of speaking about Australia being a white man's country. But Australia first of all was a black man's country and I have never heard that a black man invited us to take his property away from him".

Despite the goodwill Australia showed when they voted 90 % in the referendum to let Aborigines vote, they still have difficulty admitting the dispossessions and brutality of the past and their inbuilt preferences that allowed this to happen. Inaccurate historical facts still reflect today on relations with other cultures and races .

Any conference that deals with culture or .multi- culture needs to begin with our earliest endeavours , traumas and struggles that included strong class & racial biases which are the foundation of our NATION.