

SNAPSHOTS OF ABORIGINAL FITZROY



Produced by Bunj Consultants in consultation with the City of Yarra and the Aboriginal Cultural Signage Reference Group.

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Cover image: "Boomerangs in Flight" (detail) by Mandy Nicholson.

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Foreword

On behalf of Yarra Council, I am delighted to present this third edition of *Snapshots of Aboriginal Fitzroy*.

Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as traditional owners of this land. Fitzroy and Collingwood continue to be an important meeting place for Victorian Aboriginal people.

Snapshots was commissioned by the Council in partnership with its Yarra Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) as a way of documenting some of the Aboriginal history of the City. The Project began in 1998. After extensive consultations with the community, the first edition was published in 2002. Snapshots is planned to be a living document, with opportunities for the community to continue contributing new material.

I would like to thank all the people who have contributed time, feedback and images to the development of Snapshots. Very special thanks to Joy Murphy and Bev Murray who provided valuable support for the Project through the Aboriginal Cultural Signage Project Reference Group. I would like to acknowledge the project consultants, Glenn Romanis and Megan Evans (who conducted the initial research) and Liz Cavenagh and Mark Harris from Bunj Consultants who put the final document together. And finally, thanks to the Council's Aboriginal Advisory Group whose constant support and stewardship help keep this document alive.

A fair and just Reconciliation with traditional owners and true social justice for all Aboriginal people is fundamental to Australia's well-being. Yarra Council hopes that Snapshots helps create greater understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal peoples, culture and history.

Signed



Cr Kay Meadows
Mayor, City of Yarra
September 2004

Preface

Snapshots of Fitzroy and the Yarra Aboriginal Cultural Signage Project

The Snapshots project was commissioned as part of the City of Yarra's Aboriginal Cultural Signage Project and was a partnership between Council and the Yarra Aboriginal Advisory Group. The Cultural Signage Reference Group was then established as the Steering Committee for this project. This project occurred over a five-year period and included two key stages.

Stage One: Research and Consultation

Stage One involved research and consultation. A preliminary study was undertaken in 1998 by consultants, Glenn Romanis and Megan Evans to identify the sites of significance in Yarra to the Aboriginal community. Bunj Consultants undertook further research and consultation in 2001, which evolved as this Snapshots of Aboriginal Fitzroy document.

Stage Two: Artworks

Based on the material developed in Stage One, Yarra

Council and the Yarra Aboriginal Advisory Group commissioned public artworks to be designed and produced by Koori artists to create site-specific public artworks for the intersection of Gertrude Street and George Street, Fitzroy.

The two Koori artists selected were Mandy Nicholson and Kelly Koumalatsos. Wathauruog Glass, an Aboriginal business specialising in glass design and manufacture worked with Mandy Nicholson to fabricate her designs.

Completed in 2002, both artworks reflect and celebrate the many layers of Aboriginal stories, places and generations of people in the Fitzroy area.



Delkuk Spirits by Kelly Koumalatsos

Delkuk Spirits is a bronze sculpture by Kelly Koumalatsos. Standing over two metres tall, the work marks a significant meeting place on the corner of Gertrude Street and George Street, Fitzroy. The title of the work is in part derived from the word Delkuk, a Werhgkia (weddagaya) word meaning "good and beautiful".

The bronze sculpture was cast at Coates and Wood art foundry in Collingwood.



Glass Windows by Mandy Nicholson

Mandy Nicholson designed a series of glass window panels titled:

- Boomerangs in Flight I and II
- Scar Tree
- Water
- Music of the Gum Leaf
- Lake Tyers Gum Leaf

These panels are installed in the front of the Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Aboriginal Stars Gym (MAYSAR) at 184 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy. The glass designs form windows and door features to the façade of the building. The designs feature a range of imagery connected to Fitzroy and the history of the area, including boomerangs, gum leaves, a scar tree and water. The panels were fabricated by Wathaurong Glass.

Some of the designs featured in the windows:

The Boomerangs in flight

These panels represent the throwing competitions and get-togethers at the parks around Fitzroy.

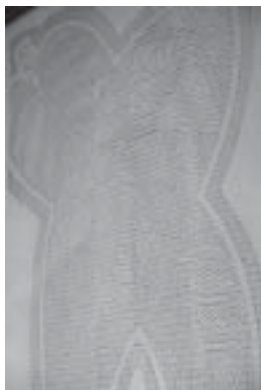


The Scar Tree

This design represents the pre-contact times in Fitzroy and the presence of scar trees in the area today.



Water



Music of the Gum Leaf



Lake Tyers Gum Leaf Band

This design represents the playing of gum leaves in the past and present in the Fitzroy area.

Introduction

This is not intended to be a definitive account of the Fitzroy Aboriginal community. As the title suggests 'Snapshots of Aboriginal Fitzroy' is meant to be the beginning of a longer process of collecting and preserving memories of the Aboriginal connection to the areas in and around Fitzroy. It is hoped that the Snapshots will serve to stimulate discussion and lead to more stories being told and collected.

The project is seen as an opportunity to reflect on the past and to preserve the stories of Elders while they are still with us. As much as possible we tried to interview a wide range of community members. For various reasons some people chose not to be involved, but the project has attempted to collect a range of perspectives from different generations of the experience of living in Fitzroy.

Where there are errors in the text or in the acknowledgment of people in photos, we apologise in advance and hope that people will let us know, so amendments can be made. If there is additional information on topics, or material that has been omitted, we would like to hear from the community. A project like Snapshots of Aboriginal Fitzroy can only be a success if the community feels that it is relevant. We hope that you think it is.

Mark Harris and Liz Cavenagh, Bunj Consultants, 2002.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the participation and assistance of many people. In particular we would like to acknowledge the people who we interviewed and the people who were interviewed by Glenn Romanis and Megan Evans:

- | | | |
|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| ■ Alice Thomas | ■ Beryl Booth | ■ Cheryl Vickery |
| ■ Ron Johnston | ■ Troy Austin | ■ Pat Austin |
| ■ Kutcha Edwards | ■ Alf Bamblett | ■ Bev Murray |
| ■ Carol Fraser | ■ Bunta Patten | ■ Janina Harding |
| ■ Reg Blow | | |

The assistance of the Koori Heritage Trust in allowing access to a number of photos and documents was also invaluable in compiling this document and we would like to thank Jim Berg and his staff for all that they did.

While Auntie Merle Jackomos did not wish to be interviewed, the contribution of her family in allowing access to Alick Jackomos' unpublished document, Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy, was also a great assistance.

We would also like to acknowledge the generosity of those members of the community who allowed us to reproduce photographs. In particular we would like to acknowledge the Jackomos family, the Koori Heritage Trust, Alice Thomas, Ron Johnson and Bev Murray.

Acknowledgements for the 3rd Edition:

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1 Wurundjeri Stories

The area that is now known as Fitzroy and Collingwood was part of the territory of the country of the Woiwurrung people of the Kulin nation. The Kulin nation comprised five distinct language groups. There is some dispute as to the exact boundaries between the various clans and groups, it is clear however that the area around central Melbourne was a significant meeting place for the Kulin clans. Writing in 1840, only five years after the establishment of Melbourne, William Thomas observed that “the spot where Melbourne now stands...was the regular rendezvous for the tribes known as Waworongs, Boonurongs, Barrabools, Nilunguons, Gouldburns twice a year or so” (Presland, 1994: 35). The area that is now known as Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy was the land of the Wurundjeri people.



Source: Wiencke, S., *When the Wattles Bloom Again*, Impact Press, Woori Yallock, 1984, p.5

The landscape of the area that was to become Fitzroy and Richmond is described by Presland in the following way:

Further up the river the vegetation begins to change and there are tall and mature eucalypts on both sides. Around the Richmond area we see that some trees bear scars that show where bark has been removed by Aboriginal people. At the point where the course of the river starts to bend around to the north, you can see on your right a small stream, emptying its water into the Yarra from the south... There are tall red gums growing in the valley of this tributary but they will not endure...

Presland, G. *Aboriginal Melbourne*, McPhee Gribble. 1994, p.24-5.



Wurundjeri man ornamented for corrobaree
 Photo: Antoine Fauchery circa 1858
 Copyright: State Library of Victoria
 Accession Number: H84.167/52

The suburbs of Collingwood and Fitzroy have been established on part of the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people. These lands were once free of buildings and concrete and only occupied by Aboriginal people. A migration of people changed this existence. Social unrest occurred. Some Aboriginal leaders established a base in the Collingwood and Fitzroy areas in an attempt to address these issues. Others became empowered by their presence, joined them and continued the struggle for human rights and social justice. The Wurundjeri people are proud to have shared and provided a place for the fight for equality.

Statement by Joy Murphy-Wandin, Wurundjeri elder

The Wurundjeri-Willum consisted of three main groups at the time of the white invasion, with each group having control over an area of land either to the north or south of the Yarra River. Ellender and Christiansen note that the family of Billibellary, who lived on the north bank of the Yarra and whose territory extended as far as the Merri Merri Creek, occupied the area that is now Richmond and Fitzroy. The southern bank of the Yarra, upstream to Gardiner's Creek was occupied by the family of Burrenupton, the brother of Billibellary. (Ellender & Christiansen, 2001:35)

The creeks and rivers around the area that is now Melbourne provided a plentiful source of food for the Wurundjeri. Eels were hunted using a spear which was barbed with emu claws and kangaroo teeth. One of the main sites frequented by the Wurundjeri for eeling was Bolin Swamp, which is now known as Bulleen (Ellender and Christiansen, 2001: 41). The Wurundjeri also hunted for waterbirds, possums and kangaroos. The food collected by the women included the yam daisy or murrnong. The tuber of this plant was consumed by Aboriginal people throughout Victoria and was prepared for consumption by roasting in the ashes of a fire.



Wurundjeri Camp up to the Yarra
 Source: Antoine Fauchery, circa 1859
 Copyright: State Library of Victoria
 Accession Number: H2476

Wurundjeri creation story

Once the water of the Yarra was locked in the mountains. This great expanse of water was called Moorool, or Great Water. It was so large that the Woiwurrung had little hunting ground. This was in contrast with the Wothowurung and the Bunurong, whose hunting ground was the lovely flat which is now Port Phillip Bay.

Mo-yarra, slow-and-fast-running, was the headman of the Woiwurrung. He decided to free the country of the water. He, therefore, cut a channel through the hills, in a southerly direction, and reached Western Port. However, only a little water followed him, and the path cut for it gradually closed up, and the water again covered the land of the Woiwurrung.

At a later time the headman of the tribe was Bar-wool. He remembered Mo-yarra's attempt to free the land. He knew that Mo-yarra still lived on the swamps beside Western Port (Koo-wee-rup). Each winter he saw the hill tops covered with the feather down which Mo-yarra plucked from the water birds sheltering on the swamps.

Bar-wool resolved to free the land. He cut a channel up the valley with his stone axe. But he was stopped by Baw-baw, the Mountain. He decided to go northwards, but was stopped by Donna Buang and his brothers. Then he went westwards, and cut through the hills to Warr-an-dyte. There he met Yan-yan, another Woiwurong, who was busily engaged in cutting a channel for the Plenty River in order to drain Morang, the place where he lived. They joined forces, and the waters of Moorool and Morang became Moo-rool-bark, the Place-where-the-wide-waters-were. They continued their work, and reached the Heidelberg-Templestowe Flats, or Warringal, Dingo-jump-up, and there they rested while the waters formed another Moorool.

Bar-wool and Yan-yan again set to work, but this time they had to go much slower, because the ground was much harder, and they were using up too many stone axes. Between the Darebin and the Merri Creeks they cut a narrow, twisting track, looking for softer ground. At last they reached Port Phillip. The waters of Moorool and Morang rushed out. The country of the Woiwurrung was freed from water but Port Phillip was inundated.

Massola, A. *Bunjil's Cave: Myths, Legends and Superstitions of the Aborines of South-East Australia*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1968, p. 58.

Following the settlement of Melbourne the environs of the area were rapidly transformed. The Wurundjeri were moved to a mission station, first at Acheron and then to Coranderrk. Despite the attempts to move Aboriginal people away from the new settlement there remain significant sites around the Melbourne locality.

The British Government's awareness of the impact of the new settlement at Port Phillip upon the Aboriginal population led to the establishment of a Protectorate system, under a Chief Protector, George Augustus Robertson. Robinson commenced his duties on 24 February 1839 and was assisted by Assistant Protectors. The Protectorate system was supposed to provide for the "education and moral guidance" of the remaining Aboriginal population but it had little success in curbing the decimation of the Kulin nation. The combined effect of dislocation from their traditional country, frontier clashes, massacres and the impact of introduced diseases such as influenza led to a dramatic decline in the Aboriginal population (Ellender & Christiansen, 2001: 28). Wiencke estimates that by 1863 the total number of survivors of the tribes of the Kulin nations was only 181 (Wiencke, 1984: 35).



View of Melbourne with Aboriginal family in foreground
Source: State Library of Victoria
Library record number: 847764
Accession number: H92.334/2

The Batman Treaty

On 8 June 1835 a ceremony was held between representatives of the local Aboriginal Tribe and John Batman, a representative of the Port Phillip Association, which was a group of entrepreneurs who intended to make their fortune by exploiting the rich grasslands of the Port Phillip District. Batman alleged that he met with representatives of the “Yarra Yarra tribe” and that the *ngurungaeta* (clan headman) subsequently signed title deeds over the land of the Woiwurrung.



The signing of the Batman Treaty By C. Ashton, reproduced in Lemon, A., *The Northcote Side of the River*, p.3

Batman's diary entry recorded: *"The other five chiefs were fine men and after a full explanation of why my subject was I purchased two large tracts of land from them about 600 000 acres more or less – and delivered over to them blankets, knives, looking glasses, tomahawks, beads, scissors, flour etc as a payment for the land and also agreed to give them a tribute or rent yearly".*

A Campbell, *John Batman and the Aborigines*, McPhee Gribble. 1987, p.100.

The Batman “Treaty” was subsequently disallowed by the Government of the Colony of New South Wales, which maintained that only the Crown had the capacity to make grants of land. The validity of the title deeds gained by Batman has been questioned by a number of writers, with Foxcroft calling them “a piece of grotesque trickery, fantastic and absurd” (Foxcroft, 1941:33). The place where the so-called “Batman Treaty” was allegedly signed between John Batman and representatives of the Yarra tribe in 1835 remains in dispute. Eidelson observes that there have been numerous locations given for the signing of the treaty, including the Merri Creek, Darebin Creek, Edgars Creek and the Plenty River (Eidelson 1997:32).

Early Days of Melbourne

The earliest commentators did not recognise or appreciate the different tribal groupings and there was consequently a wide variation of spellings for the names of Aboriginal tribes. Alternatively the local groups were described in geographic terms, using local features to distinguish groups. For example, William Kyle's reminiscences refer to the groups that would have been part of the Kulin confederacy as the Plenty River tribe, or the Yarra Yarra tribe.

Arriving with my parents in Port Phillip in the year 1841 we found the black population pretty numerous. Many of them were camped around the embryo city of Melbourne. The Yarra Yarra tribe camped on the site now occupied by the Melbourne and Richmond cricket teams...Other tribes often visited the young city. The Plenty River tribe fixed upon Newtown Hill, now Fitzroy, as their camping ground.

**Kyle, W., "Reminiscences of Aboriginal Life in Victoria and New South Wales",
The Geelong Naturalist, Second Series, Vol. 2, Nos 3 & 4, pp. 159-172, 182-6.**



A Corroboree at Emerald Hill 1840 by W.F. Liardet,
La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Kyle also recounted the occasions of gatherings of the Aboriginal groups around Melbourne. These gatherings were also recorded by the Aboriginal Protectors, on 26 March 1839, for example, Robinson wrote to the Colonial Secretary that "on Saturday last the town of Melbourne was visited by a very large body of aboriginal natives, who it seems were invited by the resident tribes, and as I am informed, to attend a conference" (Cannon, 1983: 448). The white artists of the time also attempted to record such "conferences".



Corroboree Tree, Burnley Photo: Mark Harris

Apart from the pictorial and documentary records of the corroborees that took place around the new settlement in Port Phillip, there are still signs in the landscape where these important gatherings took place. One of the most important of these is the Corroboree Tree, located in Burnley. This tree remains of great significance for the Wurundjeri people today.

The Battle at Ryries Hill 1843-4

The congregation of various tribal groups around Melbourne on some occasions resulted in conflict. James Dredge's Journal entry for 23 March 1839 records "This evening a fight took place between the different tribes of blacks just outside the town...A few of the poor fellows got some bad wounds from spears and boomerangs" (Cannon, 1983: 449).

Kyle also recounted the battle that took place in 1843-4 between tribes from the Yarra Yarra, Goulburn River and River Plenty on one side and the tribes from Lal Lal, Barrabool Hills and Corio on the other. The number of Aboriginal disputants was put at between five and six hundred (Kyle: 170). He noted that: "The spot selected for the battle was on the southern slope of what was then known as Ryrie's Hill, and is now called Clifton Hill. The road to Heidelberg was the dividing line of the opposing armies" (Kyle: 171). After a period in which the Lal Lal allies enjoyed the upper hand the balance of the battle shifted, according to Kyle, to the Yarra Yarra alliance, so that they "forced their enemies over the crest of Clifton Hill, and almost surrounded the Western tribes" (Kyle: 170)

The battle was halted by the arrival of the Black Protector, Mr Thomas, and two members of the native police. Kyle reflected that “The number killed in the fight was small, not exceeding eight – a small percentage compared with the number engaged – but I think that others succumbed to their wounds later on” (Kyle: 182). The bodies of the fallen were buried in an old graveyard on the banks of the Merri Creek, which Kyle noted “belonged to the Yarra Yarra tribe” (Kyle: 182). Later in his recollections Kyle notes that the Yarra Yarra graveyard was located “not far from where the road from Melbourne to Heidelberg crossed the creek” (Kyle: 184), and also that “a few were buried near where the Collingwood gas house now stands” (Kyle: 182).



Dights Falls
Photo: Megan Evans

The Merri Creek School

On 1 January 1846 the Merri Creek School, which was also known as the Yarra Aboriginal Station was opened under the control of the Collins Street Baptist Church (Eidelson, 1997: 28). The “front door of the school looked out over the Yarra while the back door opened onto the Merri Merri” (Ellender & Christiansen, 2001: 94). In the same locality of Dights Falls was also located a sub-branch of the Native Police Corps. The group had been set up in 1837 and between 1842 and 1844 they were also stationed at the Merri Creek. The Native Police Corps contingent at this time numbered in the vicinity of fifty shelters.

The Deaths of Billibellary and Kulpendori

The dislocation of the lives of the Wurundjeri was hastened with the death of its *ngurungaeta*, Billibellary on 10 August 1846 from a chest infection. The clan elders that gathered at his death bed were divided as to the cause of the illness, some attributing it to actions of the Goulburn people, while others thought that it was deed of someone from the Loddon River region. Billibellary himself believed it was a someone from the Loddon clan who had slipped in while he was sleeping and cut a lock of his hair. Billibellary was buried where the waters of the Yarra River met those of the Merri Merri Creek (Ellender & Christiansen, 2001: 106-7).

In 1852 Kulpendori of the Wurundjeri-Willum died, in the swamp that was located in the area behind what is now the Richmond Town Hall. Kulpendori was the son and heir of Jaga Jaga, who was recognized as the leader amongst the Wurundjeri-Willum. Jaga Jaga had been one of the eight leaders who had been signatories to the so-called “Batman Treaty”

The Move to Acheron and Coranderrk

In 1859 the Goulburn and Wurundjeri men, led by Simon Wonga petitioned Protector Thomas to secure land for them at the junction of the Acheron and Goulburn Rivers. Although the Acheron Aboriginal Reserve was established in 1859, it was never formally gazetted. The Acheron reserve was short-lived, and the residents were forced to move to another site in 1860. Led by Wonga and William Barak the remaining members of the Wurundjeri shifted to a site near modern-day Healesville in March 1863. An Aboriginal reserve was established on 931 hectares and became known as “Coranderrk”, which is the name for the Christmas Bush (*Prostanthera lasianthos*).

Although the Coranderrk Aboriginal reserve was subsequently closed down in 1924 by the Victorian government to provide land for returned servicemen, the area was considered very significant for all those Aboriginal people who had been re-located there. In 1998 part of the original estate was purchased by the Indigenous Land Corporation for the Wurundjeri people.

Off the Mission

Alick Jackomos has noted that “during the mid 1930s the Aboriginal community of Melbourne consisted of about 10-12 families living in Fitzroy with one or two families living in Richmond and North Melbourne; approximately 100 people”. Beryl Booth recalls that her family were the first Aboriginal family to move to Fitzroy in 1928, shifting from Gunditjamara country in the west of the State. Edna Brown also recalls coming to Melbourne from the Framlingham Mission in 1932, when she was only fifteen years old. She recalls that “I married in 1934 and we held the service in the minister’s house in Collingwood. It was the Depression and times were pretty bad”. Returned Aboriginal servicemen, who had fought for their country in the First World War were denied equality on their return to Australia. This prompted many to leave the country areas:

My grandfather served in the First World War, he was in the light-horse regiment and was gassed and all that in France, came back and they had a plan for soldiers resettlement and Lake Condah Aboriginal Mission was actually split up, torn apart and the white soldiers could use the mission land. And when our soldiers asked for the land they were told “nup” you weren’t entitled to it, even though it was soldiers resettlement, those that went and fought for the country. So you had the white soldiers taking the land off us again and the mission slowly shrinking. It was just another way of forcing our people off the land ...having to live off river banks as I said earlier and becoming fringe dwellers and you look around at where a lot of the Aboriginal missions were you’d find a lot of fringe dwellers living in a camp, living on the edge of towns and river banks and that’s how they were forced out and the country towns, a lot of the country towns they couldn’t move there because of the racial tension there they always had to live outside or the majority of us would live outside...and pretty hard to find a job and that’s why a lot of them came to Melbourne.

Ronald Johnson, Interview, 14 September 2001.



Aboriginal Recruits from Lake Tyers lined up for morning parade at Caulfield
Library Record no: 1163655 Accession number: H99.201282
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The declaration of war in 1939 resulted in many Aboriginal families coming to Melbourne, particularly those of the men who had enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). The war effort also required workers and Aboriginal people to obtain employment at a number of places, such as the munition works, the glassworks at Newport and the other industries supporting the war effort. At one point there were twenty Aboriginal servicemen from Lake Tyers who enlisted in the AIF, these men were posted around Melbourne, Bacchus Marsh and later Bonegilla, after which their families shifted from the country to the various streets around Fitzroy.

Nora Murray recalls her family coming to Fitzroy in 1941 and first living in Little George Street, which is now Napier Street, behind the MacRobertsons chocolate factory. After the death of her father the family moved first to St Georges Road before her mother, Gladys, purchased a house at 25 Fergie Street in North Fitzroy. She recalls that when she was about 13 her mother worked in the Munitions Factory in Maribyrnong.

Nora also began work at an early age:

I was working afternoon shift at Australian Cans in Nicholson Street, Carlton. We made the cans for the food that was provided to army personnel. I worked night shift and mum worked during the day. I had worked before at the Rosella Factory in Collingwood where we made tomato sauce and sweet pickles. Quite a few of our people worked there too.

Nora Murray, Interview courtesy of Bev Murray.

The prospect of full-time work and the desire to be close to enlisted family members were not the only reasons people moved to the city. Many of the families that moved to Melbourne did so to escape the control of the Aborigines Protection Board. The assimilation policy that had been introduced with the *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* was still in force and this meant that the Board could compel either “full bloods” or “half castes” to reside at the remaining Aboriginal mission, at Lake Tyers in Gippsland. Those family members who were not deemed to be dark enough to reside on the mission were forced off and were prosecuted if they attempted to return to visit their family.



The Gore Street Church

The Church at 258 Gore Street is remembered by Alick Jackomos as the place where “the contemporary or modern Aboriginal movement all started”. The property was given to Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls in 1943 by the Church of Christ to establish the Aboriginal Church of Christ. Before the establishment of the Gore Street Church Alice Thomas recalls that the house of her parents, Alice and John (Jack) Connolly at 234 Gertrude Street provided the base for activities of the church. This arrangement lasted until the Church of Christ handed over the Gore Street property.

The Church of Christ, Gore Street was the place people would gather to hear the gospel preached by Pastor Doug Nicholas [sic.] on Sundays. Young and old would gather on a Sunday night. Visitors that came from elsewhere would go on Sunday nights to sing hymns and talk to people they hadn't seen for a some while. Most of the young people would go also, like Tommy and Victor Lovett, Bindy Jack, the Houdon's and Aunty Margaret Tucker.

Lovett Gardiner, I., Lady of the Lake: Aunty Iris's Story, Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne 1997, p.87



The Gore Street Church
Photo: Mark Harris

Ronnie Johnson recalled that the events organised by the Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls provided a focus for the community.

Uncle Doug started his church group in Fitzroy, Auntie Alice playing the piano, you know, I remember one year, every year, the fundraisers and that was empowering ourselves...Uncle Doug had a vision I think and that was to have a church hall where people could come into and meet. One of the places I remember was the Masonic Hall in Gipps Street Collingwood just off Hoddle Street there and that hall one Christmas we all went back there and they loaded us onto...there was a lot of families there...we were going down to Rosebud for a family day and the trucks that they had were the old furniture trucks and the old furniture trucks had windows inside and they also had fold down seats...Uncle Doug loaded us onto those trucks you know and we all went away and that was instilling into us that we were one community still and when there was a function on everyone made it.

Ronald Johnson, interview, 13 September 2001.

Nora Murray (nee Nicholls) also remembered that “we all looked forward to going to Church because we would spend hours together afterwards. The church was the meeting place for everyone. There were Aboriginal people from all over who came to the church during the war years”.

Pubs around Fitzroy

Apart from the community activities that centred around the church of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls, the various pubs in and around Fitzroy and Collingwood were also an important focus for community meeting.

We're in Gertrude Street at the Builder's Arms Hotel. This is where Aboriginal people always used to go in for a drink. That was one of the most popular. There was the Builders Arms and on the next corner in George Street there is the Royal and on Napier Street is the Renown and on the corner of Brunswick (Street) is the Champion and the Rob Roy. A lot of them are not even hotels any more. Aboriginals used to always go to the Builders Arms.

A Jackomos, *Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy*, p.9.

Eleanor Harding, who came to Fitzroy in 1956, recollected that apart from the dances at the Collingwood Town Hall and the focus of the Church the other main meeting place was the pub.

The pub was the meeting place. A lot of the Aboriginal women never drank, but they'd go to the pub because it was where the socialising was done. The Builders' Arms used to have a big piano in the back room, and it was to a lot of us our meeting place. On Saturday afternoon the young women used to dress up in their Sunday best. The men had on nice white shirts and polished shoes...In the old days, everyone used to dress nice, the girls wouldn't come in the pub unless they had stockings. They would go to the hairdresser in the morning and get a hairset and after lunch everyone would go in the pub and the piano and guitar would be going and people used to sing to it and enjoy themselves...The Builders' and the Royal - they were the popular hotels with Aboriginal people.

E.Harding, *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, 1991, p. 289

Carol Fraser came to Fitzroy in the early 1960s and she recalls that:

In those days there was pub on every corner. We would start at the Rob Roy, then the Champion, the Renown (Squizzy's), the Royal, the Builders. This was the pre-organisation days. Most country people would come here. Fitzroy was packed with migrants and Aboriginal people and got along pretty well together.

Carole Fraser, interview with Elizabeth Cavanagh.

Ronnie Johnson recalls how when he returned from a period as an exchange student in Northern California in the mid 1970s his mother took him to the Builders Arms as a way of introducing him to his relatives and other members of the community.

When I came from America in 1975, 1976 my mother said "Come on you've got to meet some more of the family", and she took me to the Builders Arms, which is in Gore Street straight across from where we used to live, you know, so she took me in, and I was "wow look at all these black people" and then I realised something, it wasn't just us in the suburbs, there were all these other people that came in from the suburbs and the majority came from the northern suburbs...and you wouldn't see anybody until Thursday or Friday night and that's when the families came out, you know...

Ronald Johnson, interview with Elizabeth Cavanagh.



Builders Arms Hotel, Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
Photo: M.Harris

When Cheryl Vickery returned to Fitzroy to look for her mother, Stella Nicholls, she also went to the various pubs searching for her.

I was 15-16 and went looking for my mother. She was in Fitzroy and it was in the Builders Arms that I knew to go and look in Fitzroy because of my memory...there was a pub on every corner and I just did the rounds like everyone did...you know, start at the top end and go in that one and then go in that one...you know, people were always putting their head in looking for someone.

Cheryl Vickery, interview with Elizabeth Cavanagh.

Bunta Patten has similar memories of the Builders, noting that:

If you wanted to find someone, if you were new in town, just down from the mission, just call at the Builders, someone'd know where you lived...I'd like something to mark the Builders, because the Builders was our meeting place. That's where a lot of good things happened. That's where we talked about a lot of things. We all helped each other, I mean there was people used to go there, even old Stewart Murray used to go there and he didn't ever drink.

Bunta Patten, interview with Megan Evans.

It wasn't only inside the Builders that the community carried out its business. Bunta Patten also recalls that the lane behind the pub was the venue for fights and the occasional game of two up.



At the Royal Hotel in Fitzroy
Mick Edwards, Choco Edwards, Chris Bedgood,
Beryl Booth and Brian Lovett
Photo: Bev Murray Collection

At the Old Colonial in Fitzroy
Tommy Smith, John Harding, Gary Murray
and Bobby Nicholls.
Photo: Bev Murray Collection



At the Champion in Fitzroy
Lyn Bennell, Terry Austin, Bev Murray, Reg
Edwards and Claude Jackson
Photo: Bev Murray Collection



At the Grace Darling in Collingwood
Leon Saunders, Phillip Cooper and Bill Belling
Photo: Bev Murray Collection





At the Royal Hotel in Fitzroy
Stella Nicholls, Rosie Austin and Bobby Nicholls
Photo: Bev Murray Collection

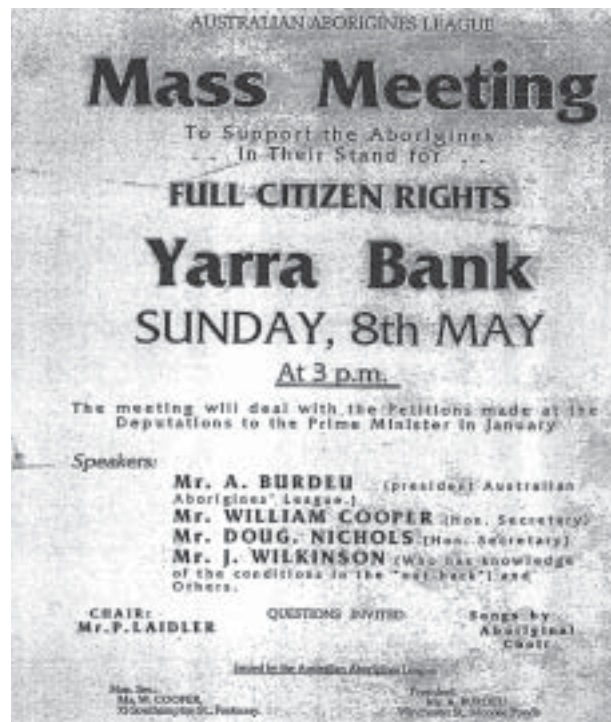
At the Builders Arms in Fitzroy
Wayne Norris, Gary McGuinness, Terence Austin,
Lionel Rose, Les Norris and Darren Briggs
Photo: Bev Murray Collection



At the Builders Arms
Doug Nicholls and Vicki Liddy
Photo: Bev Murray Collection

Speakers Corner on the Yarra bank

In the early days of the Australian Aborigines League Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls would go to the Yarra Bank on a Sunday to argue for rights for Aboriginal people. From his first tentative visit accompanied by Tommy Foster, an Aboriginal from La Perouse mission in New South Wales, Pastor Doug went on to argue for citizenship rights, representation in Parliament and assistance for Aboriginal communities (Thorpe-Clark, 1972: 84-96).



Advertisement for a Yarra Bank meeting

Alick Jackomos recalled that:

We're at the Yarra Bank which I think is officially called Flinder's Park in Batman Avenue opposite the Yarra River and it's alongside where the new Melbourne Park or the tennis courts are... Every Sunday they'd come down to the Yarra Bank. The people I'm referring to are William Cooper, Doug Nicholls, Marge Tucker, Ebenezer Lovett, and Annie and Mae Lovett... They'd be having meetings down here every Sunday and they were concerned about what was happening to Aboriginal people, not only in Victoria, in other parts of Australia. So they'd be here every Sunday.

Alick Jackomos, *Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy*, p.52.

Old Peppercorn tree in Gore & Webb Streets

In those early days Sir Doug had a church down here in Gore Street and so we used to go to that, during the week we used to have a youth group, so we'd go to that...in the church that was...and other times, just around the back from where we sit there is a parking lot, and in the parking lot there is a peppercorn tree and I was telling these fellas the other day that peppercorn tree has an historical significance because where we were living we weren't supposed to be drinking, but what we'd do is you'd go up to the pub and they had six o'clock closing and if you get a drink, because you couldn't go home with it we'd sit under the peppercorn tree and have a drink...just up the back here in Gore Street and Webb Street.

Alf Bamblett, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 4 October 2001.



Peppercorn Tree meeting place
Photo: Mark Harris

Fitzroy Stars and Fitzroy Gym

In some ways it could be said that the gym developed because of the Fitzroy Stars Australian Rules football team. The Fitzroy Stars grew out of the “mainstream” Westgarth football team and, as Troy Austin puts it, the “Fitzroy Stars sort of evolved out of Westgarth as a football club”. By 1973 the Fitzroy Stars football club had been started up through the work of Jono Jonson, Jock Austin, Ronnie Smith and Ross Barnerson. Troy Austin remembers that, “four or five years later the organisation (the Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Gymnasium) was started.” The work of the late Jock Austin is remembered by people still today.



George Atkinson
Photo: Bev Murray Collection

End of 85 I got work at Fitzroy Stars Gym and worked there until 1990 with a bloke called Jock Austin who taught me a lot of things in regard of being an urban Aboriginal and learning the urban culture and what it was to have respect and stuff like that and the values that he instilled in me I still hold to this day...

...I can remember we started in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy and even racism in regards to the football ground there, it was hard to get backing for an Aboriginal football club to use the football ground there, so once the league was established out at Thornbury we moved out there.

We'd have to apply every year to the city council and they'd have their own opinions on who should occupy the ground and it ended up soccer clubs would get priority over football on a specifically Aussie Rules ground and even in the leagues itself we were seen as being the perpetrators of violence and yet I can remember a game at Brunswick Street where the oppositions supporters rolled up with pistols and started shooting them and after that the police trying to land the helicopters on the ground in 1986..it was a normal game in the YCW league and we were playing a club called Kenstores and that club subsequently got ousted after that incident...you know just incidents like that...

Kutchia Edwards, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 23 July 2001.

The Fitzroy Stars belong to the community. And they're good sportsmen because everyone knows each other. You know you're going to get looked after. You know the community is on your side"

Neville Bamblett, Reserves coach, Melbourne Times 26 May 1993.

"There are plenty of potentially great players on this team and in teams all over Australia. But for most of us the important thing is to enjoy playing together as a Koori team, where you're part of a family, playing with the brothers"

Ross Morgan, Fitzroy Stars player, Melbourne Times 26 May 1993.

The Fitzroy gym had its beginning as the Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Community Youth Club Gymnasium, which was formed by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) in 1977. Working originally from a small space in the VAHS, Jock Austin was instrumental in expanding the services. In 1982 the Gym leased a building at 173 Gertrude Street for a short period, before moving to 99 George Street.



Plaque at Fitzroy Gym
Photo: Megan Evans

The importance of the gym can be gauged by Troy Austin's assessment that:

We've always had the core of our community that have always used the gym and that will never change. We've got core families in Melbourne, the McGuinnesses, Austins, Thorpes um just to name a couple, there's certainly more than that around the community...they're all connected to this organisation, in the early days...people used this as a central point. Someone might be coming from the Western District and someone from Gippsland and they'd say "I'll meet you down the gym". It was the central point to meet, it's a friendly atmosphere, you can always get a cup of tea"... The health service was just up the road and the legal service was in Gertrude Street, so it was always the central hub.

Troy Austin, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 29 May 2001.

The Gym provided facilities for a youth gymnasium as well as the NINDEBIYA workshop.

Jan Chessells started up the Nindebiya workshop, there'd always be blank boomerangs and that. Initially it was in one of the shops across the road from the gym, but then we relocated to 99 George Street, and the Nindebiya workshop came with us, rather than paying two rents we sort of consolidated the rents, it was a great focal point for communities and the parkies used to get down there for a cup of soup and everything. And as I say you could go in there and do anything, you could paint, you could do clay, you could cut out a boomerang and paint it up or just go and sit down and just talk.

Troy Austin, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 29 May 2001.

Apart from providing a wide range of sporting facilities and classes, the Fitzroy gym was probably even more important as a meeting place or "drop-in" centre.

The gym is only one small component of what we do...we're a community centre that runs youth activities and gym and health and fitness programs, but we do a lot more than what you see in this building, scouts programs, leadership courses, employment programs, tennis...any sport you name it and the gyms been involved in it...there's been contemporary dance classes, Yve Jo Edwards and Julie Phillips were involved in cultural dance classes upstairs. Wayne Thorpe is great in that area...The scouts program, run by Aboriginal leaders, who have been trained by Australian scouts but if non-Aboriginal people want to send their kids along, or come along themselves, they're more than welcome.

Troy Austin, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 29 May 2001.



Fitzroy Gym 2001 Photo: Mark.Harris

5 Living in Fitzroy

The Boarding Houses

Much of the accommodation in Fitzroy in the period from the 1940s onwards was made up of rooming houses. Fitzroy boarding houses were not the only places the Aboriginal community congregated. Cheryl Vickery recalls that when she was about nine years old her mother, Stella Nicholls lived in Neill Street Carlton where “we had the double room upstairs”. Cheryl also recollects Ivy Bux had a house in Peel Street, Collingwood.

A lot of the other people my mother knew lived in rooms and shared accommodation. In every street (in Fitzroy) there was boarding houses and in every street probably you would have had a Koori renting a room and you might have had ten in the street... My mother (Stella Nicholls) lived at the front of the house and the kitchen was under the stairwell - under the stairwell was just the gas cooker...you cooked there, but you didn't eat there, you bought it back to your room.

Cheryl Vickery, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 16 June 2001

A report prepared in 1950 by the Victorian Council of Social Services, called *The Dark People of Melbourne* sought to examine the difficulties which Aboriginal people encountered in Melbourne. A table reproduced in the appendices of the report detailed the extent of overcrowding.

Persons living in a sample of 10 house occupied by the Dark People

House	No. of rooms	First Family	Second Family	Other	Total Persons	Persons per room
1	4	2A	2A/2C	2A	8	2
	3	2A	2A	10/12A	14	4.5
	3	2A/4C		2C	8	2.6
	4	2A/7C	1A/4C	3A	17	4.25
	6	2A/4C	2A/4C	4A	14	2.3
	3	2A	2A	3A	7	2.3
	6	2A	2A/5C	3A	12	2
	5	2A/6C		2A/1C	11	2.2
	6	2A/8C	2A	3A	15	2.5
	4	2A	2A/2C	2A/2C	12	3

A = Adult C = Children

The Dark People of Melbourne, Victorian Council of Social Services Report, 1950.

Gertrude Street, Fitzroy

In Gertrude Street Alick Jackomos remembers that there were three families. The house on the corner of Little Smith Street and Gertrude Street, at 234 Gertrude Street, was occupied by Jack Connolly and his wife, Alice (nee Thorpe).

Nora Murray (the daughter of Dowie and Gladys Nicholls) remembers the different families that lived around Gertrude Street in the early years:

I can remember the Clarks, the Browns, Taylors, Nevins, Thorpes, Lovetts, Bergs, Aunty Maude Moyle, Kings, Connollys, Greens, Hudsons and Aunty Marj of course. Most of the families lived in one of the streets off Gertrude Street, Fitzroy.

Nora Murray, interview courtesy of Bev Murray.



John and Ally Connolly, 234 Gertrude Street, early 1940s
Photo: Alice Thomas Collection

Gore Street, Fitzroy

In 82 Gore Street there were three families, there was my Auntie, Auntie Aggie and her husband and her family... I think they lived in the basement...yeah...I think we lived in the basement, they lived in the middle level and the grandparents lived above. So there was three different levels...and the house actually still stands there. The old bluestone and the iron picket fence and we used to walk down...and then coming to an area...it was very cramped, especially the kitchen area, it was so small.

Ronald Johnson, Interview with Liz Cavanagh, September 2001.



82 Gore Street
Photo: Mark Harris



Gore Street Boarding House
where Stella Nicholls lived.
Photo: Megan Evans

I can remember my mother in Gore Street, you know where the Yoga place is?...well she had the front room there, it was a double room...it was pretty flash..the rest of the place was non-Indigenous...and I had my first baby there...they had a big kitchen, they had a couple of stoves at the back and it was very, very flash and very, very clean but it didn't have a lot of Kooris living there.

Cheryl Vickery, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 16 June 2001.

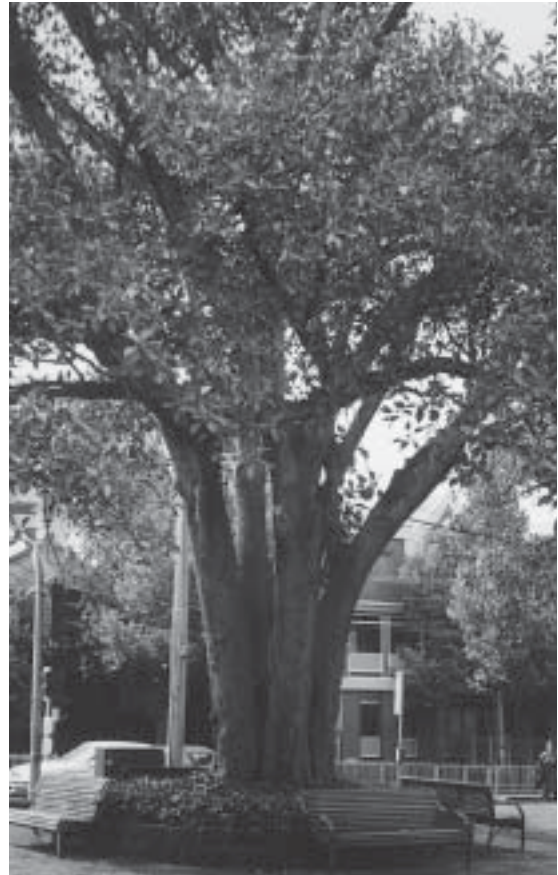
The Parkies and the Gardens and Lanes of Fitzroy

Before the establishment of the organisations one of the main meeting places for the Aboriginal community in Melbourne were the parks around Fitzroy and Carlton, and in particular a site in the Exhibition Gardens. Alick Jackomos recollected:

We're on the corner of Gertrude Street and Nicholson Street and we're just outside the old tram shed...Opposite there's a Moreton Bay Fig tree. Can you see it there? That big tree? In fact there's two and that's where the Aboriginal community, both before the war and when the war was on, would come and meet. As I said before, there were no organisations and there was no Advancement League. You couldn't fit into anyone's house because every family only had a little room in the house. It could be three or four families in one house. So on Saturday and Sunday, and during the week, but mostly weekends, everybody would come here and sit around these Moreton Bay Fig Trees. That was our meeting place in the late 30s and 40s and maybe early 50s.

Alick Jackomos, *Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy*, p.24.

Moreton Bay Fig Tree in Carlton Gardens
Photo: Mark Harris



For many Aboriginal people who had no permanent residence, the gardens and the area around the Moreton Bay Fig trees were also a temporary residence. Archie Roach also recalls the Atherton Gardens as one of the locations frequented by the Aboriginal community of Fitzroy.

We'd always seem to end up there, at the end of the day, the Atherton Gardens. Like we'd probably be all over different lanes and parks during the day, but we'd end up there because, night-time, the only time we ever ventured into the pubs was usually about night-time really. When everything was in full swing. Most of the time we'd just be drifting around different parks. The Atherton Gardens, they sort of like became, eventually a pretty important meeting place. That little square there, where the seats and that are a lot of people went through there. A lot of people came and went and it was pretty significant there, as far as I was concerned.

Archie Roach interview, 19 February 1999.

The “parkies” in Fitzroy also frequented numerous small lanes and alleys around the Fitzroy area. The lanes of Fitzroy have been most notably documented in the song “Charcoal Lane” by Archie Roach. Archie Roach recollected in an interview in February 1999 that many of the lanes had been blocked off or fenced off, to provide additional car-park space. He also remembered some of the other lanes:

Goomie Lane’s still there. That’s down Little George Street, no not George Street. That lane further toward Palmer Street. A little one way street...Gumi, because that’s basically what it was. It was very isolated, very hard to find, out of the way...When I hit town it was mainly Charcoal Lane, or Lopez Lane or the Hole in the Wall.

Archie Roach interviewed by Glen Romanis.

Archie Roach also notes that the perception of the wider community of the life of the “parkies” is often not related to the reality. He observed that:

...there was more to it than drinking. If people just saw it on the outside, you know, they’d just think, oh, a couple of old Koori fellows, or young Koori, couple of Koori people drinking in a pack, or whatever, vacant lot, vacant area – but it was more than that. That’s where I learned my history brother, from those areas, because all the old fellas, they knew more about me than I did, mate.

Archie Roach interview, 19 February 1999.

The community of the “parkies” was integral for the maintenance of community links and, even more importantly, confirming the history of those people who were often ignored or rejected by mainstream society. The shared body of knowledge of the “old fellas”, as Archie Roach called them, was important for confirming identity and belonging. Consistent with the maintenance of the Koori identity was the renaming of all of the sites around Fitzroy by the “parkies”. Bunta Patten remembers how the lanes and alleys were all given different names to that on the street sign. She remembers that:

Similarly Archie Roach explained how “Charcoal Lane” came to get its name:

Charcoal Lane was, we call it Charcoal Lane because at the end of it, behind the Cadbury Street School, there’s sort of like, just behind there’s a little road, but behind is a lane way. So at the end of the lane there used to be this old factory. And people that worked there, some lads that worked there, maybe not ourselves, but some blokes that worked there that we knew. They’d be shovelling bags of briquettes or charcoal like that. And that’s where they made it...So that’s Charcoal Lane.

Archie Roach interview, 19 February 1999.

Community entertainment

Music always played an important part in the Aboriginal community gatherings in and around Fitzroy. From the earliest days there were musical groups. Apart from the choir that was based at the Gore Street Church, there were also community gatherings at places like the Collingwood Town Hall and the old MU hall. Alick Jackomos recounted that the MU hall was located on the corner of Hoddle and Vere Streets in Collingwood. He recalled that:

There was a big community in Fitzroy and a lot of people living in and around Collingwood. This was before the housing commissions housed all these people in Reservoir and Preston. So we used to run dances in this building. It's on the corner of Vere and Hoddle Street, next door to a hall called the Collingwood RSL. The MU Hall doesn't exist any more. There's an overpass coming from the Collingwood College, from the west side to the east side of the Hoddle Street for kids going to school. But the MU Hall is where we ran our dances. The Aboriginal people didn't call it the MU Hall they called it the "Emu Hall". And we used to run dances there.

Alick Jackomos, *Remembering Fitzroy*, p.44.



Site of old "Emu Hall" on Hoddle Street, Collingwood Photo: Megan Evans

Auntie Alice Thomas often played piano at the Emu Hall community gatherings, having taught herself by watching her mother play. Her mother had received formal instruction, but from the age of four Alice Thomas had played the piano by ear. She recalls, for example,

Me and Harry Williams, we had the first little band, I played the piano and he was the guitarist and his brother, Mervyn, used to play a string in a box for a bass and in them days we used to charge like 5 shillings to get in at the door and they'd have maybe sandwiches and a few cakes that we could afford to put on the table, and those days were lovely days...that was at the M&U Hall, yes, and old uncle Ed Green used to be on the door.

Alice Thomas, interview with M.Harris, 10 December 2001.

Apart from playing in the band with Harry and Mervyn Williams, Auntie Alice Thomas also recalls the performances that were carried out by a number of women together. She recalls that there was herself and "Aunty Jessie Taylor, that's Joycie Johnson's mother, she used to play piano accordion, Marg (Tucker) used to play ukulele. And we had a band, us three girls, and we played at a do out at...oh I can't think of the place, anyway it was like a Catholic thing... .We had our own choir, church, everything, it was beautiful".

Music and song formed a strong bond with Alice Thomas and many of the other women in the Fitzroy Aboriginal community. She remembers that:

We was like sisters, there was Aunty Sissie McGuinness, then there was Stella Nicholls, we used to call her "tidda girl" and she'd sing a song. Everyone had a special song I played. Everybody used to like to sing. Aunty Iris (Lovett-Gardiner), oh she had a fantastic voice. They were lovely days.

Alice Thomas, interview, 10 December 2001.

One of the main places that Alice Thomas remembers that the community went to after six o'clock closing was the home of Alick and Merle Jackomos, who then lived in Coburg. She remembers that:

See when we used to have the six o'clock closing at the Builders, Alick and Merle lived up off Sydney Road, Coburg, and they used to invite us out to their place and they used to have sandwiches and cakes for us, they had a piano, and we'd have a lovely time and he was the only man in Melbourne ever done that for what they used to call drunks in them days...Everyone from the pub would come and we would just have a beautiful time. We'd have a great sing-song until probably 11 or 12 o'clock. They were the only people in Melbourne used to open their house up to the Aborigines, no, he was a great man Alick Jackomos in my books.

Alice Thomas, interview, 10 December 2001.

Eleanor Harding recollected of the social life in the period from the late 1950s onwards



There was nothing much for the black folks then. Once a fortnight there used to be a dance at the Collingwood Town Hall, and it was really good because the young ones would have somewhere to go. I always remember the band, they used to play all the old songs. The dances were run by Eric Onus, Alick Jackomos and Merv Williams and we used to look forward to them. The pub would shut at 6 o'clock and everyone used to be dressed up and heading down to the Collingwood Town Hall. After the dance there'd be a nice supper - cakes, scones, sandwiches, a cuppa. No alcohol was allowed in the hall because the children were there.

Eleanor Harding.

Eleanor Harding
Photo: Bev Murray Collection

Joyce Johnson was another community member who was always at the forefront of the Aboriginal community in the arts. Her son, Ron, remembers that she continued to have community gatherings at her place in later years:

The only time we get together now are special occasions, and those special occasions are not like the, are different to what we used to have on the weekends, like I mentioned the Sundays, always the Sundays. Like where I'm living now, Mum carried on the tradition, Sundays parties and all that in the backyard...If you ask Auntie Alice and them they'd tell you, yeah Joyce Johnson's place, ah yeah, party up the back and that was it, you know, bringing people together. I think in the eighties that was when it all started to fade away.

Ronald Johnson, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 14 September 2001.

The family get-togethers are also fondly remembered from the teen years of Nora Murray (Nicholls) who recalls:

As a young girl I would meet up with my friends and we would go to Connolly's and to Joyce Taylor's (later Johnson) place for get togethers with other Aboriginal families. There were the concerts and we would go to the pictures at the beautiful Regent Theatre that used to be in Johnson Street, Fitzroy. We would go to the City, to St Moritz for ice skating, to Luna Park and

we would also go canoeing on the Yarra River. Back then Smith Street, Collingwood was like Bourke Street in the city today. It was filled with all the major stores and everyone did their shopping there and it was the place to catch up with friends.

Nora Murray (nee Nicholls), Interview courtesy of Bev Murray.

Apart from having community gatherings with a sing-song, Joyce Johnson was also involved in amateur theatre and played acoustic guitar and sang in coffee shops. In the 1970s she established Nindetana Theatre, which was similar to the Black Theatre established by Betty Fisher in Redfern (Walker, 2000: 172).



Theatrical Troupe
Photo: Ronald Johnson Collection

Joyce Johnson performing at a coffee bar
for sailors and soldiers during the 1940s
Photo: Ronald Johnson Collection



In more recent times the group called the “Stray Blacks” was formed, which quickly become an institution at Aboriginal cabarets and at the John Curtin Hotel in Lygon Street, Carlton. Alf Bamblett recalls of those days:

We started a band, the Stray Blacks, it was just us. And we started playing up at Fitzroy at the Eastern Hill Hotel (Brunswick Street and Victoria Parade) I think it was...I reckon if we had a Stray Blacks reunion we would have about ten bands all up, just all the different people that come and played...see we were getting barred from all the pubs...someone will go and play up and you come along after and you can't get in... so I went to this publican and said we want to put on a night of our own and so we'll look after it, then we started to think about music and so we scratched up and went and borrowed an amp here and a guitar there and a drum kit here... and we used to have those nights every fortnight, pension night or whatever it was and somewhere for people to go to...We did that for a few years, had this night, a meeting place...mobs of people over the years...and so it was somewhere for people to go and meet...The publican owned that pub and the John Curtin in Carlton and then they sold the Eastern Hill and so we ended up at JCs and we went there for years, doing the same thing and that was really good and people from all across the nation would be there...and that went for quite some time.

Alf Bamblett, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 4 October 2001.

Aboriginal people and the law

From the earliest days of the Native Police, Aboriginal people have been volatile. Throughout Australia the experience of Aboriginal people with the police has been in their role as enforcers of repressive government policies such as the assimilation policy. Beryl Booth recalls that her father and others ensured that Kooris would be represented when they appeared in court. She remembers that:

My father, along with Jack Patten and Stewart Murray would make sure they would have representation at the court, which was across the road from our house and we would know every time a black went to court, because it was opposite our house...We knew when the black maria was coming to pick them up to take them to Pentridge. We knew when they were going to court and what the bail was. And most of the time they were released into my father's custody because we were opposite the jail and the Magistrate's Court in Condell Street, Fitzroy.

Beryl Booth, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 24 April 2001.

In the eyes of the community the police harassment of Aboriginal people in the pubs was a form of intimidation, Bunta Patten recalls the frequency of the police raids.

In the big black marias, they used to call them, like big black armoured trucks and whether you was drinking or not if you was there you got dragged in. You could be in there having a lemon squash and you'd get pinched and they'd do that two, three times a month to try and break us up.

Bunta Patten, interview with Megan Evans.

Bev Murray's recollections from the mid 1980s are that, even after the establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Service, there were still instances of police harassment. She remembers:

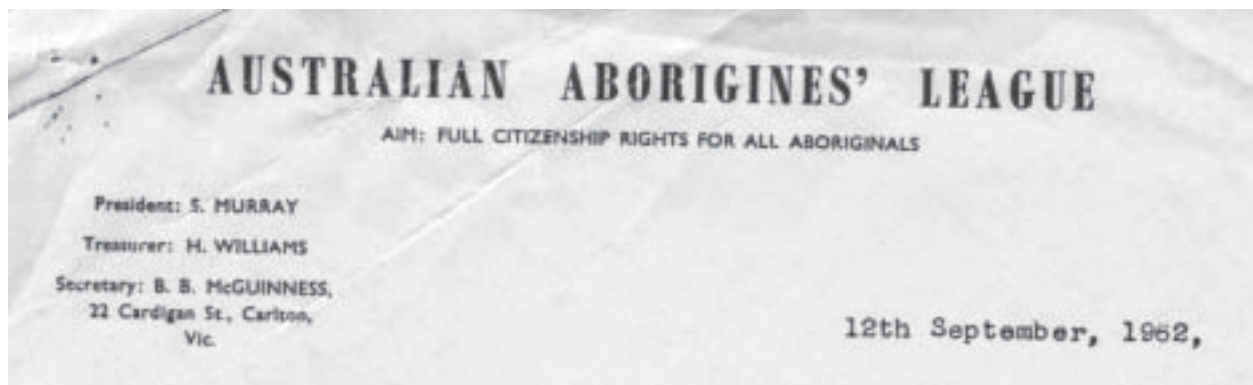
But you still had things like the police rolling up, waiting for you outside the pub, waiting to pick up the blackfellas and cart them down the lockup. You know it was the blackfellas drinking, that was their only crime...I remember when we were drinking at the Eastern Hill a big riot van pulled up there and grabbed the blokes as well as the women...it was atrocious...

Bev Murray, interview with Mark Harris, 14 November 2001.

In 1983 relations between the Fitzroy Aboriginal people and the local police became the focus of attention by the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gerry Hand, after a series of articles in the Age newspaper, detailing how police had described Aboriginal people in "racist and demeaning terms" ("Meeting on local Aborigine-police relations", *Melbourne Times*, 9 November 1983). One of the initiatives that followed as a consequence of the controversy was the placement of trainee police with Aboriginal health and legal services as part of their preparation for transfer to the Fitzroy police station.

Australian Aborigines League

Beryl Booth recalls that, after her family came to Fitzroy in 1928, “my grandfather was a political man who established the first Aborigines League at 240 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy. He was a communist”.



The beginnings of the Aboriginal organisations in Melbourne can be traced to the arrival in 1932 of William Cooper from Cummeragunja Aboriginal Mission. The Cummeragunja mission was located on the border of New South Wales and Victoria, near the township of Barmah. The difficulties brought about by the depression had forced William Cooper to Melbourne, where his house in Footscray rapidly became a meeting place for other Kooris from the Cummeragunja mission. The organisation that developed was the Australian Aborigines League which, along with its counterpart in New South Wales, the Aborigines Progressive Association, was instrumental in pushing the issue of Aboriginal welfare to the forefront of public attention in the southern states.

Although he was nearly seventy when he moved to Footscray, William Cooper took on the role of organising the fight for Aboriginal rights. At the time, the lives of the residents of reserves such as Cummeragunja were restricted by harsh pieces of legislation such as the *Aborigines Act 1909* (NSW), which limited the distribution of rations to children, the aged and infirm. Given that this was the time of the Great Depression there was little prospect of the station's residents obtaining any work in the area surrounding the reserve, which led to an increasing number seeking better conditions in the cities. The Melbourne Aboriginal people who were drawn to the side of William Cooper included many other former Cummeragunja residents, such as Margaret Tucker, Shadrach James and Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls.

The major initiatives of the Australian Aborigines League during its early days included the petitioning of King George V to allow for the inclusion of an Aboriginal representative in the Australian Federal Parliament and the centralisation of existing state administration of Aboriginal affairs under a federally controlled Department of Native Affairs. The most significant event, however, was the organisation of the National Day of Mourning to coincide with the celebrations of the centenary of the arrival of the First Fleet on 26 January 1788. A joint statement was prepared by the Australian Aborigines League and the Aborigines Progressive Association which, in part, declared that:

The 26th of January 1938 is not a day of rejoicing for Australia's Aborigines, it is a day of mourning. The festival of 150 years of so-called "progress" in Australia commemorates also 150 years of misery and degradation imposed upon the original inhabitants by the white invaders of this country.

It is a measure of the difficulties which the Australian Aborigines League had to surmount in its early days that all of these proposals were met with either indifference or hostility by the wider community. Cooper was informed that the Federal Parliament would not proceed with the presentation of his petition to King George V. Although William Cooper passed away in 1941, his influence, and that of the other founders of the first Australian Aborigines League, upon future Aboriginal organizations was profound.

Aborigines Advancement League

In 1957 Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls was asked to join a Western Australian parliamentary committee that travelled to the Warburton Ranges to study the living conditions of the Aboriginal people there. Upon his return Pastor Doug set about trying to draw public attention to the shocking living conditions of the region's residents. Doris Blackburn the president of the Women's International League called a public meeting of the "Save the Aborigines Campaign" at which Pastor Doug showed graphic film footage of the Warburton Ranges Aborigines.

From this initial meeting the decision was made to establish a new organisation which funded the position of full time field officer for Pastor Doug. The Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) replaced the "Save the Aborigines Campaign" and commenced its operations in 1958 with an executive comprising president Gordon Bryant, a Labor MHR, and secretary Stan Davey, a Church of Christ minister. It is worth noting that while there was an involvement by those who had been prominent members of the Australian Aborigines League, such as Geraldine Briggs, Margaret Tucker and William and Eric Onus, the direction of the organisation was largely steered by the white membership for the next decade. Following the establishment of the League the Victorian Aboriginal Girls Hostel Committee, which was formed earlier in 1956, also became part of the AAL organisation.

The Aborigines Advancement League initially had a small office in 46 Russell Street. From there the Advancement League moved to a premises in Victoria Parade that had been previously occupied by the Presbyterian Ladies College. The League was based in Victoria Parade, around the area where the outpatients clinic is now located and opposite the Grand Masonic Lodge from 1963 until the construction of the Doug Nicholls Centre in Cunningham Street, Northcote in 1966 (Jackomos: 3-4).

Following the growing politicisation of Aboriginal organisations during the mid 1960's and increased agitation by prominent League members such as Bruce McGuinness, the League replaced all white members on its committee of management on 3 October 1969. At the time of the resignation of the nine white committee members there were seven Aboriginal committee members. At the time of the transition of the League there were 40 branches and approximately 3000 members across Victoria.

After a building appeal was launched in 1980 the Advancement League moved to its present home in 1982, the title to the Northcote property having been given to the League by the State government. In 1999 a grant of \$ 2.79 million dollars from the Victorian Government enabled the League to refurbish its headquarters, including the creation of a cultural keeping place to document the history of the Aborigines Advancement League.

Australian Aboriginal Elders Council of Victoria

On 3 August 1957 the Elders Council held its first state conference to elect delegates to positions on a representative Victorian Aboriginal body. The conference was held at 165 Gertrude Street. The office of the organisation was at 26 Smith Street in Collingwood. The President at this time was Jack Patten, the secretary Harry Roberts and the Treasurer was L. Booth. The organisation also had country representatives from Mooroopna (G. Nelson), Lake Condah (H.Lovett), Orbost (M. Woodworth) and Lake Tyers (J. O'Rourke). While there is little recorded on the activities of this organisation it is important to note that there were other organisations apart from the Australian Aborigines League and the Aborigines Advancement League that were active in the area of Aboriginal rights.

United Council of Aboriginal Women

Another organisation of which there was little written was the United Council of Aboriginal Women (UCAW). A pamphlet circulated in 1969 lists the office bearers for the group as being Marg Tucker (President); Eleanor Harding (Vice President); Joyce Johnson (Secretary) and I. King as Treasurer. The UCAW stated: "We are a group of Aboriginal women who feel that it is long past the time that our voices should be heard on Aboriginal affairs, voicing the deepest needs of our people, our families and especially our youth".



Undated newspaper clipping
Marg Tucker, Rosalie Monk and Joyce Johnson
Source: Ronald Johnson Collection

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

The Aboriginal Health Service was established in 1973 as a response to the growing number of Aboriginal people who needed medical attention, but were reluctant to go to mainstream medical services. As a result of this a number of volunteers established the Service from a shopfront at 231 Gertrude Street. The Health Service then moved to the corner of Little Napier and Gertrude Streets, to a building that was originally the Fitzroy Post Office. (Jackomos, A., Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy, pg.17.)

In 1992 the Health Service moved to its current premises at 186 Nicholson Street.



Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, corner Little Napier and Gertrude Streets

The importance of having a designated Aboriginal health service is best illustrated by the range of anonymous quotes from patients of the Health Service collected by Pam Nathan.

You can go in and see your friends which is all part of the cure isn't it? It's your service, a Koori thing and a community service.

Before I found out about this Centre I hardly had any knowledge of Koori people in Melbourne and I was isolated.

Well it brings our people together. It's a grass roots service, run by our people, for our people and we have a lot of say in what goes on.

You can go in and identify with the Kooris who are working there. We're all together.

Nathan, P. *A Home Away from Home, a study of the Aboriginal Health Service in Fitzroy*, p. 115.

The importance of the Aboriginal Health Service is not only in its capacity as a community health service, but it also serves an essential role in providing a meeting point.

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

The precursor to the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) was the work that had been done for many years by people such as Stewart Murray, Les Booth, Merle Jackomos, Hyllus Maris and Margaret Wirrpunda. These people had visited Aboriginal people in the cells and appeared for them at court hearings long before the momentum developed to establish the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. The first Aboriginal legal service office was established in June 1972 at 72-73 Gertrude Street. Bunta Patten recalls Jim Berg telling her that the establishment of the Legal Service came after members of the community had taken legal academics to watch the manner in which the Fitzroy Police indiscriminately arrested all Aboriginal people at closing time in the pubs, regardless of their state of inebriation. Before the establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Service, Gary Foley recalls that:



Aboriginal Legal Service, Brunswick Street
Photo: Megan Evans

Furthermore, for about five years prior to the establishment of the Victorian ALS, the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) had conducted a quasi-legal aid service from their office in Northcote using volunteer lawyers where possible, or League officials appearing for Aboriginal people when no lawyers could be found. In one six month period in 1969, then AAL Director, Bruce McGuinness made 23 appearances for Kooris fronting court (with lawyers organised by him appearing in 10 of those cases), 28 prison visits, bail/lock-up appearances). This practice of organising what legal assistance they could was began by League Director Doug Nicholls, perfected by McGuinness, and maintained by subsequent AAL administrations, including that of the late Stewart Murray.

Foley, G., "The Pain of Faine goes mainly to my Brain", www.kooriweb.org/foley.

The site of the first Aboriginal Legal Service was the building at 229 Gertrude Street. The Legal Service then moved to 173 Gertrude Street. The Legal Service stayed there for a number of years, occupying the first floor of the building, before moving to a location in Brunswick Street. After staying at these premises for a number of years the Legal Service then shifted to its current premises at 6 Alexandra Parade.

The commemorative plaque at the offices of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service states:

***The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service** Listed below are the founders of the legal service together with members of the first council. These people gave willingly of their time and made considerable personal sacrifice to see the legal service established. The plaque commemorates their contribution and commitment to the cause of justice for Aboriginal people. We thank them for their efforts*

FOUNDERS *Stewart Murray, Geraldine Briggs, Merle Jackomos, Hyllus Maris, Margaret Briggs/Wirrpunda, Dr Elizabeth Eggleston, Peter Hanks, Professor Louis Waller, Ron Merkel and Ron Castan.*

On the establishment of the Legal Service, Alick Jackomos recalls that:

First of all it was the Legal Service. That was established in 1972...It was established by Stewart Murray, Merle Jackomos, Gareth Evans, Ron Castan and Professor Louis Waller. People like that. They used to meet in the Melbourne University in the Law Faculty there, eventually, when they got it going.

Jackomos, A., *Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy*, p. 12.

Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria



The Aboriginal Housing Board was established in 1981 and was initially located at 108 Smith Street, Collingwood, the building leased by the Victorian Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd., until its shift to its second premises at 79 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy. The Aboriginal Housing Board moved to its current premises at 125-27 Scotchmer Street, North Fitzroy in February 1995 and continues to manage the Victorian Aboriginal Rental Housing Program.

Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria
125-127 Scotchmer Street

Koori Club

The Koori Club was formed in 1969 at 41 Gertrude Street, mainly through the efforts of Bruce McGuinness. Bruce McGuinness recalls: "The cops were against it, the local council was against it, everyone was against it, except us. It really didn't get off the ground we tried but we just couldn't get people involved to come along and plus Kooris didn't like to travel a lot at night on their own, to and from Places" (Reko Rennie-Gwaybilla, "the Dr. Bruce Mac Interview", www.kooriweb.org/bbm). Alick Jackomos recollected that: "That was where the word Koori was more or less introduced in Victoria because, until the mid 60s, the word Koori wasn't used in Victoria. Gippsland people were Kurnai, and Cummeragunja people would call themselves Woongies and the Western District people were Mara. But in the early 1960s, the Koori club was set up by a fellow called Bruce McGuinness, a grandson of old Aunty Maude Moyle or Maude Onus" (Jackomos, A. Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy, p.28).



41 Gertrude Street
Photo: Mark Harris



Koori Information Centre,
Gertrude Street.

Koori Information Centre

The Koori Information Centre (KIC) was established around 1982 following the Commonwealth Games. Bev Murray recalls that:

Because that protest generated a lot of interest in White Australia in relation Black Australia and KIC was an organisation that could provide that information to people who wanted to know, and that's what we did...We were probably the first Aboriginal organisation to have an artist in residence. Lin Onus produced a comic while he was there and he did some artwork for community organisations...Robbie Thorpe was involved, with assistance from John Morieson, who did all of the funding....

Bev Murray, interview

The activities of the KIC were seen to be sufficiently threatening to the government of the day to warrant police surveillance, a fact that subsequently came to light when the *Age* revealed a list of organisations that had been subject to covert surveillance.

Victorian Aboriginal Co-Operative at 108 Smith Street

While some organisations shifted from location to location, the building at 108 Smith Street was unique in that there were numerous programs and organisations operating from there. Often an organisation would commence its operation at 108 Smith Street, until it expanded sufficiently to move to its own premises. Apart from the activities of organisations there were also courses and programs run from the building, such as the music programs.

Alf Bamblett recollects that:

When I first came down to Melbourne a lot of the stuff was with the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, like the government "big brother", if you like, for Aboriginal affairs, and then Aboriginal people got together and created the organisations and started to make things happen. The Aboriginal Housing Co-Op used to be just up there at 108 Smith Street. We finished up with 2-3 floors in that place. We did some things with Youth, Sport and Recreation there...we had a coffee shop there...Koori Coffee Club or Koori Coffee Shop, something like that...lots of the stuff came from times when we'd just be sitting around having an ale. What is now the Aboriginal Education Group had their first office in 108 Smith Street, they're up in Gertrude Street, Gertrude and Brunswick Street now, with a different name, but it's the same thing.

Alf Bamblett, interview, 4 October 2001.

Bev Murray also remembers the significance of the building at 108 Smith Street.

That building...a lot came out of that building. Koori Kollij started from there. It started there and moved to its own premises. VAEAI started there and then moved, Camp Jungai started there. The Victorian Aboriginal Co-Operative Limited. The people that were involved in that organisation helped to set up lots of other organisations.

Bev Murray, interview.



Kennedy Edwards & Penny, Tripcony
Photo: Aboriginal Housing Board of Vic.

Koori Kollij

The Koori Kollij was a community initiative that developed out of a program at the Aboriginal Co-Operative at 108 Smith Street. The program was initiated by leaders from the Aboriginal community such as Gary Foley and Bruce McGuinness, with assistance from a non-Indigenous academic from Swinburne Technology, John Morieson. In 1982 thirty Aboriginal community members attended a nine month course for Aboriginal Health Worker training. The original course was co-ordinated by Alan Brown, who revealed to the media of the time that the course was funded by a private benevolent trust. He noted "We have been trying to get the money for five years, running the course of many Government departments – Aboriginal Affairs, Health, Social Security and didn't get it...It will be the first community controlled health worker program in Australia, possibly the western world". ("Blacks look to their own", *Melbourne Times*, 24 March 1982).



In front of the Koori Kollij
Gary Foley and Alan Brown
Photo: Jamie Davies,
Source: Weekend Australian 21-22 July 1990.

The Aboriginal health worker program was so successful that it subsequently attracted government funding and the Koori Kollij was established in Cambridge Street, Collingwood. The Kollij ran programs in a wide range of disciplines until the Federal Government annual funding of \$220 000 was removed in June 1990 on the grounds that there were not enough students enrolled. At the time of the funding being cut it was alleged that by the Federal Minister for Employment, Mr Dawkins, that there were only eight students enrolled and there were nine staff working there. In response to this, Alan Brown, the Kollij co-ordinator noted that up to 120 students had been expected to apply for the next round of 12 month courses. The move was also criticized by Gary Foley, who commented that the course had provided training for students from communities from Geraldton to Alice Springs. At the time of its closure the Koori Kollij courses were recognized under the Federal system of pay awards for health workers. The loss was not just to the field of training in health and welfare work, but a wide range of other areas.

We have had a student from Bundalong in Queensland where there was no Aboriginal Health Service and she went back and started one. We are training paramedics, but not run-of-the-mill paramedics – people who can work in a Koori context. It's like the barefoot doctor scheme in China.

Gary Foley quoted in Stone, 1990. "Too few students so Koori Kollij loses its funding" *Weekend Australian*, 21-22 July 1990.

The importance of the course for the Aboriginal community is emphasized by participants such as Kutcha Edwards who remembers that:

I can remember tutors like Wayne Thorpe, who did the tutoring for video production, I can remember Alf Bamblett Jnr was a student, Dixie Patten was a student, Carol Williams, Frances Williams, lots of people, my future girlfriend was there, Fiona Kennedy, and a lot of people from interstate, I can't name them all, from Mt Isa and Townsville, Bundaberg, because this was the only place you could get this certificate in Aboriginal health workers...in turn you could work at any medical center in Australia and that was the thinking behind the course, so you could get this ticket and go back and work in your communities..

Kutcha Edwards, interview.

Aboriginal Community Elders Service

The Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES) was established around 1991 and is located in East Brunswick. ACES came about largely through the efforts of Aunty Iris Lovett Gardiner, who was concerned that Elders were dying in mainstream nursing homes without anyone from the community knowing about it. The volunteers were initially assisted by the support of existing Aboriginal organisations and the Aborigines Advancement League loaned the elders a project worker. Once ACES became incorporated it was eligible to receive funding and it set up a twenty five bed hostel, which was named the Iris Lovett Gardiner Aboriginal Elders Caring Place. Apart from caring for the residents at ACES, the hostel also operates a day care program that picks people up from about nine o'clock in the morning onwards. ACES provides medical care and ensures the elders get a nutritious meal. The programs offered for elders include craft making, rock painting and basket painting, with the bingo on the Mondays as the highlight.

I had the idea of having a place, a hostel, for Aboriginal Elders...I was tired of our people dying in rooming houses and all sorts of places because they had nobody and they were sick. A woman who I really liked and who used to come to all our concerts, she died in an institution and we didn't even know she'd died until a fortnight after she was buried. I thought, "That's it. We should make somewhere where we can keep the Elders under our eyes".

Lovett-Gardiner, I., *Lady of the Lake: Aunty Iris's story*, Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne, 1997.

The inappropriateness of mainstream conceptions of an aged care facility further emphasises the importance of ACES. Fay Carter, the administrator of ACES explains it in the following way:

Then there's another situation too, you know, we've got prematurely aged - who aren't necessarily elders. They're prematurely aged through their lifestyle and they're usually prematurely aged with disabilities. Even the government has recognised that. They use a benchmark age for their age care planning and developing their services as 70 and over and they're accepting 50 and over for us...Also, the way they assess nursing home care is not the way we would assess it. They don't take cultural issues into account that we want to sit and talk to our people, take them for walks, spend time with them...

Andrews, J., Anderson, I. and Atkinson, W. (eds) *Nagarity - Kooris Talkin*, Latrobe University Press, Melbourne 1993.

Iris Lovett Gardiner, recalls that "Fitzroy has always been the place where our people came to. There has always been an Aboriginal community within that suburb, although people's roots were elsewhere in the country".

Fitzroy means to me the central pivot point...people don't say I'm going down to Melbourne to go to Preston, the drawing card is Fitzroy, it always has been and probably always will be. People say where do you go when you go to Sydney of course they say Redfern and it's the same as what has happened in Melbourne with Fitzroy. A lot of people are moving out of Fitzroy to the burbs, to Preston, Reservoir, Thomastown, Lalor and even Epping and then you have large pockets of the community have moved to Broady. Why would you have the health service in Fitzroy it's because it's where at the start a lot of the people were congregating. You get all different areas but Fitzroy's it.

Kutcha Edwards, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 23 July 2001.

We didn't call Fitzroy Fitzroy, if we were coming into Fitzroy, we'd say we're going into town and we weren't going into Melbourne, we were going into town and it was Fitzroy.

Ronald Johnson, interview with Liz Cavanagh, 14 September 2001.

Because we open until eight o'clock at night a lot of people from interstate or down from the bush people come down catching a train they come to gym: "Do you know where there is a hostel I can stay or some welfare kind of work", because we were open that little bit later than the other organisations.

8 Special People

This section is intended to commemorate those members of the Aboriginal community who have passed away, but are remembered for the contribution that they made. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and it is hoped that people will suggest further names for inclusion.

Jock Austin

Jock Austin was one of the key people behind the establishment of the Fitzroy Stars Gym. Beginning from a small office in the Aboriginal Health Service, the organisation expanded until it finally moved to its current premises in Gertrude Street. The legacy of Jock Austin is remembered by Kutcha Edwards in this way:

"Jock taught me a lot of things in regard to being an urban Aboriginal and learning the urban culture and what it was to have respect and stuff like that and the values he instilled in me I still hold to this day".



Jock Austin



John & Ally Connolly
Photo: Alice Thomas
Collection

John & Ally Connolly

John & Alice Connolly lived at 234 Gertrude Street from the early 1940s onwards. Next door to them lived the Greens and the Hudsons. Their daughter, Alice Thomas, recalls that:

"My father was born at Ramahyuck and my mother was a Thorpe, Ally Thorpe, and she was born on Lake Tyers mission...He was the Treasurer of the old League, my Dad, with the late Bill Onus. My Dad used to travel backwards and forwards to Melbourne before we shifted for meetings. As I say they lived in Gertrude Street and all the Aborigines that came to Melbourne were sent to their place for a bed".

Eleanor Harding

Eleanor Harding moved to Melbourne with her husband and three children in 1956. After a short stay in South Yarra they moved to Fitzroy and they eventually shifted to 217 Gore Street, where they stayed until the mid 1960s. In the late 1960s she was involved, along with Marg Tucker and others, in the formation of the United Council of Aboriginal and Islander Women.



Eleanor Harding
Photo: Bev Murray Collection

Les and Hannah Booth

Les and Hannah Booth moved to Fitzroy in 1928 and their daughter, Beryl, was born in Gore Street, two houses down opposite the Builders Arms. Beryl Booth recalls:

My mother when I was about 10 years of age walking down to the Rainbow Hotel, buying the counter meals from her own pocket to take to the prisoners up at the Fitzroy lock-up....My father, along with Jack Patten and Stewart Murray would make sure they (the Koori prisoners) would have representation at the court, which was across the road from our house.



Alick Jackomos
and Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls
Photo: Alick Jackomos Collection

Alick Jackomos

Alick Jackomos was involved in Aboriginal issues for more than fifty years and he is the only non-Aboriginal to have been made a life-member of the Aborigines Advancement League. After being introduced to the issues affecting Aboriginal people by the Yarra Bank speeches of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls Alick began his life's work striving for the improvement of conditions for Aboriginal people. He married Merle Morgan in 1951. Alick Jackomos' legacy to Victorian Kooris include both his comprehensive photo collection and also the genealogies he compiled over the years.

Joyce Johnson

Joyce Johnson lived in 82 Gore Street and was an accomplished musician. Her son Ron Johnson recounts:

"This is what the white man has done to our people I've got a photo there of Mum singing at a club for the soldiers...one of the things that I can laugh about is Mum and Auntie Marg Tucker and a few others...I think it was the Moomba parade... what they did was chain themselves all together as a protest basically it was to let the white people know"



Joyce Johnson
Photo: Ronald Johnson
Collection

Stewart Murray

Born in Lake Boga, near Swan Hill Victoria and descended from the Wemba Wemba people, Stewart Murray served in the army during the Second World War. On his return he became closely involved in the establishment of Aboriginal organisations with his father-in-law, Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls. At various times he was an official with the Aborigines Advancement League, the National Tribal Council, the Dandenong Aboriginal Co-Operative and the Victorian Aboriginal Lands Council. He went on to become the second Aboriginal Justice of the Peace in Victoria and was awarded an OAM.



Stewart Murray
Photo: Bev Murray
collection

Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls

Born in 1906 at the Cummeragunja Mission station Pastor Doug shifted to Melbourne in 1927 to further his football career. He also was a handy boxer (with the Jimmy Sharman Troupe) and an accomplished sprinter. In 1943 he was working at the Gore Street Church. With the formation of the Aborigines Advancement League in 1956 he was appointed as field officer. In 1962 he was made a M.B.E. and in 1963 he became the first Aboriginal Justice of the Peace in Victoria. Pastor Doug was subsequently knighted and went on to assume the post of Governor of South Australia but it is for his early work in Fitzroy that he is often remembered.



Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls
Source: Thorpe Clarke,
1972: 34

Stella Nicholls

Stella Nicholls was a prominent Fitzroy identity who lived in a number of different boarding houses around Carlton and Fitzroy, as recalled by her daughter Cheryl Vickery. Stella is also remembered by Alice Thomas as a member of the group that used to join together for "sing-songs" and that "we used to call her tidda girl".



Stella Nicholls
Photo: Bev Murray



Minnie Patten
Photo: Melbourne Times

Minnie Patten

Born in Moama in 1913, Minnie Patten shifted to Fitzroy in the early 1930s. A newspaper account of her funeral quoted her nephew, Herb Patten, who said: "At the funeral, an old Aborigine woman came up to me and said that Minnie had fed, clothed and housed her five children for two weeks when she first came to Fitzroy over 20 years ago. Aunt Minnie just met this woman in the Builder's Arms Hotel. That's the sort of person she was *Minnie Patten*".

Maude Pepper (nee Carter)

Remembered by Alice Thomas, Maude Pepper lived with the Connollys and worked at Dunlops in Abbotsford for nearly thirty years. She bought toys for the children for Christmas out of her own money. Alice Thomas remembers that she was a devoted Richmond Football Club supporter and was made a life member.



Maude Pepper
Photo: Courtesy of Museum Victoria
- Iris Lovett Gardiner Collection.



Margaret Tucker
Source: Jackomos & Fowell,
1991: 136

Margaret Tucker

Born in 1904 at Warrangesda Mission Margaret Tucker was actively involved in the fight for Aboriginal rights throughout her life. In 1932 Marg Tucker was part of the group that established the Australian Aborigines League. In 1958 she was awarded the MBE in recognition of the work she had done for her people. In 1964 she was appointed to the Aborigines Welfare Board. In 1968 she was appointed to the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. Her involvement in community organisations continued through the 1960s when she helped establish the United Council of Aboriginal and Islander Women.

Ebenezer James Lovett**Robert Leonard Lovett & Hilda Victoria Lovett (nee King)**

The Lovett family have served in every war until the Falklands war.

Ebenezer Lovett joined the Communist Party because of its sympathies to Aboriginal justice and was one of the founders of the Aboriginal Advancement League. He was the father of Robert Lovett.

Robert Lovett was a wing commander in the Royal Air Force and fought in WWII. He returned decorated with the Pacific Medal.

Robert and Hilda were married at Lake Condah in 1939 and have eight children.



Ebenezer James Lovett



Robert Leonard Lovett &
Hilda Victoria Lovett (nee King)

Photos: Courtesy of Denise & Eugene Lovett

A Timeline for Aboriginal Fitzroy 9

A TIMELINE FOR ABORIGINAL FITZROY

Date	Events
8 June 1835	The Batman "Treaty" is signed between tribal leaders of the Yarra Yarra Tribe and John Batman, representing the Port Phillip Association. The Treaty is subsequently deemed invalid by Governor Bourke.
26 March 1839	Robinson records a large corroboree in the new settlement.
1843-4	William Kyle witnesses a battle between two groups of Aboriginal tribes. Eight people are dead by the end of the battle.
1 January 1846	Merri Creek School for Aboriginal children opened at the area near the junction of the Merri Merri Creek and the Yarra River.
10 August 1846	The Wurundjeri people lose Billibellary, their <i>ngurungaeta</i> (headman), to a chest infection.
1859	Acheron Aboriginal Reserve established.
March 1863	Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve established near Healesville.
1886	The Aborigines Protection Act is introduced, which allows the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) to proscribe the place of residence of any "full blood" Aboriginal person. This is the beginning of the policy of assimilation that is practiced by the BPA and its successors in Victoria until 1966.
17 September 1941	The Fitzroy Aboriginal community complained about the comments made by Fitzroy Councillors about their behaviour. The local police commented "These aborigines give us very little trouble...Although there are about 100 of them in the district we rarely have to arrest any of them".
1943	Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls established the Gore Street Fitzroy Church of Christ Aboriginal Mission.
26 August 1949	The first Aboriginal Debutante Ball is held at the Collingwood Town Hall. Organised by Marg Tucker the Ball features 26 couples who are presented to Sir George and Lady Knox.
31 January 1954	An Aboriginal choir, featuring Isobel Kuhl a 13-year old soloist is the feature of the special Australia Day service at the Churches of Christ Aborigines' Mission in Fitzroy (<i>Argus</i>).
3 August 1957	A conference is held at the club rooms of the Australian Aboriginal Elders' Council of Victoria at 165 Gertrude Street. Delegates from all over Victoria attend.
6 July 1958	The first Aboriginal girls' hostel is opened in Cunningham Street, Northcote by the Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board.

1958	Marg Tucker is awarded an MBE for services to her people.
July 1961	A “Conscience calling Ball” is held at the Northcote Town Hall to raise money for the appeal being conducted by the Aborigines Advancement League to raise funds for the construction of another Aboriginal youth hostel.
10 January 1968	Bill Onus, the first Aboriginal president of the Aborigines Advancement League, dies.
12 February 1969	The <i>Koori</i> magazine names Georgina Rose as Mother of the Year and Stewart Murray as Father of the Year. Entertainer of the year was Edgar Green, for his gum leaf recitals outside Myers in Melbourne. (<i>Australian</i> 12 February 1969)
28 June 1969	The Aborigines Advancement League started its button day to raise funds with folk singing and boomerang throwing in the City Square. (<i>Age</i> 28 June 1969)
11 July 1969	Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls presents a petition to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in a ceremony at the City Square. The petition calls for a better deal for Aboriginal people. <i>Herald</i> 11 July 1969.
June 1978	First State Aboriginal Housing meeting held in Collingwood, which results in the establishment of a steering Committee.
April 1981	Inaugural meeting of the Aboriginal Housing Board in Melbourne.
June 1981	The Aboriginal Housing Board establishes its office at 108 Smith Street, Collingwood.
3 March 1982	In protest at the closure of the only Aboriginal Community Youth Support Scheme(CYSS) by the Department of Employment and Youth Affairs, members of the Aboriginal community occupied the offices of the Department of Employment and Youth Affairs on 22 February. Explaining the need for an Aboriginal CYSS the Project Officer, Bev Murray noted that: “You ask around at the other CYSS projects around here - Carlton, Fitzroy, Collingwood. They will almost never get an Aboriginal. They don’t go there because their programs don’t relate to what our kids need. Kooris want to work within their own community, in programs that relate to their own Aboriginality”.
24 March 1982	A full time, nine-month course for Aboriginal health workers began at the Koori Kollij in Smith Street, Collingwood. The students included thirty Aboriginals from Southern New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. The course was a community initiative funded by a private benevolent trust. (<i>Melbourne Times</i>)

2 June 1982	The grant of \$23 000 by the Australian Heritage Commission to the Victorian Archaeological Survey to carry out a survey of the Melbourne Metropolitan area was criticised by Gary Foley. Foley observed "The money would be better spent on land rights or some viable form of compensation for the people today". <i>(Melbourne Times)</i>
9 June 1982	Stewart Murray, on behalf of the descendants of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people laid claim to the area of the Collingwood tip, which had been part of an Aboriginal reserve of nearly 27 acres along the Merri Creek in the 1830s. <i>(Melbourne Times)</i>
23 June 1982	Executive members of the South Eastern Land Council, including Sandra Onus, David Anderson, Herb Pettit and Stewart Murray announced that the Council had passed a motion supporting the claim of descendants of the Gunai, Werrungery and Bunurong tribes to 27 acres of Clifton Hill. <i>(Melbourne Times)</i>
July 1982	Sandra Bailey, a Yorta Yorta woman, becomes the first female Aboriginal law graduate in Victoria.
September 1982	Stewart Murray is appointed as the second Aboriginal Justice of the Peace, following in the footsteps of Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls. First Annual General Meeting of the Aboriginal Housing Board is held in Northcote and the first annual report is circulated.
17 November 1982	The claimants to the 27 acres of Clifton Hill rejected an invitation to make a submission to the Council. On behalf of the tribes Stewart Murray noted "We are not prepared to put in a submission, which implies we don't already have a right to the land". A submission was made instead to the State Government, including historic evidence, anthropological reports and maps. <i>(Melbourne Times)</i>
December 1982	The State Government approves a submission by the Aboriginal Housing Board for the creation of Aboriginal Housing Liaison Officers.
20 July 1983	The funeral of Minnie Patten who was called the "Angel of Fitzroy".
18 April 1984	The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service is successful in its case against the Museum of Victoria, which had attempted to loan Aboriginal artefacts to other museums in breach of the <i>Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1972</i> .
February 1985	The first State Aboriginal Housing Conference is held at Camp Jungai.

11 June 1986	A production of Jack Davis' play <i>No Sugar</i> , is performed in the Fitzroy Town Hall. (<i>Melbourne Times</i>)
1987	Aboriginal Housing Board transfers to new premises in Gertrude Street Fitzroy.
1988	Community protests follow evictions.
March 1988	Community meetings held after each monthly Aboriginal Housing Board meeting in Mooroopna, Morwell, Dandenong, Mildura, Ballarat, Warrnambool and Melbourne.
November 1988	The Aboriginal Housing Board holds its second Statewide Housing Conference in Mildura.
July 1990	Funding for the Koori Kollij is cut.
4 December 1991	Fitzroy's Aboriginal community expresses outrage at the sacking of a worker from the Fitzroy adventure playground. Gary Foley indicated that the community was also planning to organise a campaign against what he called the "gross mismanagement of Koori kids" by Community Service Victoria workers. (<i>Melbourne Times</i> , 4 December 1991)
February 1995	Aboriginal Housing Board transfers to its new office at Scotchmer Street, North Fitzroy.
April 2000	Aboriginal Housing Board celebrates its 1000 th property purchase in Shepparton. Myrtle Muir is awarded the Frances Pennington Award by the Minister for Housing at Parliament House.
August 2000	Aboriginal Housing Board appoints its first Chief Executive Officer.
April 2001	Aboriginal Housing Board holds 20 th anniversary dinner and presentation evening event at the San Remo Ball room in Nicholson Street, Carlton.

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Addendum: A Snapshot of Aboriginal Public Art in Yarra

11

A number of other public art projects have been produced in partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations and groups over the past few years.

***Shelter 2* by Lyn Thorpe**

In 2001 Yarra Council provided funding to the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria, through the Community Grants scheme, to commission a commemorative stain glass window at Scotchmer Street, North Fitzroy, by artist Lyn Thorpe.

Shelter 2 by Lyn Thorpe was commissioned by the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the organisation, launched in May 2002.



Shelter 2, Scotchmer Street, North Fitzroy. Photo: Aboriginal Housing Board Collection

Accompanying text for the artwork:

“Mother Earth is our Shelter. She provides for us and nurtures our physical needs. She sustains Identity, Spirituality and Connection to Country. She is our Shelter and in ‘Our Special Place’ her healing spirit empowers us to be True to Ourselves, Our Families and Our Heritage.”

***The Cave* by BEEM artists (Gary Smith, Mary Hassell, Christobel Williams, Nichole Nash, Leonard Lovett, Tracey Briggs, Megan Evans and Eugene Lovett)**

Yarra Council has also been the auspice body for an Art and Environment project funded by Vichealth. The project has led to the creation of the Collingwood Housing Estate Arts Committee (CHEAC), and the commission of a major mural at the Collingwood Underground Carpark arts space, by the BEEM artists.

The Cave mural by BEEM artists took two years to complete and forms the gateway to the Collingwood Underground Carpark arts space at the Collingwood Housing Estate. The detailed and expansive artwork explores the Aboriginal themes of creation of life. The wings of the eagle Bunjl, the Creator of Life, are spanned above the cave depicting the elements of life: the sun, moon, wind, water, earth and fire.

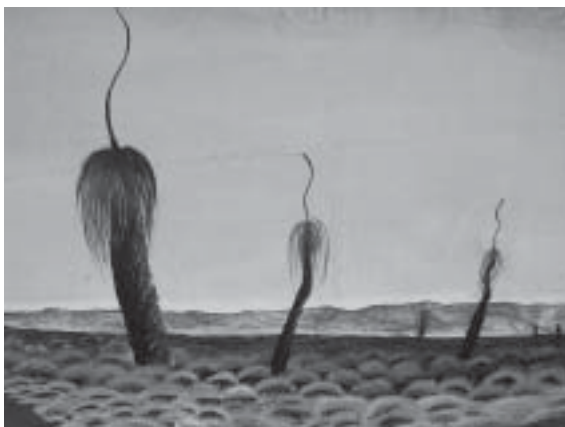
The surrounding landscape depicts indigenous flora, fauna and traditional ways of life. As a man takes aim with a spear in the tall grasses, blackboys dot the desert-scape. Many types of birds appear throughout the imagined scene, with brolgas, galahs, swans and magpies all taking part in the mural. The magpies, an iconic bird of the area, represent the Parkies and the residents of the Collingwood Housing Estate.

The plaque dedicates the mural to the community and remembers the Parkies who have met around the area in the past.

The mural was funded by: Vichealth, City of Yarra and the Office of Housing, with further support from Collingwood Neighbourhood House and CHEAC. It was launched in 2004.



Composite image of the mural *The Cave*



Blackboys, *The Cave* (detail)



Brolgas, *The Cave* (detail)