



TRANSCRIPT OF SUBMISSION

BARBARA CLARKE - 21 NOVEMBER 2024

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MS CLARKE: My name is Barbara Clarke and I thank the Yoorrook Justice Commission for the opportunity to offer this testimony. I will tell the truth to the best
5 of my ability.

I'm joined by my cousin, Jason Clarke, who I have to thank for having the courage to join me here when others didn't. We are sorry that our application came too late to allow us to appear before the commissions personally and answer any questions that
10 they might have had for us, but we would welcome the opportunity to answer any questions that they would like to ask us after reading and viewing our evidence.

We want to tell the Yoorrook Justice Commission about two aspects of our family's history with this country. The first aspect is about how both our ancestors and we
15 ourselves have lived unconsciously failing to understand the cultural protocols which should have been observed from the start in the interacting with First Nations people of this country. We also need to give a trigger warning to the people of the First Nations tribes who our ancestors dispossessed with their colonising activities, particularly to the members of the Wotjobaluk tribe for the deaths of some tribe
20 members my ancestors and/or their employees were responsible.

We deeply regret this fact. We wholeheartedly apologise to their families and other tribal members and we wish that it had never happened, but it did. And we apologise in advance for instances in which we use language such as that commonly used in
25 colonial times which we quote from our sources which First Nations people along with ourselves will find offensive. Secondly, we want to talk about what we are doing to act consciously and with integrity in this country.

In my own bloodlines, one great-grandfather was Alfred Deakin whose shameful adoption of the Half-Caste Act my second cousin Peter Sharp has addressed in his
30 Yoorrook testimony. I say what he said. But in this testimony we concentrate mainly on the evidence concerning the land grabbing activities of William John Turner, also known as Big Clarke, our joint paternal grandfather.

For the purposes of OUR Yoorrook Justice Commission submission we have restricted ourselves with one exception to discussion only of what is now known as the State of Victoria or more correctly Wurundjeri, Bunurong, Gunaikurnai, Wadawurrung and other tribal names, country, formerly known as the Port Phillip district of New South Wales when Batman and Pascoe Fawkner they claim to land
40 there, although Big Clarke had land holdings in other states.

We have used Michael Clarke's book Big Clarke published in 1980 as our major source. Big Clarke's son, Sir William Clarke's property holdings were covered in Michael Clarke's second family biography, Clarke of Rupertswood, 1813-1897: the
45 Life and Times of William John Clarke, First Baronet of Rupertswood published in 1995.

It should be noted that as a Clarke descendent himself, Michael Clarke may not be a wholly reliable witness, although his willingness to report the murders of some First Nations people on Big Clarke's properties might make him - might him - might not make him a wholly unreliable witness either.

5

So the exception to the Victorian side of things is I want to talk about properties called Merton Vale and Lovely Banks which Big Clarke had in Van Diemen's Land on - I think it's Kanamuluka country. On 4 October 1830 Clarke and his assigned servants were drafted into participating in the Black War by Governor Phillip. The idea here was that settlers would form a cordon across the whole state, walk in a straight line and drive the current inhabitants into the south-west corner of Van Diemen's Land. Big Clarke was really annoyed at having to go to this war because he was very busy with his farming activities and it was almost lambing time, but he couldn't get out of it so he went. They walked in the straight line for some time but the weather was terrible and the bush was dense and so fairly soon they found themselves walking in single file along kangaroo tracks and tracks that the traditional owners used. So - yes.

Okay. The next property I want to talk about is Dowling Forest and Buningyong which is in the vicinity of the current town of Ballarat which is Wadawurrung country. And then in 1987 he - Big Clarke selected a 20,000 acre section of block number 14 in the vicinity of Little River just north of Geelong and running between Station Peak and Port Phillip Bay. As he travelled this country he noticed kangaroos hopping around, thin columns of smoke rising from distant camp fires, ie, that the country was already occupied, and plentiful kangaroo grass capable of feeding thousands of sheep. Michael Clarke 1980, Big Clarke, page 57.

The fact that the kangaroo grass was capable of feeding thousands of sheep fills today's environmentalists with horror due to its almost complete eradication. But these facts gave him no pause in thinking about whether he could legitimately occupy this land, turning it to his own clauses, speaks volumes for our ancestors' unconsciously privileged coloniser settlement mentality.

Then there was Woodlands in the late 1830s which was on Wotjobaluk land. Now, I think I've lost my page. Can I have that page back again for a minute. Yep. Sorry. Okay. So Woodlands was in the Wimmera district, the upper Wimmera River. I'm unsure if he in theory owned 183,000 or 230,000 acres. Big Clarke didn't even apply to buy it from the government because it was so remote that he thought beyond the reach of the police and he didn't think anybody in authority would come to inspect it so he just occupied the land with his sheep and cattle which was and is Wotjobaluk country and appointed John Kale Francis as superintendent. This can be interpreted as the cultural misunderstanding about different methods of "land ownership" between First Nations and white colonisers. Unsurprisingly Bili Bili and the Wotjobaluk tribe deeply resented this invasion of their country and had many bloody encounters with Francis. Clarke 1980, Big Clarke page 81-86, Journal of ES Parker, manuscripts La Trobe library, and Edgar Morrison 1966, page 15, Early Days in the Loddon Valley.

In March 1841 Edwards Stone Parker, magistrate and protector of the Loddon Valley Aborigines, actually visited Woodlands:

5 "to investigate the slaughter of several Aborigines by Mr Francis in
December 1840."

Journal of ES Parker, manuscripts La Trobe library. Mr Francis admitted to shooting four Aborigines for setting the bush on fire. Clarke, page 80. We can now see that this is likely to have arisen from another cultural misunderstanding regarding the
10 need to burn country in a specific way to maintain its health. Parker believed that six First Nations people had been killed and alleged that Francis had:

"Manifested an utter disregard of human life."

15 Journal ES Parker manuscripts, La Trobe library.

Big Clarke was extremely concerned at what had been happening in his absence and went up to Woodlands to find out for himself, for reporting to Michael Clarke:

20 "He took pride in his previous avoidance of any trouble with them."

1980, page 80.

25 "He was alarmed that Francis had been carrying out a frontier war with the
Wotjobaluk tribe ...

(Clarke page 81)

30 "...in retribution for them driving off around 1,000 head of sheep and
enterprisingly mimicking their colonisers by setting up their own station.
Some of the sheep had been recovered but some had been killed."

Clarke page 80.

35 On one occasion the tribe had repulsed Francis and his men when they tracked them into the mountains and kept the sheep. Shepherds had been attacked and one had been badly speared. TF Bride, Letters from Victorian Pioneers, Melbourne, 1898.

Michael Clarke quotes Big Clarke:

40 "When my people found it necessary to defend themselves a number of the
blacks, I am sorry to say, was shot. Mr Francis, the overseer, was many times
engaged in fights with them."

45 1980, page 81. With seeming legal impunity no police came to arrest him or anything. Except that Parker paid him a second visit, this time to invest the reported murder of a native shot in the sheep yard. Clarke 1980 at page 84. Francis lived by

violence and died by violence when he was stabbed in the stomach by an Irish station hand with a rusty sheer blade. Clarke 1980, page 84.

5 Rockbank. In 1853 Big Clarke bought Rockbank in the Melton shire or what is now the Melton shire and began constructing bluestone buildings including one of Victoria's largest early bluestone shearing sheds, a manager's house, shearers' quarters, boundary riders quarters, a large bluestone underground tank, a causeway across the Kororoit Creek, a number of dry stone walls including dams, a pigsty, a brick kiln, stables, cooks house and likely a dairy. Clarke ended up, he was probably
10 the most significant supplier of sheep which were walked to the Newmarket Saleyards in the 19th century and in 2007 the Heritage Council classified the property as being of state significance.

15 Now, the later properties of the Clarke family, I'm going to show you a map of the area of Victoria covering the country seats of Sunbury and Bolinda Vale; Rupertswood and Bolinda Vale. The green sections are the bits owned in inverted commas by the Clarkes, so you can see that that was a fairly large proportion of that section of Victoria. Punch made a cartoon of Big Clarke which seems to sum it up reasonably well. I don't know if you can read the caption but it is "The man in
20 possession."

But what ethical dimension and cultural dimensions that possession had were probably not understood in a similar way between Clarke and the First Nations people of the area who would have been the Wurundjeri people, I think.

25 Now I want to talk a bit about the way I am trying to live consciously and with integrity on this land. I had some fine teachers along the way. One of them was a small community group that I belong to which ties a tenth of the registration fees for its annual gathering and donates the results to various causes such as Aboriginal women's refuges, dance troupes. They gave some money for art materials at one
30 stage. Yes, so giving First Nations people control over what they do with the money.

When I was studying community development at Swinburne in 1997 I came across a definition called deep colonising in an article by Deborah Bird Rose in the 1996
35 Aboriginal Law Bulletin numbers 69 and she defines deep colonising as:

"Practices of colonisation are embedded in the institutions that are meant to reverse processes of colonisation."

40 And we have seen a number of examples of that lately, one of which is the referendum, I suspect. But - yes. The saying is we need a path not to go from here to there, but to go from here to here. I sleep walked through much of my early life living unconsciously but I've been moving from here to here with the help of some extraordinary First Nations teachers for a while now.

45 In 1993 a proud Nunga woman ran a workshop I attended in which she told her audience you are all displaced people. We all said, "No, we're not. Our family has

been here for X generations and we love Australia and we feel like we belong here" and she sent us away to talk in groups of our cultures of origins. When we came back we had to admit that she was right. She then told us that we needed to know where our motherlines had come from seven generations ago before we'd really know
 5 where we had come from. This sent me on a quest but so far I've only managed to get four generations back to Eliza Dowling of Buckington, Western Zoyland and Granton in Somerset and Sarah Bill from Clonarth in Wales regarding some of my motherlines. And the name of the farm had changed when I went to Granton to find where my ancestors came from. It was called Coats Farm but when my grandfather
 10 Frank had written a family book he talked about taking my father to Dove Coat farm which was situated diagonally opposite the rector's place in Granton.

Now, as I said, the name of the property had changed to Coats Farm, but it was diagonally opposite to the rector's place in Granton and I felt a really strong pull
 15 there just to go and touch the bricks because although the current owners knew nothing of the history of the place and not even the 81-year-old oldest residents of the village knew anything about Dove Coat farm, I had this really, really strong feel that this is where my people had come from. And so - yes, that was a strong feeling of belonging there in Somerset which is minuscule, I imagine, in comparison with
 20 the feeling of belonging of First Nations people who have been here for thousands and thousands of years.

So if we were displaced what were we doing here? The answer is benefiting from the displacement of the First Nations inhabitants of this land accomplished by Jason's
 25 and my great-great-grandfather, William John Turner Clarke, AKA Big Clarke. Yes, so we've talked a little bit about Big Clarke's sometimes lawful but sometimes more creative land accumulation and we cannot cover all of his activities but, you know, I hope the map gave you some idea of the extent of his land holdings in this country.

I've talked about pay the rent. In 1996 I heard a radio program on Radio National which was a discussion between Jackie Huggins and Bell Hooks, an African-American feminist, and Jackie later reproduced the conversation in a book. And something that she said kind of astonished me, although it's quite logical. She said that women were colonists too and we have to think about their role in the
 35 occupation of this country. And she and Bell discussed the fact how black women often don't want to join white feminist circles because, as Jackie said, white women are colonists too and they need to deconstruct their own thinking before they can respectfully interact with black feminists.

40 Yeah, so examples of deep colonising, some of which have hit me in the guts hard. Yeah, thinking about that caption, "the man in possession", like possession is nine-tenths of the law. No, I don't think so.

Yes. I saw a policeman trying to escort an elder from the sacred fire at Camp
 45 Sovereignty during the Stolenwealth Games. That really got to me, how utterly disrespectful that was. I supported Camp Sovereignty by scrounging for station wagon loads of food to support the camp and I just delivered the food and left and

later on a Gunaikunai elder thanked me for my respect in not wanting to borne in on discussions by First Nations people. Yeah. Later on I was able to sneak that same elder and another into a United Nations conference on the sustainable development goals which was only the fifth United Nations conference which had been held
 5 outside the United Nations, so my community group had a couple of extra registration tags and I thought okay, well, give them to her and she use them to go around and talk to all the other traditional owners from other countries who are attending this conference.

10 I like to find little cracks where I can insert or help First Nations people to insert themselves through the massive brick wall of deep colonisation. In 2010 I sat in Parliament House with a number of traditional owners hearing very eloquent stories of their connection to land and how they begged the Victorian government just to give them two more weeks before debating the bill because many of them had had -
 15 not had time to read it or digest it, but no, deep colonisation prevailed and the bill was passed in a really cruel hard-hearted way, in my view.

Then there was Juukan Gorge which I'm not the only person who was devastated about it being blown up. And the Djab Wurrung birthing trees campaign in October
 20 2020 whereby the government was wanting to cut down the trees to make the highways straighter when, as various environmental and construction people had showed, there was a very suitable alternate route which would achieve the same thing. But no, they chopped down the direction tree, chopped it up in pieces and paraded it around the town in the back of a truck. That really got to me too.

25 Just not long before that tree was chopped down I'd travelled up to the Djab Wurrung protest site to give them support and there I had met and talked to somebody called Zelenak and he told me that he was reading every word of the Australian Constitution very carefully to see how it could be used to support traditional owners
 30 rights, human rights. And I told him that I absolutely approved of that activity and it was a really good thing to be doing and then I said to him, "And I think I need to tell you who I am" and I told him that I was the great-granddaughter of the person who had partly drafted that constitution. And we had a really powerful interaction together. Both of us were quite shaken in a way by it. And just before I left Zelenak
 35 cell came up to me and presented me with a club which he had been fretting from a Mallee root but it was unfinished and I treasure that club and I take it as a sign that the battle is not over and that we have to keep fighting and Zelenak, I am.

I just want to mention a tiny bit about my other great-grandfather's influence. Yeah.
 40 So he had three daughters and he really loved his three daughters and he encouraged them all to get a good education. And when I was cleaning out my mother's effects I came across a letter dated 1881 from his wife, Patty Deakin, to her sister-in-law Catherine and in it she related how Deakin had gone to see the Madame Tussauds touring exhibition and outside it he had seen five little shoeless urchins craning to try
 45 and see what was going on in there. And he paid for their entry and he took them around every exhibition and he explained what each one meant. And I just have trouble reconciling the fact that he could have such compassion for those young kids,

but none whatsoever for the families affected by the Half-Cast Act which he coldly and calculatedly made sure passed the Parliament.

5 And I want to end on a happier note. And Auntie Joy Murphy Wandon is a very special person to me. And she gave that first Welcome to Country at the Melbourne Town Hall and I thought wow, that must have taken quite a lot out of her to do that and I think it was a brilliant piece of reverse psychology because some people who might not have thought about this before thought oh, a welcome here, oh, does that mean that I wasn't welcome before, and hopefully that set some of them off on a line
10 of thought which they would pursue.

So straight after Auntie Joy's welcome I walked around the corner to a café, sat down and wrote the only song I had ever written in my life and since the Deakin University truth telling session was not released to the public, I would like to sing it to you now.
15 It's called "Honour the Leaf."

You gave me a leaf, sister, and I know what that means. I will try to tread lightly now that you've spoken. We'll walk together now the drought's broken. Yours to forgive. Mine to remember. Yours to forgive. Mine to remember. Leaves from the
20 same tree woven by spirit. All my relations walking, learning, hearing, together. I will honour that leaf from the earth to the sky. I am remembering. I am remembering. I am remembering.

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