

Indigenous justice and our Edmonds and Crosthwaite ancestry

Sandra Edmonds and Jim Crosthwaite (Settler Families Giving Back)

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A submission to the [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#), which “is looking into injustice experienced by First Peoples in Victoria since colonisation ... Your story will help Yoorrook create a public record of this injustice.”

Our family has set up a fund called Settler Families Giving Back to support autonomous Indigenous groups that build capacity and resilience amongst their members and the wider community. One son and his wife helped to set up the Fund and make financial contributions, the other son who lives in England is very supportive.

We recognise the history of colonisation in Australia, the dispossession, and the relative privilege of our family members past and present. The beneficiaries include our Vietnamese daughter-in-law who arrived in Australia about 15 years ago. No matter how long each of us has been here we all benefit from that legacy and strongly feel the need to give back as part of reconciliation. So far our fund has sponsored the [Dardi Munwurro](#) football team in the Reclink competition and helped with small grants to [Kiilalaana](#) in Mildura.

Jim grew up on his family's dairy farm in the Kiewa Valley in North-East Victoria. This farm was on land taken from the original First Nations inhabitants. Four Crosthwaite brothers had come from England, the first in 1859, well after initial dispossession in the 1830s. The brothers took over a squatting run and later selected prime areas of land. Most of this land remained within the family for over 120 years. Jim and his cousins, all descendants of the second brother to arrive, lived on four properties nearby.

In contrast to the lives of most Indigenous people of his generation, Jim and his cousins had a secure life that gave them and the next generation a great start in education, careers, and family life. Jim was fortunate to go to the University of New England where he tutored Aboriginal children, participated in land rights marches, and witnessed the horrible living conditions in fringe settlements. A long stay in a village in coastal Papua New Guinea confirmed for him the relative privilege of most Australians.

On her mother's side, Sandra has ancestors from the very early settlement of Western Australia at Augusta, Swan River and Geraldton. She grew up in Adelaide in a less secure family environment where it was hard to make ends meet. Still, she was able to go to university and establish a career in law, lecturing and public service. Through shared experience in working class struggles, her mother was a good friend of Gladys Elphick, a well-known Indigenous elder in South Australia.

We know more about the interactions between our ancestors and the First Peoples in Tasmania than in Victoria and Western Australia. Two women, a generation apart, came to live in North East Victoria after marrying Jim's great-grandfather and grandfather.

Great-grandmother Ann was the daughter of the harbour master in Hobart and the granddaughter of the Master of the Supreme Court, then Van Diemen's Land. Each of these men received substantial land grants and participated in the justice system that dealt so harshly with Indigenous people before, during and after the Black Wars of the 1820s. One of these ancestors later came to Melbourne bankrupt, blaming in part repeated attacks on his property. The other had chaired a meeting of colonists following Governor Arthur's call to all citizens to mobilise and support the Black Line to expel Indigenous peoples from colonised land.

Jim's grandmother Mary was the granddaughter of one of the teachers who became headmaster of the King's Orphan School in Hobart; Indigenous children, separated from families or destitute, were forced to live in the school over the years. Earlier, Mary's relatives had owned the Lennox Arms Hotel at Richmond which proudly hosted a military barracks for soldiers protecting settlers and chasing down Indigenous people.

In our view, it is important to acknowledge and take ownership of our history without feeling guilty. We all need to investigate our histories through each family line no matter when the first of our ancestors came to Australia.