

# **ACT Government Genealogy Project**

**Our Kin Our Country**

**August 2012 Report**

# Foreword

**European settlement in the 19th century had a devastating effect on Aboriginal cultures and populations. Moreover, subsequent government policies carried out in the 20th century — of separating Aboriginal people onto missions and reserves, prohibiting their culture and language, and removing their children — continue to affect families, generations and communities in regrettable ways.**

The ACT Government is committed to assisting Aboriginal people overcome this legacy of dislocation and disadvantage.

We recognise that research into the family lines of Aboriginal people connected to this region will not only fill a gap in the history and habitation of the region, but, more significantly, will be valuable and affirming for Aboriginal people and their families, supporting them to better understand their own heritage.

Positive effects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been observed following the recovery of cultural identity. Genealogical information builds the capacity of Aboriginal people to be able to tangibly identify and recover lost family connections and tell their stories.

When the ACT Government first initiated this project, it did not foresee the far-reaching scope and support it would garner from members of our region's Aboriginal community, and indeed the wider community.

From the beginning, it has been about giving a context, as well as a tangible record, to the descendants of the families who first inhabited this region as their home.

Recognising and respecting the importance of their contribution and significance to the land on which we all now live is a priority of the ACT Government, and indeed the current and future generations of Aboriginal families connected to the region.

The genealogy project is an opportunity for the national capital to lead in an Aboriginal cultural revival in the spirit of reconciliation and to build Aboriginal leadership in the Territory.

This overview report provides a snapshot of what has been achieved so far, and what is still to come.

**Dr Chris Bourke MLA**

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

August 2012

# Acknowledgments

**The ACT Government's Our Kin, Our Country genealogy project has been made possible by the generosity and willingness of many Aboriginal families from Canberra, Queanbeyan, Yass, Cowra, Bega, Sydney, Gundagai, Tumut and Cooma.**

We are grateful to the many family representatives who generously gave their time, sharing unique and precious family histories and perspectives, and reviewing genealogical material as it developed.

Their participation has contributed significantly to the major documentation of past and present Aboriginal cultural history in the region, creating a valuable resource for future generations.

A special thanks is due to Lyn Marlow who conducted and shared her extensive research in the NSW Government archives.

We are also thankful to the many experts and institutions that provided assistance including, but not limited to:

- Ardeth Pemberton Family History Assistance
- ACT Heritage Unit
- United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC)
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
- State Library of NSW, Mitchell Wing
- St Augustine's Catholic Church, Yass
- National Library of Australia
- Libraries ACT.

## Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the data and information contained in this report. In the gathering of that information, several sources were consulted and facts double-checked. However, due to the sensitive and historical nature of the subject matter, and also the lack in some instances of detailed recordkeeping over the past 200 years, the ACT Government and its contractors cannot be held accountable if there are discrepancies.

## Executive summary

**This is a report on the outcomes and findings of the ACT Government's Our Kin, Our Country genealogy project, the scope of which was to research and compile genealogies for Aboriginal people claiming connection to the ACT and surrounding region.**

The main aim of the project was to strengthen those protective factors identified as needed for social and emotional wellbeing in Aboriginal communities. These factors include connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family, and community. Research indicates that connection to land and kinship networks promote Aboriginal people's sense of wellbeing.

The comprehensive dislocation of Aboriginal populations, following European settlement, has led to a high proportion of Indigenous Australians, particularly those living in urban settings, who do not know their traditional origins. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) records show a high number of Aboriginal families in the ACT affected by the *Stolen Generation* era.

The ACT Government recognises the traumatic impacts of colonisation on the population and social structures of Aboriginal communities in the 19th century through to the draconian 'welfare' policies of the 20th century. The government is committed to a holistic approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing and has sought through this project a way to enable Aboriginal families local to the region to 'reconnect'.

Terms of reference for the research were set as follows:

- research and compile genealogies of families with association to the ACT and surrounding region irrespective of the traditional identity or no traditional identity
- research and identify the likely cultural area, and spatial location and organisation of the Aboriginal populations that occupied what is now the ACT and surrounding region at the time of European settlement.

In addition, a key principle was that the project's processes and outcomes should contribute to Aboriginal people's wellbeing as broadly as possible, involving Aboriginal people in those processes and outcomes.

To compile the genealogies, professional family historians were engaged to research the genealogies and store them in a genealogical database. The first interviews with families were conducted in late 2010. Since that time, dozens of meetings and interviews with 29 family representatives have been conducted, thousands of source documents collected, detailed family history books created, and the archives have been scoured to find evidence of the original inhabitants of the region.

Despite the sensitive and sometimes confronting nature of the project, many Aboriginal people from Canberra and regional areas such as Cooma and Cowra participated. And the feedback as this project has unfolded over the past two years has been extremely positive from both the Aboriginal community, and the wider community.

As at August 2012, the project research has generated the following outcomes:

- a fully annotated genealogical database covering more than 5000 individuals, European and Aboriginal, from the early 19th century to the present day for what appears to be a highly networked regional population.
- a collection of more than 2000 primary and secondary source records which were used to document the life events in the database
- creation of 29 detailed family history books, which range in size from 200 to 1500 pages of charts and associated source material made up of transcripts or copies of birth, death, marriage, baptismal,

convict and other records.

- for the 29 family representatives and their families, the source material validated over 120 key ancestors and associated lines of descent to present day families.
- including families that may be descended from Eden–Monaro and Tumut–Brungle territory has generated a picture of a definite regional Aboriginal population that has adapted and survived the initial European occupation.

The main population finding from the genealogical data is unmistakable: a surprisingly resilient regional population maintained through a distinct web of family networks in the immediate region surrounding the ACT. This has been the case across Australia. Whatever the original tribal and other group affiliations, what emerges repeatedly across the continent, surviving and adapting to the vicissitudes of settlement, population decline and dispersal, and official policies of segregation, child removal and assimilation, are Aboriginal communities which are based profoundly on strong kinship networks despite the disruption and trauma of colonisation.

For Aboriginal people in the region this finding is important as it confirms their place as a unique and important part of the Australian story.

Finding ancestors and discovering the links to other families has been an enormously affirming experience for the participants. Now, participants of the project are educating others in the community about family connections, who in turn are extending their knowledge about their family lines. These discoveries of kin will continue to grow and along with this knowledge, a strengthening of cultural identity.

In recent decades, many Aboriginal people have migrated to the territory from surrounding NSW. It is estimated that a significant proportion of the ACT Aboriginal population may be descended from the original inhabitants of the region under study for this project. It is anticipated that a number of family group connections will continue to be authenticated through the project for these people.

Developing the family history books as a collaboration between the Aboriginal families who participated in the project and the ACT Government has helped families have confidence in the project. The family history books have proved to be powerful tools for connecting families with families, and building knowledge in the regional population. The books are a particularly important resource for community Elders, creating a legacy to pass on to the younger generation. This will contribute to building pride in Aboriginal identity, providing closure for families who have lost connection. In short, the family history books will continue to increase understanding in the community about the role Aboriginal families have played in the region far better than summary genealogical material included in a report.

The genealogical material in the database with the significant collection of source material now stands as an important cultural history resource for both the Aboriginal and wider community, increasing depth of understanding of the past, redressing the losses of the last 200 years.

This resource represents an exciting opportunity for continued research into regional family networks and lines of descent. Initial analysis of the data suggests that of the 5000 individuals documented in the database, there are hundreds of individuals, mostly Aboriginal and some non-Aboriginal, who could be considered as key ancestors for this region. The collection of thousands of primary and secondary source records provides a rich archive of biographical material for these ancestors and their descendants.

The benefit of this project to Aboriginal people, the participants and the regional communities will be ongoing as more of their stories are told and gaps in knowledge about family kinship lines are breached. For families who have been disrupted by past policies of removing Aboriginal children from their families, this kind of information has been, and will prove to be, invaluable. The telling of stories will continue to strengthen cultural identity, critical to community wellbeing and the countering of past destructive policies and practices.

For all of us, a better understanding of our shared past will contribute to the process of reconciliation.

# Introduction

**In recent decades, the Australian nation has undergone a radical transformation in its approach to its democratic responsibilities to respect the right of everyone to ‘have a fair go’ and to be respected for their cultural and racial backgrounds and the contributions they make.**

The demise of the White Australia Policy, the increasing Aboriginal activism for land rights and equality, and the emergence of a new school of history have allowed the Aboriginal side of the Australian story to be told and national government policy to change accordingly.

The ACT, with the seat of Commonwealth Government, has been the scene for much of this change, from the establishment of the tent embassy in 1972, the historic Mabo and Wik decisions to the National Apology for the *Stolen Generations*.

In recent decades, many Aboriginal people have come to the ACT to pursue jobs in the growing Commonwealth public service and also to pursue careers as academics and activists. Many have also come because the ACT and Queanbeyan are regional centres of employment, health and education services.

The ACT, with a growing Aboriginal population, stands in a unique position to take the lead in Aboriginal cultural revival in partnership with the community to recover the Aboriginal heritage of the region and build Aboriginal leadership in the Territory.

## Project background

Work began on this significant project when the ACT Government allocated \$100,000 funding in the 2010 ACT Budget to ‘research and compile genealogies for each of the acknowledged Aboriginal clans who are based in the ACT’.

This project sought to honour the diverse and complex histories of Aboriginal people throughout the region since the establishment of British sovereignty and assist families to verify their historical and cultural associations to the region by uncovering genealogical links to the past and between contemporary families.

A further aim was to reflect the way in which traditional Aboriginal social structures have not disappeared but have adapted since contact and been transformed into distinctly recognisable groupings.

Needs and issues to be addressed through the project were grouped as follows:

1. **Inter- and intra-familial disputes about the processes, findings and limitations of previous genealogical research into some of the Aboriginal family networks of the region.** Previous genealogical research, limited to some family lines, has created inequities between those families who have access to authenticated historical and genealogical knowledge and those who do not. Previous genealogical research is discussed in Chapter 2.
2. **Disputes about what would have been the traditional language or other group affiliations of Aboriginal populations in the region.** In particular, since the ACT Government’s 2002 recognition of the ACT as Ngunnawal territory there has been disagreement in the community about whether or not this identification is an appropriate or adequate description of the territory’s original Aboriginal population. This decision has caused concern because there are some historical accounts that indicate that other languages such as Ngarigu and Walgalu may also have been spoken in the Canberra region. In addition, one group formerly identifying as Ngunnawal now wish to be recognised as Ngambri. The 2002 ‘Ngunnawal’ decision was taken out of respect for Aboriginal self-determination. The ACT Government accepted the general consensus at the time of a gathering of Ngunnawal people that the territory should be considered Ngunnawal.
3. **Indigenous wellbeing.** Research indicates that connection to land and kinship networks supports

Indigenous wellbeing. According to the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA), connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry and family and community are protective factors for wellbeing. They can also serve as a:

*unique reservoir of resilience and recovery in the face of adversity and moderate the impact of stressful circumstances on the social and emotional wellbeing at the individual, family and community level. Land is central to social relationships and the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous individuals, families and communities.*<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the comprehensive dislocation of Aboriginal populations following European settlement has led to a high proportion of Indigenous Australians, more than 40 per cent, who do not know their traditional origins. The Australian Bureau of Statistics records a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT affected by the *Stolen Generation* policies.

4. **Who will benefit.** The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the ACT has been growing steadily since the 1970s. The 2011 ABS census figures show that 5183 people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reside in the ACT, up from 3872 in 2006 — an increase of 33.9 per cent. With this inwards migration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the Territory, there are a particularly high number of Aboriginal people from surrounding NSW. In the five years between 1996 and 2001, about 846 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples moved from other parts of Australia to live in Canberra. Most came from NSW, with 97 of these coming from the region around Canberra. It is therefore estimated that a significant proportion of the ACT Aboriginal population may be descended from the original inhabitants of ACT and surrounding region. It is anticipated that a number of their family groups will be authenticated through the project. Aboriginal people from other parts of Australia would like to know that the best effort has been made to respect the original inhabitants of the region and those who may be descended from them.
5. **The geographical area under study.** A generous regional boundary was defined in advance based on the geography of the region and likely patterns of occupation of that geography, what is known historically about the Aboriginal populations after settlement.

The main geographical areas for the focus of the genealogical research were Canberra–Queanbeyan, Yass region, the Tumut–Brungle region and the Eden–Monaro region. It also included parts of Victoria, formerly within NSW, particularly Gippsland.

No genealogical study of south-east NSW could ignore the important population concentration and dispersal sites of the former missions and reserves such as Lake Tyres in Victoria, Wallaga Lake on the South Coast, Erambie Mission in Cowra, Warengesda, Hollywood, Edgerton at Yass, Brungle, Delegate. Some of these sites did not survive the turn of the 20th century, such as Braidwood or Delegate, others emerged in the 20th century, for example, Hollywood, Lake Tyres, and Warengesda and some which survived to the present including Wallaga Lake and Erambie.

**Chapter 1** provides background on Aboriginal kinship systems, and an overview of how, as elsewhere in Australia, traditional Aboriginal societies and territorial relationships in the region have transformed since contact with Europeans. This chapter includes a description of Aboriginal society in the region prior to European settlement.

**Chapter 2** discusses the project's research methodology and findings.

**Chapter 3** provides a summary of the findings and outcomes and discusses possible further research.

## **The future of the research material and access**

The Our Kin, Our Country project has generated a significant record of the families of the region, many of

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA), *Defining Indigenous Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health*, [www.indigenoupsychology.com.au/publications](http://www.indigenoupsychology.com.au/publications).

whom now reside in the ACT.

Through this record, it is envisaged that individuals will be able to continue to access their family's information and add new information to their histories.

The ACT Government is seeking a secure repository for the family histories and significant genealogical data that has now been compiled.

In the short term, the ACT Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs will continue to maintain the database and associated resources.

As genealogical material does contain some information which is personal and sensitive, access to the resource will be subject to privacy considerations.

The genealogical material created through the project — family history books, a genealogical database, and a significant collection of source materials — now stand as important cultural history resources for both the Aboriginal and wider community, increasing depth of understanding of the past, redressing the losses of the last two hundred years.

By advancing and broadening the genealogical knowledge in the Aboriginal community, the project will allow a more equitable voice to various Aboriginal groups and individuals in terms of their role in the cultural life of the region.

## **Conventions**

The name of Aboriginal language groups have been spelt differently at different times, by different groups of people for different purposes. For example, in this report, for Aboriginal language names, we have used the following spellings:

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Ngunnawal	Ngun(n)awal	Ngunawal
Walgalu	Walgal	
Ngarigu	Ngarigo	
Ngambri	Ngambra	Kamburry

# 1 Kin and Country

**Before the arrival of European settlers, the greater Canberra region had been home to Aboriginal people for up to 20,000 years. This chapter describes the effect of European settlement on Aboriginal societies in south-eastern NSW and what has survived as important elements of Aboriginal culture and kinship systems today.**

## The country

The ACT is located in the south-east of New South Wales. It covers 2358km<sup>2</sup>, is the smallest territory in Australia, and stretches 88km from north to south and only 30km from west to east. The ACT is bounded by the former Goulburn–Cooma railway line in the east, the watershed of Naas Creek in the south, the watershed of the Cotter River in the west, and the watershed of the Molonglo River in the north-east.

The ACT includes two geographic features — tablelands and mountain ranges. The tablelands are generally considered to extend from Gungahlin in the north to Lanyon in the south, bounded in the west by the Murrumbidgee River and in the southwest by the Namadji Ranges. The highlands of the ACT, collectively known as the Namadji Ranges, are the northernmost outlying peaks of the Australian Alps, made up of ranges of between 1400 and 1900m in altitude and numerous deep river valleys. Over 42 per cent of the territory is taken up by the ridges, forests and rivers of Namadji National Park.

The mountainous areas of the ACT include the catchments for the Cotter and Gudgenby rivers and their tributaries. This was to supply water to the capital city.<sup>2</sup>

The tablelands consist of gently undulating plains (at an altitude of less than 610m), and scattered hills, covered with savannah grasslands and woodland vegetation. The summer–winter temperature ranges would have allowed occupation by Aboriginal people throughout the year.<sup>3</sup>

Two major rivers flow across and around the tablelands, the Murrumbidgee and the Molonglo Rivers. Previously, other waterways like Ginninderra, Sullivan's (formerly Ngambra / Kamburry) and Tuggeranong creeks snaked across the grasslands creating chains of ponds which only flowed rapidly only when in flood. In this environment, the greatest diversity of animal species would have occurred between forest and woodland.

## Prehistory

There is archaeological evidence of Aboriginal people visiting this region for over 20,000 years. The territory is rich with archaeological evidence of Aboriginal occupation. There was a wide variety of resources and places to support the Aboriginal way of life on the plains and hills of what is now the greater Canberra region. There were places for ceremonies and sources for body paint and ochre, places for burial, and raw materials for tool manufacture, plants for fibre, food and medicine. There are still quarries, scarred trees, and stone artefact scatters across the ACT's lowlands. There are stone arrangements in the Namadji ranges.

There are large lowland base-camps open sites stretching several kilometres such as the one found at Pialligo. This site is similar to two other large sites at Reidsdale on the ACT–NSW border in the north and Nardoo, east of Lake George. In the ACT, Aboriginal occupation sites have often been found located close to aquatic resources, to wet sclerophyll forests or to bogong moth habitats. Medium-sized lowland camps occur in a lineal pattern along riverbanks of the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee Rivers, and Ginninderra and

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<sup>2</sup> Moore, Bruce 1997, *Cotter Country*, p1.

<sup>3</sup> Kabaila, Peter 1997, *Belconnen's Aboriginal Past*

Tuggeranong Creeks.

The oldest Aboriginal site so far found in the ACT is the Birrigai rock shelter, located in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, which contains stone tools and charcoal from campfires dating back over 21,000 years. On the Eden–Monaro, archaeological evidence dates back to 50,000 years.<sup>4</sup>

Hunter-gatherer life style meant that people were always on the move allowing resources to replenish. Archaeological evidence shows that the ACT was criss-crossed with well-worn foot tracks, and significant trails leading to other regions and tribal territories. Trade routes ran for hundreds of kilometres. It was possible to trade bone, shell, wood, fur and stones from across the continent.

As elsewhere in Australia, Aboriginal people managed the environment with fire to clear undergrowth to create a parklike environment to make hunting and managing game easier. Several times a year Aboriginal people in the open woodlands could flush out the kangaroos by fire or spear them in the open woodlands. Fire was also used to cook, char and harden wood for tools and weapons. Bark was used for water holders.

According to early settler accounts the Limestone Plains and woodland slopes were rich in native game: emus, kangaroos, snakes, lizards on land. Aboriginal people made toeholds in trees and climbed them to catch possums. The rivers, ponds and flood plains promoted bird life: wild turkey, emu, wood ducks, black ducks, and teal. There were numerous plants such as the yam daisy. The comb and honey of the native bees could be found in tree hollows.<sup>5</sup>

In the open forests of scribbly and brittle gum, with its grassy understorey, there were wild turkey, koalas, snakes, lizards and bandicoots which would probably been caught while foraging for vegetable foods. They were easily roasted straight on the hot coals. Rich oily meat of goannas and emus and the pork-like white meat of echidnas were still eaten until the 1940s. The mountain streams were full of yellow belly, platypus, spiny crayfish, yabbies, and mountain cod.<sup>6</sup>

Aboriginal hunter gatherers travelled light. According to William Davis Wright, whose father was one of the earliest settlers, warriors were well equipped with a range of spears, nulla nullas, tomahawks, and shields. Women carried sharpened digging sticks, and baskets and bags made of grass. Kangaroo and opossum skins were sewn together with bone needles for clothing, rugs and bags. Bags were also made of twisted possum fur.

The dingo travelled with Aboriginal families, but they were soon replaced with other breeds of dog in Aboriginal camps after Europeans arrived.

It can be assumed that across the Eden–Monaro and up to Yass and Boorowa, Aboriginal people were similarly equipped.

Aboriginal people were possessed of extensive knowledge about the environment in their immediate locality and for many hundreds of kilometres, and were able to hunt and gather foods all year round.

European explorers made extensive use of Aboriginal guides when opening up territory or travelling through hazardous country. Aboriginal people assisted the early graziers in the Canberra region to find suitable grasslands for their stock, fords for crossing rivers like the Murrumbidgee, overlanding of stock through the mountains, finding lost children or bushrangers.

## European settlement

The contact period for the Canberra region is said to be relatively brief, as almost all the members of the local tribes had perished or been dispersed within little more than half a century. Most historians of the

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<sup>4</sup> McKenna, Mark 2002, *Looking for Blackfella's Point: an Australian history of place*, p.16

<sup>5</sup> Bluett, W.P. 1954, *The Aborigines of the Canberra District at the arrival of the White Man*

<sup>6</sup> Kabaila, Peter Rimas 1997, *Belconnen's Aboriginal Past: a glimpse into the archaeology of the Australian Capital Territory*

early history of Canberra, such as Lyall Gillespie and Bruce Moore, have found little evidence of violence between Aboriginal people and the settlers as happened in other places in Australia. Historians also maintain that Aboriginal people on the Limestone Plains were treated kindly by most settlers. However, they concede that the establishment of large pastoral holdings led to the wholesale dispossession of Aboriginal people who lost their land and the game they needed to hunt and gather food.

Europeans first entered the Canberra area in December 1820 when Joseph Wilde, James Vaughan and Charles Throsby Smith reached the Limestone Plains by way of the Molonglo River during an attempt to find the Murrumbidgee River, which they had heard of from Aboriginal people.

During the early expeditions, the explorers failed to meet Aboriginal people, although they saw fires in the distance, and saw burnt patches of land and in one case they disturbed a group in Tuggeranong who fled. Most exploration took place in the summer months, so Aboriginal people may have been away in the mountains or deliberately avoiding Europeans.

The tablelands in what is now the Australian Capital Territory were first called the Limestone Plains and the extensive well-watered grasslands of the Limestone Plains soon attracted squatters to what seemed to be largely uninhabited land.

In 1824, Joshua John Moore arrived and occupied 2000 acres between Black Mountain, Mount Ainslie, and the Molonglo River, now known as Acton. He was followed shortly by James Ainslie, in 1825, driving Robert Campbell's sheep. In 1826, Palmerville, a property at Ginninderra Creek was established, Timothy Beard established his squattage at Queanbeyan and Robert Johnson arrived on the Tuggeranong plains.

The settlers occupied land that had been of cultural and material significance for the local Aboriginal people. According to Bluett, there were two significant sites of occupation in then the Limestone Plains: Pialligo and the foot of Black Mountain. Archaeological evidence around Duntroon dairy and Black Mountain peninsula supports the fact that European occupation did take place on land important to the local Aboriginal people.

It is generally maintained that relations were good between the settlers and the Aboriginal people in the following years.

Various gatherings and 'corroborees' were reported in the district in Tuggeranong, Ginninderra, Black Mountain, Mt Ainslie, Queanbeyan and Pialligo. Young men were taken to Tidbinbilla for initiation during the first decades of European occupation.

The only reports of hostility recorded is from Elizabeth McKeahnie who alleges that in the 1830s Aborigines had planned to kill all the men on Moore's station, located at the foot of Black Mountain. Given the report of the 'warm reception' the Aboriginal people received on that occasion, they probably learnt early to avoid confrontation with the new landholders. There is also a report that Henry Hall, who owned Charnwood Station, shot the Aboriginal leader Hong Yong in the thigh to punish him for spearing sheep.

Within a mere 20 years of discovery and 15 years of first settlement, the Limestone Plains and many miles beyond in the Monaro and towards Yass were substantially occupied by pastoral properties, many of which were worked with assigned convict labour. Some very large holdings were established on the Limestone Plains: Springbank (1830), Yarralumla (1836), Klensdorff (late 1839), Lanyon (1835), followed also by Charnwood, Booroomba, Freshford, Tidbinbilla, and Orroral. Some of the wealthiest landowners in the new colony arrived on the Limestone Plains such as Robert Campbell, who established Duntroon.

A town was established at Queanbeyan in 1838. In 1828 the census showed that there had been 94 people living on the Limestone Plains, by 1838, there were 1728 Europeans living on the Limestone Plains, many of them convicts.

While there may be little evidence of hostility on the Limestone Plains, there is evidence of hostility in neighbouring Eden-Monaro and Yass during this time. In 1844, George August Robinson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines who travelled through the Monaro and Limestone plains reported that around Yass Aboriginal people were considered 'troublesome' and were 'shot on sight'. In 1844, Robinson, also observed a large number of half-caste children at Yarralumla.

From the decade of pastoral expansion of the 1830s, the population of traditional Aboriginal people diminished at an alarming rate. After 1840, Aboriginal camp sites were closer to European settlements than in previous years. As elsewhere in NSW, Aboriginal people turned more and more to begging. By the 1850s a small number of hunter-gatherers had survived the onslaught of European diseases and removed themselves to live in the uplands of the Monaro. They became little understood curiosities, a dying race of 'kings' and 'queens'. In the Eden–Monaro regions, reports continued of Aboriginal people being killed by settlers until later in the century.

By the middle of the 19th century, there was no longer a place for people who wished to practice the traditional hunter-gatherer ways of living. There were a few Aboriginal people who stayed to work in the area and were well known stockmen, cricketers and domestic servants. Their stories are well documented; for example, Bobby and Nellie Hamilton, Jemmy the Rover, Johnny and Jimmy Taylor.

By the mid-19th century, the land had changed substantially, becoming a landscape of starker contrasts. With the removal of Aboriginal fire management, the native forests grew thicker with dense regrowth of species such as wattles, while on the tablelands a different process took place. Early 'pioneers' weren't keen for their cattle to share the grasslands with native plants and animals. Vegetation was cleared, native game was culled and pastures restocked with thousands of sheep, cattle and horse. Rabbits, foxes and new breeds of dogs were introduced. Trees had been felled to clear the land for grazing and to be used as timber for fencing and building. The landscape was also affected by heavy grazing and erosion on hillsides which had lost trees.

Not only had Aboriginal people been forced from their hunting grounds, but the animals which they had relied on were also being hunted or poisoned almost to extinction. Dingoes were wiped out with Strychnine at Ginninderra station. Widespread culling of thousands of native animals in the Canberra region took place from the mid 1800s, leading to the extinction of species such as the red rock wallaby.

The oldest surviving full-blood Aboriginal woman in the district, Nellie Hamilton, was quoted as saying:

*"You come and take our land and kill our game and let us starve, and if we take a sheep or kill a calf you shoot us or put us in gaol. You bring your disease and give it to us — we had nothing like that until you came and stole our land — you give us rotten blanket and bad rum."* (Schumack 1967: 150)<sup>7</sup>

By the latter part of the 19th century there were very few Aboriginal people left in the greater Canberra region. Aboriginal groups were reduced to small family groups, clad in European rags, camped on the edge of Queanbeyan, on riverbanks or on stations. Some families were by then up to their second or third generation of station hands. Aboriginal men preferred to work as horse handlers and stockmen. Today 'Black' Harry Williams and Richard Lowe are still known for their hard work on the stations in the southern parts of the territory. Nellie Hamilton died in January 1889 and the local press mourned the loss of the 'Queen of the Aboriginals of Queanbeyan and the last remnant of her tribe.'<sup>8</sup>

It is estimated that at the beginning of the 19th century there may have been about 5000 Aboriginal people living in Eden-Monaro. By the time all the land had been 'settled' 50 years later, it is estimated that there were less than 700 Aboriginal people.<sup>9</sup>

What happened on the Limestone Plains and the Monaro, was part of a broader picture of dispossession and settlement, often with violence and starvation, across the colony of New South Wales. All of the families involved in the genealogy project are descendants of Aboriginal people who survived the settlement of NSW.

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<sup>7</sup> cited in Kabaila, Peter Rimas 1997, *Belconnen's Aboriginal Past: a glimpse into the archaeology of the Australian Capital Territory*, p.29

<sup>8</sup> *Queanbeyan Observer*, 5 January 1897

<sup>9</sup> McKenna, Mark 2002 *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: an Australian history of place*, p.45

For quite some time in the 20th century, the official story of the relations between the colonising British and the first Australians is that Aboriginal people generally relinquished their lands peacefully to those bearing a 'superior' and 'more productive' civilisation.

The 'Aboriginal problem' beleaguered the colony until well into the late 19th century. By the late 1880s many Aboriginal people, driven from their land by force or hunger, began to occupy the banks of waterways and the fringes of European settlements. Residents in country towns began to demand that the State take great control over Aborigines. Aboriginal township camps were considered 'hotbeds of immorality'. Europeans objected to Aboriginal beggars and drunks.

## Missions and reserves

The missions and reserves were a solution which government administrators hoped would control and protect Aboriginal people and allow European pastoral civilisation to advance unimpeded. The establishment of missions and reserves began from 1878.<sup>10</sup> The first mission was set up on the Darling River at Maloga. Aboriginal people came from as far away as Lake George, Tumut, and the Monaro. In 1879, the Reverend John Gribble established a mission at Warengesda, at Darlington Point. Families from Yass, Canberra and Tumut moved there.

In 1881, George Thornton was appointed Protector of Aborigines of New South Wales. Thornton reported a total of 8919 Aboriginal people in New South Wales. The Colonial Secretary wanted more to be done for the 'remnant of the Aboriginal race.' The Board for the Protection of Aborigines was created in 1883.

From 1880 to 1900 the Brungle Aboriginal Station in the Tumut district was established, providing Aboriginal people with another place to congregate.

The 'Aboriginal problem' persisted into the 20th century in different forms as governments grappled with race relations through the means of protection boards, reserves and the assistance of Christian missions. The policies of this era of welfare administration were to continue to force Aboriginal people to be collectivised on missions and reserves, where they could be taught 'useful' occupations and were obliged to abandon their traditional heritage. By 1939, 180 reserves were being subsidised by the NSW Government.<sup>11</sup>

In the 20th century the process of 'civilising' Aboriginal people was pursued relentlessly. On missions and reserves across NSW there is no evidence that Aboriginal culture was allowed at all.<sup>12</sup>

On missions and reserves, and even on the streets of country towns, it was forbidden to use ancestral language. Aboriginal people were expected to assimilate entirely. This included the 'forgetting' of the racial violence that accompanied the early days of settlement. While in the 19th century, the press, government spoke openly of the frontier violence, of the 'pacification' of the frontier, after the turn of the century and Federation, historians and the public alike colluded in lowering, what the great anthropologist Stanner called 'the veil of silence'.

Education, if it was allowed at all for children, was only on the reserves or missions. Ironically Aboriginal men were allowed to fight in both World Wars.

The misguided policy of removing Aboriginal children from families, even those who had complied and moved onto missions, is one of the saddest outcomes of official policy in recent times and dealt terrible disruption and trauma to many families across Australia. It is estimated that between 5000 and 8000 children were removed from their families in New South Wales to become wards of the state, to live in 'homes', or to become indentured apprentices.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Securing the Truth* 1995, NSW Government, p.10

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p.30

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p.31

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

## **New communities**

From early on, groups of Aboriginal people of mixed descent established themselves around towns such as Yass and Queanbeyan and became dependant on European pleasures such as tea, sugar, flour, tobacco and alcohol.

By the 1870s, there were Aboriginal families in the region not only living in huts near the towns and in camps along major rivers, but also on small farm blocks which they leased or which were granted to them by the government. For example, family communities were established at Pudman and Blakeney Creek.

By the turn of the 20th century, while the white population was lamenting the passing of the last of the local tribes across New South Wales, and calling for solutions to the Aboriginal problem, they were often ignoring the Aboriginality of the new populations of a surviving and growing minority of mixed descent Aboriginal people who were finding their place amongst the working classes, mostly as labourers, farm workers and domestics. These new communities were living in fringe camps on the edges of towns like Yass, Queanbeyan, Eden and Bombala. They had lighter skin and participated in the European economy, doing station work, domestic work, mining, picking vegetables, fishing or horse breaking.

Almost universally, their birth, death and marriage records show their occupations as 'labourer' for men and 'domestic servant' for women. Many of their descendants have been absorbed into 'white' society and do not now know of their ancestry.

Poverty and dispossession combined with Aboriginal social organisation to create new cultural patterns, neither traditional nor European. From the 1880s, Aboriginal people in the districts surrounding the modern Australian Capital Territory, from the south coast through the highlands, and along the Murrumbidgee river forged new relations; they responded to, adapted and survived the complete upheaval brought by European settlement.

One consequence of creating the Aboriginal missions and reserves, was that the Aboriginal reserve communities became places where a new Aboriginal identity emerged, despite the Protection Board's attempts to deny and destroy Aboriginal culture.

On occasions, during the 20th century, when the number of 'half- castes' on the reserves increased, the 'Board' became eager to have the 'able-bodied' removed from the reserves to working situations and sent children to 'homes'. Aboriginal people ejected from the reserves then had to set up camps on the fringes of towns, creating new centres of Aboriginal populations.

Traditional ways of life, which had always involved much travel between related family groups, caused a great deal of anguish for government administrators, who were trying to create an existence for Aboriginal people that was steady in residence and work.

By this time, Aboriginal people now moved on a 'beat' between the missions and the main camps at places like Yass, Brungle and Darlington Point, as well as Cowra, Young and Orange, ignoring the past hostile and friendly relations of their ancestors' societies. Through intermarriage, people from different traditional backgrounds began to move into each other's territories, old boundaries ignored but not forgotten altogether.

Aboriginal attachments to ideas of kinship remained strong in the new Aboriginal groups emerging in the 20th century. People travelled frequently to stay in contact with large kinship networks, yet they remained within a range often within what would probably have been the homeland of their ancestors.

## **Progress**

Aboriginal activism began in the 1930s and grew through the sixties with the Charlie Perkins bus rides, the 1967 referendum recognising Aboriginal people as Australian citizens, Aboriginal children attending primary and then high schools, having access to medical care, housing, the closing of reserves and missions, and the

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ending of the old welfare policies.

From the sixties to the present there has been a great revival in Aboriginal cultural and political identity to the point where the progress of Indigenous people in Australia is the envy of Indigenous people all over the world. From the 1970s onwards it has become more acceptable to admit and take pride in Aboriginal ancestry.

In the 1960s, Professor Stanner gave his famous Boyer lectures where he talked of the 'silence' surrounding the history of Aboriginal Australia. Aboriginal people and culture once relegated to the role of a mere 'anthropological footnote' to the march of history. Subsequently historians, academics, and journalists went to work to discover the hidden past of Australia's black-white relations.

The year 1972 was a critical one for Aboriginal progress. The Aboriginal flag became a national symbol, the Commonwealth established a Department of Aboriginal Affairs under a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The Tent Embassy was set up on the lawns of Parliament House and today remains a focal point for Aboriginal political action. In New South Wales, principals no longer had the right to refuse enrolment of Aboriginal children in schools.

In 1975, the titles for all missions and reserves in New South Wales were handed over the NSW Aboriginal Lands Trust. In 1983 The Aboriginal Land Rights Act was passed in New South Wales allowing the creation of Aboriginal land councils.

In recent decades, government policy has shifted from separation and assimilation of Aboriginal people to celebration and respect for Aboriginal heritage and the people who have survived. Far from continuing to force Aboriginal people to deny heritage and society, governments are now joining more and more with Aboriginal people to find out what works best for their communities and to recover lost heritage.

*In recognition of the profound dislocation caused by European settlement and to bring about reconciliation, the ACT Government recognises that so many of its Aboriginal citizens are the survivors of past practices. The Our Kin Our Country project goes some way to address the disservices of past government policy and to assist in the rekindling of a contemporary Aboriginal society based on rich kinship network.*

## Aboriginal kinship

It is useful to understand classical Aboriginal kinship, to understand why family relationships continue to be so important for Aboriginal families today.

Across Australia, anthropological evidence shows that traditional Aboriginal kinship arrangements were, and are, extremely complex, governing all social interactions, particularly marriage. Kinship was, and is, involved in the politics and economics of Aboriginal society, as well as organising and defining behaviour, rights and duties. Kinship rules are the foundation of Aboriginal customary law and contribute to matters such as the distribution of land, the settling of grievances, who looks after the sick and old, or is responsible for children on the death of their parents.

Before the disruption caused by European settlement, Aboriginal people on neighbouring country within distinct regions:

*'could count on being able to trace some kind of kin relationship to any person one was likely to meet ... Reserve and even great hostility, depending on the context, would normally mark encounters between people who were non-kin.'*

In daily life, it was unlikely that one would meet someone who was not kin.<sup>14</sup>

When Aboriginal people accept an outsider into their group, they have to name that person in relation to

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<sup>14</sup> Sutton, Peter 1998, *Native Title and the Descent of Rights*, Commonwealth of Australia, National Native Title Tribunal p7

themselves, to allow that person to fit into their society.

The common terms of endearment or respect amongst modern urban Aborigines, such as 'brother' or 'sister', or 'auntie' or 'uncle', are derived from the older kinship terms and associations.

Some Aboriginal people who are considered kin can be traced through connections of blood or marriage. But for many Aboriginal people most of their kin cannot be traced literally through connections of blood or marriage. However, there are complex systems for locating every known person in a category of kin, even when the 'blood relation' is not known or clear, so they can be addressed or referred to with a kin term. Anthropologists describe these systems as 'classificatory' kinship systems.

Even today, there are Aboriginal communities in Australia that have more than 70 different terms for relations, far more than the European terms based on more immediate family such as mother, father, sister, brother, cousin or grandparents. While people know who their real mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins are, under kinship law, they still respect and refer to more distant relations using the classificatory kinship systems.

Traditional Aboriginal society always classified people into groups related to territory or to ancestors in the mythic past. These kinds of grouping systems are organised into divisions known in anthropology as 'moieties', sections or totems. These are sometimes called 'skin' names. To know one's classification, it was only necessary to know one's parents' or grandparents' cultural identity. It was not necessary to name a remote ancestor to show one's relationship to country or kin.

An important aspect of reckoning kinship relations is through the gender of parents. In a patrilineal line of descent, one inherits certain rights and responsibilities from a series of direct male ancestors. In a patrilineal descent system an individual is considered to belong to the same descent group as his or her father.

On the other hand, a matrilineal line of descent was from a series of female ancestors. In a matrilineal descent system an individual was considered to belong to the same group as his or her mother.

In the south east of Australia, where classificatory kinship is believed to be based on a system of totems, anthropologists like Howitt maintained that it was probably the case that one's totem was inherited through the father's line.

A cognatic descent group is one which traces their links to ancestors through either the male or female line.

### **Why kinship still matters today**

In a general sense, social organisation changes and adapts to social conditions. An example of a form of adjustment to post-colonial conditions is the rise in importance of the cognatic descent group claiming relationship to a significant ancestor. Language-based tribes and cognatic descent groups are found around Australia today; quite often occurring together.

Once, it was adequate to know the traditional identity of parents and grandparents to know what one's affiliations to country and kin. And still within Aboriginal communities it is important to know the locality associated with one's parents and grandparents. However, after the disruptions of the past 200 years, particularly in parts of Australia that have been settled, it has become increasingly important to recover links to family and remote ancestors, particularly when connection to place is lost.

The project focused on cognatic descent groups, formed by those who share recognised descent from a particular ancestor or set of blood-related ancestors, and who trace their links to such ancestors through either parent. This is often expressed as knowing one's 'bloodline'.

Life histories have meant that familiarity with country varies from one person to another. Where people have not had physical connection to country, and traditional kinship systems have broken down, the knowledge that one is descended from a significant ancestor associated with 'country', and tied to others that are also descended from that ancestor, becomes very significant.

Therefore, a genealogy is not only a reproductive history, but also a political history describing the

connection of social relationships. Genealogies of cognatic relatives re-establish relations, rights and obligations between different families.

These cognatic descent groups are no longer the classical 'extended families' of living people with a role confined to kinship and mutuality, nor are they households. However, in many parts of Australia, they still prescribe rights and interests from the traditional forms of cultural property, including country. The surnames by which these families are so often known confer an identity associated with, for example, a mission, a pastoral station, home town or confer identification with traditional land as land holder.<sup>15</sup>

The term 'apical' ancestor is used to describe an ancestor from whom rights and responsibilities are inherited. Native title processes often involve the linking of present day people to apical ancestors.

During the course of this project, the term 'key ancestor' was coined to describe any ancestor significant to a family line. The key ancestors were the earliest known Aboriginal or European persons identified by families or the researchers for whom sufficient information was sourced with some surety. Knowing the key ancestors has assisted families to understand in what ways they are related to each other and how their family lines have come to be named.

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<sup>15</sup> Sutton, P (1998) *Native Title and the Descent of Rights*, Commonwealth of Australia, National Native Title Tribunal pp 60–1

## 2 The research

### Aims

In designing the research approach, the following aims were kept in mind:

1. promote the recognition of Aboriginal heritage by enabling Aboriginal communities to know and tell the stories of their ancestors
2. conserve Aboriginal oral history by recording family in their history interviews and validating these families' genealogies against the European record
3. provide a foundation of data which can be used by researchers and families in the future
4. provide a framework for analysis and further research.

In conducting this project the aim was to finalise the research in such a way as to advance the understanding of the regional Aboriginal population, and build inclusive engagement between various Aboriginal groups claiming traditional connection to the ACT.

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this report, in the 19th century, European settlement in the region very early on disrupted Aboriginal ways of life and forced people from their land. Through starvation, disease and violence the Aboriginal population declined dramatically. With population decline, traditional Aboriginal groups and families, languages, customs and vast knowledge of the natural world disappeared. Government welfare policies sought to protect and control the remnant populations of 'wild blacks' and the emerging groups of Aboriginal people of mixed descent. They were forced to live on the fringes of the new European economy, were removed to missions and/or reserves and forbidden to use any form of previous culture and language.

Very little was done by the European settlers to record the ways of life, the customs and laws, including patterns of land tenure of Aboriginal people until the late 19th century. In addition, many Aboriginal people's lives were not documented in government and church records. Moreover, in the 20th century, there was a tendency to gloss over the Aboriginal aspect of the history of the early settlement of Australia, as the sad story of an uncivilised people who died away from disease and displacement in the face of a superior 'civilising' force. From the early 20th century until the 1960s the official Aboriginal story was relegated to the role of an 'anthropological footnote'.

Naturally, this history has left gaps in the knowledge of Aboriginal people about their ancestral origins, sometimes leading to disputes about traditional heritage. Moreover, the last of the generations of Aboriginal people with connection to forebears with traditional knowledge have been passing away and there is a sense of urgency to capture their stories.

Across Australia, there has been a burgeoning interest in the Aboriginal story. In relation to the region of the ACT, and the broader south-east region of New South Wales, a number of significant historical, archaeological and anthropological works have been published, which begin to tell the story of the last 200 years, corroborating what Aboriginal people have only been able to share as oral history.

Among these works are Lyall Gillespie's *Aborigines of the Canberra Region*, Josephine Flood's *Moth Hunters*, Michael Young's *History of the Monaro People*, Peter Kabaila's work on the archaeology and material culture of the Yass and Canberra regions, the Elhpicks' works about the Riverina Aboriginal people, and of course Ann Jackson-Nakano's works providing exhaustive detail on the history of Aboriginal families of the Canberra, Yass and Boorowa area. Extensive genealogical work has been undertaken in relation to Ngunnawal and Ngarigu native title claims over the ACT. And among many Aboriginal families, there are individuals dedicated to recovering lost connections, passing on stories from relatives and scouring official records.

It was decided that this project should build on work already undertaken to provide further research and well-documented evidence of regional family connections, advancing understanding of the history of the Aboriginal people of the region and providing cultural heritage material.

It was proposed that project research be conducted in two stages:

- commencing with the verification of genealogical work already undertaken, research and compilation of genealogies of families with association to the ACT and surrounding region irrespective of traditional identity or no traditional identity
- research into the likely cultural area, and spatial location and organisation of the Aboriginal populations that occupied what is now the ACT and surrounding region at the time of European settlement.

Success of the project was to be measured by:

*‘the quality of information received as a result of the research conducted into the histories of each of the local traditional family groups and the extent to which this information furthers understanding of the contemporary links between family groups’.*

This chapter firstly discusses the genealogy research and outcomes followed by a discussion of the anthropological study.

## Genealogy

Throughout most of the 20th century there were almost no Aboriginal family groups resident within the Australian Capital Territory. The surviving families would have been absorbed into the Aboriginal population centres in the surrounding region, and their movement in the region was influenced by welfare policies and seasonal employment such as fruit picking and shearing.

The main geographical areas for the focus of the genealogical research were the Canberra–Queanbeyan, Yass, Tumut–Brungle, Cowra and Eden–Monaro regions. However, Aboriginal people from these regions were forced to travel widely for work and to survive on missions and reserves. Therefore no genealogical study of south east NSW could ignore the important population concentration and dispersal sites of the former missions and reserves: such as Lake Tyres in Victoria, Wallaga Lake on the South Coast, Erambie Mission in Cowra, Warengesda, Hollywood, Edgerton at Yass, Brungle and Delegate. Some of these sites did not survive the turn of the 20th century, such as Braidwood or Delegate, while others emerged in the 20th century, for example, Hollywood, and Edgerton and some survive to the present such as Wallaga Lake and Erambie.

To uncover the family history of the entire region described would have been a vast undertaking covering thousands of living persons, so the study was limited to those persons who were claiming contact with the ACT region.

To ensure the best results, professional genealogists from Sydney based firm Ardeth Pemberton Family History Assistance were engaged to conduct the research and use their expertise to fully authenticate the genealogies wherever possible.

In conducting their research the genealogists were briefed to:

- verify the genealogies, identifying and obtaining copies of primary and secondary source material wherever possible
- record and store the genealogies in a family history database
- produce genealogical material such as charts and records that would assist the ACT Government and participating families in understanding and communicating the genealogies.

In compiling the genealogies, the genealogists were required to:

- concentrate on genealogical research and findings and not attempt to identify the traditional affiliations of the ancestors
- verify and cross-check the findings of previous genealogical studies using primary source evidence where possible
- examine, and provide evidence for, the extent to which the broader community of Aboriginal people associated with the ACT and surrounding region are interrelated through kinship ties.

It was also decided to authenticate as much previous genealogical material as possible, both to build the genealogical information base and address any disputes arising around the findings in those works.

During the course of the project exhaustive work was carried out in the state archives of New South Wales. A complete list of references and sources is at *Appendix A: Genealogy sources*.

A particular class of genealogical research that has caused dispute between some families is the extensive genealogical research that had been conducted on families claiming traditional connection to the greater Canberra region as part of historical research and also in relation to native title claims for Ngunnawal claimants. It was possible to obtain the source files for the previous Ngunnawal native title claim genealogical research and every effort has been made to cross check and verify this work with primary source material.

The majority of the previous Ngunnawal genealogical research was undertaken by Ann Jackson-Nakano. Ms Nakano-Jackson's research commenced with a Master of Letters in history, followed by research for two Ngun(n)awal native title claims, active over all or part of the ACT.

Subsequently, Ms Jackson-Nakano's work was examined as part of Dr Nicolas Peterson's 1998 *Ngun(n)awal Genealogical and Social Mapping report*, which was commissioned by the ACT Government in response to the Ngunnawal native title claims. The Peterson report focussed on establishing the bases on which people were claiming a Ngun(n)awal identity and was carried out with the permission of the family groups involved in the claims. The genealogical component of Peterson's report was based on Jackson-Nakano's work, which was assessed as being thorough and exhaustive work on the Ngun(n)awal. Peterson also concluded that the family networks investigated did not exhaust the people likely to claim Ngun(n)awal identity although they did include a majority of core Ngunnawal people.

The genealogical research methodology employed was chosen to ensure accuracy during the collection process and data analysis. Using the approach described below assured that the conclusions maintained a level of transparency, objectivity and showed respect for the evidence of history.

## **Information collection**

The first step in genealogy is to start with what is known. Individual and group meetings were conducted with families and individuals to find out what they already knew about their family lines. These meetings and visits were a valuable source of information, not only of family members but, in some cases, records and the results of previous research.

The interviewed families had varying degrees of knowledge regarding their own genealogy. Some knew little beyond their parents' names and birth dates. Others could provide names of direct ancestors for pedigree charts, but knew nothing about siblings of the direct ancestors. Others families had access to previous research done on their behalf which they were happy to share.

When compiling the family genealogies and family connections, where possible the information provided was verified. The reliability of a source generally depends on the authority through which the information is being endorsed. Birth, Death and Marriage (BDM) certificates are issued and endorsed by governments and, as such, are considered to be the primary source. Indexes held by the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages were accessed. Transcripts of NSW BDM certificates were then purchased.

Church records of baptisms/christenings, marriages and burials are regarded as a secondary source. Church records held by the National Library of Australia, St Augustine's Catholic Church in Yass and the Mitchell

Library in Sydney were consulted.

Once these sources were exhausted as a supply of information other material, where available, was considered. These included school records, censuses, blanket lists, mission records and any relevant books, records or documents held by organisations possessing archives. Ethnographic material held in the Mitchell Library was also studied.

Previous work produced by Ann Jackson-Nakano and Nicolas Peterson were analysed. However, Ms Jackson-Nakano's research and publications have not been universally well received and her findings are considered to be controversial. Mr Peterson's research shows limitations regarding sources he deemed as reliable and revealed problems of duplicates and continuity in the genealogy, as a result of his efforts to keep the lines of four main families separate. Whilst recognising the inability to use the work of either Ms Jackson-Nakano or Dr Peterson as sources, it is important to note the value of their work for comparative purposes. Every effort has been made to cross check their work.

## **Information processing**

After collection, the information was managed through the use of a specialised genealogy software system.

This allowed the researchers to make judgements about the reliability of the information. While all individuals and families involved in this project provided information in good faith, because of sometimes scant knowledge about their family line this flagging was necessary to determine where follow-up verification work needed to be undertaken.

## **Research and analysis**

Once all known names and dates were entered, the process of identifying missing people and dates and converting sources from unreliable to reliable began. This involved further searching BDM indexes to find records of events (birth, death or marriage).

New information was being continually added, leading to searches for more people and events and the need to acquire more transcriptions. Several rounds of transcriptions are generally needed to assemble a comprehensive genealogy.

## **Reliability of sources**

Although BDM certificates are considered to be the primary source, these certificates are not without limitations. A certificate is only as reliable as the informant who gave the information.

In the case of a birth, the informant is most often a parent. Birth certificates are commonly regarded as being very accurate but they obviously offer the least information of the life of the person after birth.

Marriage certificates are filled out by the bride and groom but have some deficiencies. Sometimes a bride or groom lied about their age if they were too young to be married without permission from a parent. Marriage certificates can offer supplementary information such as the names of parents but not all informants choose to give this information.

Death certificates offer the most information yet are sometimes the most unreliable. Death certificates, for obvious reasons, are not completed by the primary person but by an informant who could be a spouse, child, friend or coroner. The information supplied is only correct so far as the informant knows.

The reliability of information also needs to be weighed when collating information from numerous certificates. For example, when trying to estimate a birth year for a person whose birth was not registered there are four possible sources: mother's death certificate; father's death certificate; own marriage certificate; and own death certificate. Problems arise when all four certificates estimate different years.

This is when the reliability of informants needs to be assessed, and church and other records can also assist. When problems arise it is a matter of making the best decision from the information that is available or digging for more information until something can be confirmed.

Multiple marriages were another challenge to sourcing reliable information. Life tended to be short and a person could be widowed once or twice in their lifetime. Every effort has been made in this project to trace and link families that are related through these multiple marriages.

The spelling of family and place names can vary widely from document to document. Every effort has been made to cross match similar names and identities to verify if it is the person being researched.

## **Key ancestors**

During the research, the term 'key ancestor' was coined to define the earliest known person identified by families or our researchers for which sufficient information was sourced with some surety. These ancestors are usually the first Aboriginal people documented officially in the European record for a particular family line, probably the first Aboriginal people taking on European names and identities, entering into the European economy, competing for work as labourers and domestics, trying to raise families on the fringes of European society. The records show they were employed as labourers, trackers, fishermen, midwives and domestic servants.

Sometimes the 'key' ancestors are Europeans — almost always men — whose surnames have come to be the main identifier of a family network; more frequently they are Aboriginal women whose names are unrecorded or only recorded as first names, often Kitty, Mary, Eliza, or whose Aboriginal identity is inferred from racial information on their children's birth or marriage certificates. Aboriginal people in our study were as interested about their European ancestors as their Aboriginal ancestors.

Family interviews commenced in late 2010. By August–September 2011, the genealogists had conducted interviews and cross-checked and provided primary source verification for the findings of previous genealogies commissioned for the Nggunawal and Ngarigu native title claims over the ACT. This work centred around those family networks involved in those claims. Their work had verified approximately 35 key ancestors for a network of families mostly from the Yass region claiming an Nggunawal identity.

Detailed genealogical work was then undertaken to verify the information collected and, where possible, to fill in gaps.

From July to December 2011, research included final cross verification of Jackson-Nakano work, and expansion of the family networks researched to broaden the scope beyond the native title family grouping, including the inclusion of more families from the Eden–Monaro, Cowra and the Tumut–Brungle regions.

People interviewed were candid, rigorous and generous with their time in reviewing the material presented to them. One of the reasons for openness is that they know their account is going to be respected and not misrepresented.

By May 2012, the final outcomes and products of the genealogical research were delivered and included:

- a collection of more than 2000 primary source (birth, death and marriage) records transcripts and other archival records
- a further collection of secondary source materials
- an extensive bibliography and list of references (see Appendix A: Genealogy sources)
- a fully annotated family history database of more than 5000 documented individuals in the genealogical software program, AncestralQuest. This software is capable of creating several different kinds of genealogical and cultural mapping reports and documents, including family history books;
- the production of 55 printed descendant charts for selected ancestors, which have been used to consult with Aboriginal families participating in the project
- twenty-nine substantial family history books, which range in size from 200 pages to 1500 pages of charts and transcripts or copies of birth, death, marriage, baptismal, convict and other records
- the cross-checking and verification of previously commissioned Aboriginal genealogies, including

Jackson-Nakano and Peterson genealogies, related to the ACT region (which will also provide a reference point for the ACT Government in any future native title claims over the ACT.)

Ensuring the genealogical research included families from the Eden–Monaro and Tumut–Brungle regions has generated a picture of a definite regional Aboriginal population that has adapted and survived the initial European occupation. Research indicates that the Canberra–Queanbeyan area was depopulated very early. It was almost impossible to find any descendants with links to any of the few documented Aboriginal people in the 19th century for the Canberra region.

For the family representatives interviewed for this project, more than 122 key ancestors were uncovered, the vast majority from the south east New South Wales region that was initially proposed as the study area. A few of these ancestors could be linked to present day descendants through direct matrilineal or patrilineal descent lines; however most ancestors were linked to their present day descendants through cognatic descent lines.

At a regional level, beyond the families directly investigated there appear to be many more ancestors who could be considered as key ancestors for a highly networked regional population.

This suggests that despite the effects of European settlement and dispossession and being collectivised onto missions and reserves Aboriginal families have continued to survive on territory that is probably within the region of the ancestral territory of their forebears.

The genealogies document the lives of the Aboriginal people of the period following European settlement, conserving Aboriginal oral history by recording family identified in interviews and then validating these families through genealogies built through research in the European records.

These genealogies are significant to present day Aboriginal people because they stand as tangible means to:

- being linked to a significant Aboriginal ancestor
- being linked to other families and finding ways of talking with each other
- having a continuity of heritage that survives the impact of colonisation and settlement
- being able to teach the next generation the history of their families.

## **Anthropology**

Aboriginal people can be caught up in debates about whose group is more ‘authentic’. Without a traditional source of information from within families and communities, people turn to the historical record to find the most ‘authentic’ names. Academic attempts to reconstruct and map what might have been the case prior to European settlement, such as Tindale’s 1974 map have popularised and consolidated some group names over others leading to a great deal of tension in communities.

Families have had different ways of making traditional connection claims to the greater ACT. Moreover, many present day claimants are suspicious of each other’s histories.

It was decided that in order to harmonise their views and achieve consensus, families still need the best possible information about what might have been the original populations of the region to combine with the best possible information about their families.

Originally, it was proposed that the project be conducted in two stages: family history research, followed by connection to country research. A connection to country report requires that Aboriginal people are interviewed to find out what they know about traditional custom, law, language and ways of life. Assessment of the historical evidence points to those Aboriginal people who were in what is now known as the ACT in the 1820s and their immediate descendants either leaving the region altogether for the coast or elsewhere or becoming absorbed into other communities. Therefore there appears to be no surviving traditional knowledge of lore, language, custom, kinship structures, oral history and genealogy associated directly with the ACT which would form the basis of a connection report.

In acknowledging that European settlement has caused the comprehensive dislocation and destruction of Aboriginal populations and culture in the region and that the historical record of Aboriginal culture and populations is very scant and contradictory, it was recognised that it would not be possible to prepare a full 'connection to country' report linking present day people through their families and surviving traditional knowledge to the past land holding groups.

However, it was decided to research historical and other records to assess what may have been the Aboriginal cultural populations of the territory at the time of contact with European settler society — which began in about 1820 — particularly to research if the territory could have linguistically been Ngunnawal, Ngarigu or Walgalu.

## **Sources of information for Canberra**

There is a distinct lack of ethno-historic sources relating to the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the Canberra region.

The earliest historical sources have survived in the form of government censuses, lists of Aboriginal people receiving government issue blankets, some police records and some early settlers' diaries and newspaper accounts. Many of these earlier accounts record the 'tribes' of the Aboriginal people they are documenting, but the Europeans writing these records have used the term 'tribe' in different ways, sometimes naming a group after its leader, sometimes after a place name, or sometimes after the language people spoke.

During the 20th century, the reminiscences of long-term residents of the Canberra and Monaro district appear. Their works can be found in the National Library of Australia, the ACT Heritage Library and other archives, for example see the works of Bluett, Brennan, Gale, Schumack, Wright, and Mowle. The reliability of these sources as a guide to traditional Aboriginal societies is questionable, taking into the account the time elapsed between the authors' actual experience and the time of writing and the rapid changes of Aboriginal society as a result of European a settlement.

Similarly, anthropological and linguistic work was undertaken in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for the south eastern Australian region, for example by Matthews, Howitt, Curr or Tindale, again decades after most of the local Aboriginal groups had lost their connection to the lands and their descendants dispersed across the region. Information from these sources is also of questionable reliability and requires expert analysis to obtain useful outcomes.

Tindale placed the ACT region within three language-based cultural groups: the Ngunawal, the Ngarigu and the Walgalu. However, languages do not necessarily create significant cultural boundaries for traditional Aboriginal groups in southeastern Australia.

As there is some ethnographic, historical, and linguistic material, it was decided to engage an expert anthropologist to conduct a desktop analysis of this material to assist in determining the relevant cultural area for the ACT. After consultation with expert anthropologists at the Australian National University, broad terms of reference were set as follows:

*research and identify the likely cultural area, and spatial location and organisation of the Aboriginal population(s) that occupied what is now the ACT and surrounding region at the time of European settlement.*

The term cultural area here was used in a very broad non-technical sense to refer to an area where the inhabitants have cultural ties in the form of shared social practices, shared meanings and interactions.

In conducting the research the anthropologist was directed to:

- explore the possible identification of a pre-colonial regional Aboriginal population grouping in the upper reaches of the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan Rivers
- research and identify the likely spatial location and organisation of the Aboriginal population(s) that occupied what is now the ACT and surrounding region at the time of European settlement

- examine and give an account of relevant published ethnographic, linguistic and historical sources for the southern NSW and northern Victorian region
- indicate the location of a possible Aboriginal area (s) relevant to the ACT
- give an account of the settlement of the area by non-Aboriginal people on the Aboriginal population in the cultural area.

An experienced native title anthropologist, Dr Natalie Kwok, was engaged to conduct the research. The draft anthropologist's report has recently been provided to the ACT government and is now being reviewed by academic experts at the Australian National University. After the academic review the report will be published separately and will be a significant contribution to the anthropology of the Canberra region.

### 3 Conclusions

**The significant outcome of the work conducted through this project, has been the verification of a distinct regional Aboriginal population that survived, resisted and adapted to European occupation and settlement in the areas surrounding what is now known as Canberra.**

This finding has important implications for the ACT and proximate regional NSW Aboriginal communities. To begin with, the importance of this kind of research for social, cultural and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people is already being felt in the ACT community where families are responding enthusiastically to the findings set out in their family history books. Creating the family history books as a collaboration between the community and government, co-authoring cultural resources has proved to be fruitful on a number of fronts.

This project allowed for, and indeed resulted in, a powerful cultural heritage legacy out of collaboration between the community and government. These include:

- a fully annotated genealogical database covering over 5000 individuals, European and Aboriginal, from the early nineteenth century to the present day
- a collection of over 2000 primary and secondary source records which were used to document the life events in the database
- a set of 29 draft detailed family history books, which range in size from 200 pages to 1500 pages of charts and associated source material made up of transcripts or copies of birth, death, marriage, baptismal, convict and other records.

Through this record, it is envisaged that individuals will be able to continue to access their family's information and add new information to their histories.

In the short term, the Community Services Directorate through the ACT Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs will continue to maintain the database and other resources, which will be accessible subject to privacy considerations.

In the meantime, the ACT Government is seeking a secure repository for the family histories and data that has now been compiled.

The project has achieved its objective of providing Aboriginal families local to the region with well documented genealogical information which enables them to know and tell their stories.

The genealogical material in the database will continue as an important cultural history resource for both the Aboriginal and wider community, increasing depth of understanding of the past, redressing the losses of the last two hundred years.

This resource represents an exciting opportunity for continued research into regional family networks and lines of descent. Initial analysis of the data suggests that out of the 5000 individuals documented in the database, there are several hundred individuals, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who could be considered key ancestors for this region. The collection of thousands of primary and secondary source records provides a rich archive of biographical material for these ancestors and their descendants.

By advancing and broadening the genealogical knowledge in the Aboriginal community, the project allows a more equitable voice to various Aboriginal groups and individuals in terms of their role in the cultural life of the region.

This knowledge has already been seen to increase respect between and within different groups. It has even piqued the interest of younger members of these communities.

The benefit of this project to Aboriginal people, the participants in the project and the regional communities, will be ongoing as more of their stories will be told as gaps in knowledge about family kinship lines are

breached. For families who have been traumatically disrupted by past policies of removing Aboriginal children from their families, this kind of information has been and will prove to be invaluable. The telling of stories will continue to strengthen cultural identity, critical to community wellbeing and the countering of past destructive policies and practices.

A better understanding of our shared past will contribute to the process of reconciliation.

# Appendix A: Genealogy sources

## Libraries and other archives

**NSW State Records Office** [www.records.nsw.gov.au](http://www.records.nsw.gov.au)

- Aboriginal blanket lists
- Aboriginal reserves
- Aboriginal school records
- Census records
- Convict ticket of leave records
- Historical Records of Australia, Aboriginal Reserves
- Registers of Coroners' Inquests
- Unassisted immigrant passenger lists

**NSW State Library** [www.sl.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

- Church records
- Probate records
- Station manuscripts
- Tindale genealogies
- Yass cemetery records
- Yass Police Magistrate

**National Library of Australia** [trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper](http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper)

- Yass papers
- *Yass Courier*

**Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)** [www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au)

**Dawn and New Dawn**

- Archives [www1.aiatsis.gov.au/dawn/index.htm](http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/dawn/index.htm)

**ACT Heritage Library** [www.library.act.gov.au](http://www.library.act.gov.au)

- *Queanbeyan Age* — (formerly *The Golden Age*) microfilm 1860–1927
- *Yass Tribune*
- *Yass Tribune Courier*
- *Yass Evening Tribune*
- *Monaro Mercury* from 1860–1931

## Births Deaths and Marriages

New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages [www.bdm.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bdm.nsw.gov.au)

Family Search England births and christenings

[www.familysearch.org/.../England\\_Births\\_and\\_Christenings\\_...](http://www.familysearch.org/.../England_Births_and_Christenings_...)

Ryerson index to contemporary death notices and obituaries in Australian newspapers

[www.ryersonindex.org](http://www.ryersonindex.org)

London Metropolitan Archives, England deaths and burials

[search.lma.gov.uk/opac\\_lma/onlineresources.html](http://search.lma.gov.uk/opac_lma/onlineresources.html)

## Websites

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

- Yass Saint Augustine's Parish Records boards.ancestry.com.au
- Australian Convict transportation registers
- Ancestry.com Victorian records
- Ancestry.com, public and private member trees

## Convicts

Convict records of Australia [www.convictrecords.com.au](http://www.convictrecords.com.au)

[www.canberrahistoryweb.com/convicts.htm](http://www.canberrahistoryweb.com/convicts.htm)

## Missions and reserves

Facebook Brungle Mission page [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

## Magazines and publications

Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW Government

- Coastal custodians newsletter  
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/comanagement/CoastalCustodiansVol3Is6.pdf>
- Aboriginal Women's Heritage series:
  - Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island
  - Bourke
  - Brungle & Tumut
  - Nambucca
  - Nepean
  - Nowra
  - Port Stephens
  - Wollongong[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nswcultureheritage/AboriginalWomensHeritage.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nswcultureheritage/AboriginalWomensHeritage.htm)
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[www.esc.nsw.gov.au/site/aboriginalheritagestudy/pdf/finalreport\\_stage2.pdf](http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/site/aboriginalheritagestudy/pdf/finalreport_stage2.pdf)

## Online history resources

Australian history Research [www.australianhistoryresearch.info/aboriginal-family-history-research](http://www.australianhistoryresearch.info/aboriginal-family-history-research)

## Books

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