

ABORIGINAL HEROES

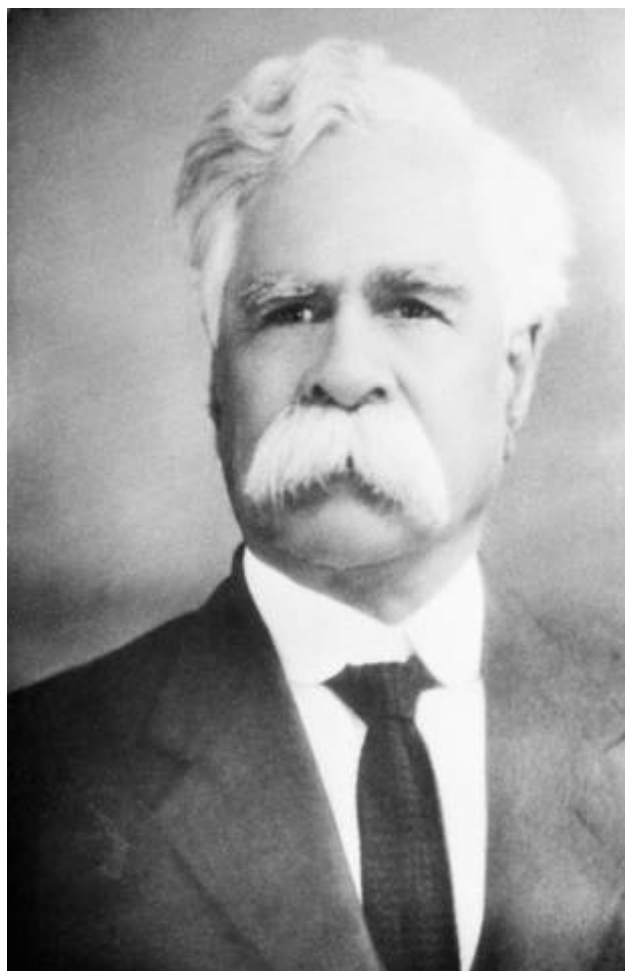
The 50th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo Decision, offers an opportunity to celebrate some of the Aboriginal Australians who have dedicated their lives to justice and rights for their people throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Significant national and Western Australian Aboriginal heroes and their legacies have been explored in this section. A list of the major committees and councils that some were involved in along the way also provides further information about their tireless work and campaigning.

WILLIAM COOPER (1861-1941)

William Cooper was a Yorta Yorta man from Victoria who was born on 18 December 1860. He was heralded as a hero and one of the earliest campaigners and activists for Aboriginal rights and justice in Australia's history. William spent most of his life in the Cummeragunja community working as a pastoral labourer in slave-like conditions, where he was a spokesman for the Yorta Yorta in their ongoing battles for land justice against the New South Wales government.

As well as leading the first Aboriginal deputation to a Commonwealth Minister in 1934, and the first deputation to the Prime Minister in 1938, William started petitions for Aboriginal representation in Parliament, enfranchisement and land rights. Despite gaining 1,814 signatures on the petition for representation in Parliament, it failed. Dissatisfied with the Commonwealth in regard to the lack of progress around this issue, William then wrote a letter to King George V stating 'to prevent the extinction of the Aboriginal race, better conditions for all, grant us power to propose a member of parliament'.

William established the Australian Aborigines League and organised the Day of Mourning to draw attention to the destructive effects of settlement and invasion. This was an Aboriginal-only protest meeting, which corresponded with the 150th anniversary of the British colonisation of Australia. It initially took place on Australia Day 1938 in Sydney and was the first combined interstate protest by the League.



Courtesy AIATSIS, Jackamos.A04.BW, N03746_04a.

At that time repressive government policies severely limited the movement and rights of Aboriginal people. The League chose Australia Day for its symbolism.

In 1939 William was involved in the 'Walk Off' at Cummeragunja NSW. On 4 February 1939, when Jack Patten was arrested and removed from the Cummeragunja Mission after trying to address the local people, as many as 200

residents of the Mission walked out and crossed the Murray River, leaving the state of NSW. This was in contravention of rules set by the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board. To Yorta Yorta people, the Walk Off is still seen as a defining moment in their ongoing struggle for self-determination, civil rights and rights to traditional lands. The next generation and many later activists were inspired by the Day of Mourning, particularly William's nephew Douglas Nicholls [known as Pastor Doug] who formed the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders [FCAATSI - see 'councils and committees' in this section for more information].

DID YOU KNOW?

On 6 December 1938, several weeks after Kristallnacht in Germany, William led a delegation of the Australian Aboriginal

League to the German Consulate in Melbourne to deliver a petition which condemned the 'cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi Government of Germany.' This protest has been referred to as 'the only private protest against the Germans following Kristallnacht.' The German Consulate did not accept the petition. In 2002, a plaque was unveiled at the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne in honour of 'the Aboriginal people for their actions protesting against the persecution of Jews by the Nazi Government of Germany in 1938.' The story of the protest is featured in the Jewish Holocaust Centre's permanent museum. William is remembered by the Jewish community today for his efforts in being the only private protest against this particular Holocaust event.

FCAATSI tirelessly lobbied for Constitutional change to alter perceived racist elements of the Australian Constitution via plebiscite. The campaign was a success and resulted in the Australian Referendum of 1967.

In addition, and perhaps his most noteworthy success, William established the National Aborigines Day, which has now become National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day [NAIDOC] Week- a nation-wide celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, history and culture.

Kristallnacht

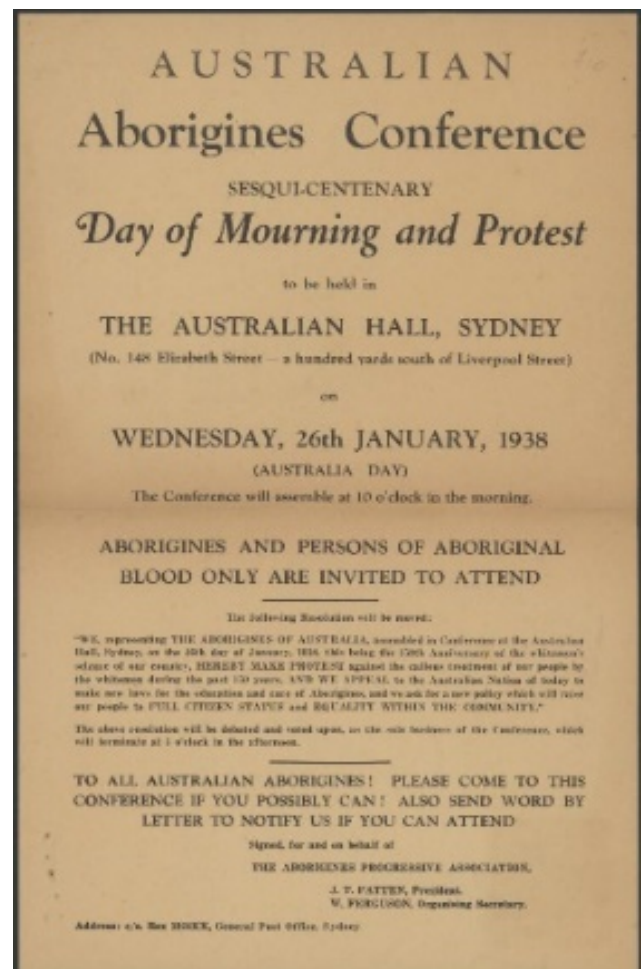
Kristallnacht- the Night of Broken Glass, was an act of mass murder and state terrorism by the Nazi's in Germany. The organised mass violence against Jews saw the destruction of thousands of synagogues, Jewish businesses and homes, and the murder of nearly 100 people and the internment of 36,000 others in camps.

NAIDOC Week

NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC stands for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee', the committee responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week and its acronym has since become the name of the week itself. NAIDOC Week is celebrated not only by Aboriginal communities, but by Australians from all walks of life.

TIMELINE

- 1860** Born 18 December in Yorta Yorta territory around the intersection of the Murray and Goulburn Rivers in Victoria, Australia.
- 1881** Started and created a petition for Aboriginal land rights.
- 1887** Created a petition for greater representation in Parliament, enfranchisement and land rights.
- 1934** Wrote a letter to King George V- 'Letter from an Educated Black' to King George V, 'to prevent the extinction of the Aboriginal race, better conditions for all, grant us power to propose a member of parliament...'
- 1934** Established the Australian Aborigines' League (in Melbourne) with Margaret Tucker, Eric Onus, Anna and Caleb Morgan and Shadrach James - to plan action on behalf of Aboriginal people. This League became the Aborigines Progressive Association.
- 1934** Led the first Aboriginal deputation to a Commonwealth Minister.
- 1938** Led the first Aboriginal deputation to the Prime Minister.
- 1938** Organised the Day of Mourning for Aboriginal people.
- 1939** Involved in the Walk Off Cummeragunja [NSW].
- 1940** One of William's major successes was the establishment of National Aborigines Day. It was first celebrated in 1940. This has become NAIDOC week.
- 1941** William Cooper passed away on 29 March at Mooroopna, Victoria aged 80. He was survived by his third wife and six children.



National Library of Australia: Broadside 405.

FANNY BALBUK YOOREEL

1840- 1907



Fanny Balbuk [Yooreel] at the Perth Zoo, circa 1902, Courtesy State Library of Western Australia, 025341PD.

Described as the last of the Perth tribe, Noongar woman Fanny Balbuk Yooreel came to prominence through the writings of anthropologist Daisy Bates. Born in 1842 in the Upper Swan region, Fanny experienced the effects of European settlement firsthand, as she watched her bountiful country disappear beneath the infrastructure of colonial settlement. A very forthright woman, she is now recognised as both an agitator and defender of the rights and values of a fast disappearing people.

One of her favourite annoyances was to stand at the gates of Government House, reviling all who dwelt within, in that the stone gates guarded by a sentry enclosed her grandmother's burial ground.

To the end of her life she raged and stormed at the usurping of her beloved home ground. Through fences and over them, Balbuk took the straight track to the end. When a house was built in the way, she broke its fence-palings with her digging stick and charged up the steps and through the rooms.

Fanny passed away in 1907 at the Perth Public Hospital [now Royal Perth Hospital] and is buried in an unmarked grave at Karrakatta Cemetery. When an unnamed relative heard of her passing he uttered "Goord-al-win ja-ga" ["her heart has ceased to beat"].

WILLIAM HARRIS [1867-1931]



Deputation to the Premier 1928. Back [left to right]: Wilfred Morrison, Norman Harris, Edward Jacobs, Algernon Kickett and William Bodney. Front [left to right]: Edward Harris and William Harris. Courtesy Freshwater Bay Museum, 07.99.

William Harris, a Noongar man, was born in 1867 in Williams, WA. In his early life William worked at the ports and stations in the Ashburton and Gascoyne districts of WA. It was here that he witnessed the brutality and cruelty exercised over local Aboriginal people. After seeing the devastation of starvation, disease and poverty, William became extremely concerned and directed his cause towards activism and justice for his people.

In 1904, following published accounts of the ill treatment of Aboriginal people in the North West of WA by the Times [London] and Australia press, William entered public debate about the issue. He wrote a letter to the

Australian press accusing Colonial Secretary Walter Kingsmill of willful hypocrisy and misrepresentation. William also criticised the Chief Protector of Aborigines for WA, Henry Charles Prinsep, for turning Aboriginal people off their land.

In 1913, writing to a local newspaper he again denounced the appalling treatment and unequal conditions his people were subjected to. In one incident in Paynes Find, police, unprovoked, shot Aboriginal peoples' dogs, which were needed for hunting kangaroos as the skins were a major source of income.

William is most remembered for the historic 1928 deputation, in which he led the first Western Australian Aboriginal deputation to meet the WA Premier, Philip Collier, to fight for better Aboriginal rights and repeal the *Aborigines Act 1905* [WA]. His brother Edward Harris, his nephew Norman Cleaver Harris, Algernon Kickett of York, Edward Jacobs of Quairading, Wilfred Morrison of Toodyay and William Bodney of Perth also accompanied William. The men argued their case in a deliberate and scholarly manner. William and his group asked the Premier to repeal the Act and give the same rights as others to Aboriginal people. They also implored the Premier to close Mogumber Mission [Moore River Settlement] due to its inhumane and demoralising conditions. Here, families were split up and treated callously under police control.

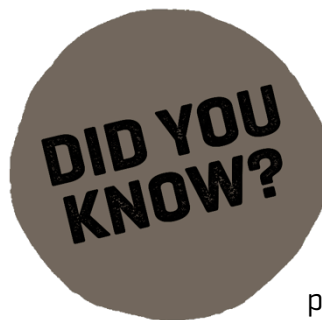
Sadly, despite recognition by Premier Collier, of a 'great obligation to do justice to the Aboriginal, because [the white man] had deprived him of his country', legislative change did not occur until after World War II.

Throughout his life, William remained undaunted by the task of confronting public dignitaries and seeking to redress injustice. His tenacity and strength were remarkable. For twenty-two years he fought against the *Aborigines Act 1905*, which restricted civil liberties.

Mirror (Perth, WA : 1921 - 1956), Saturday 10 March 1928, page 1



National Library of Australia.



William's nephew Norman Cleaver Harris [1889-1968] played a similar role in protesting for

Aboriginal rights. He worked with his uncle and participated in the Union formed by William Harris in 1926. William's brother Edward Harris was also an activist for Aboriginal rights.

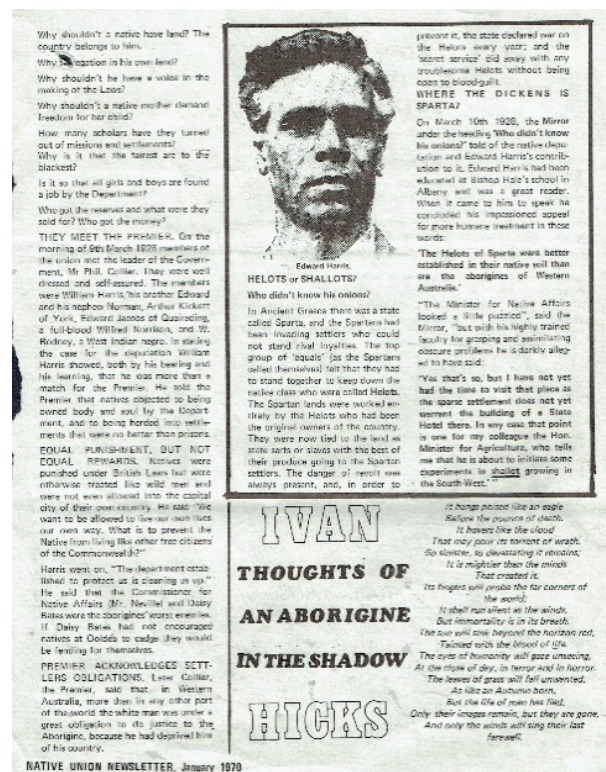
Deputation

A deputation is a group of people appointed to undertake a formal process to raise an issue with authorities and governments on behalf of a larger group. William Harris headed an Aboriginal deputation to the Premier of WA to represent the Western Australian Aboriginal people in their fight for better rights.

TIMELINE

- 1867** Born in Western Australia.
- 1904** Entered a public debate about mistreatment of Aboriginal people.
- 1906** William and Goldfields MP Patrick Lynch MLA met with the State Premier Mr Cornthwaite Hector Rason. Argued with the Premier for government assistance for Aboriginals on North East Goldfields. He handed Rason a letter signed by local justice of peace lending support.
- 1906** Met with Henry Prinsep to persuade the Aborigines Department to supply rations, clothes and medicine. Harris claimed Aboriginals' economic dependency resulted from denudation [strip something of its covering, possessions or assets] of native game by miners. Demanded provision of food and medicine from funds designated for Aboriginal use under the Commonwealth Constitution.
- 1913** Wrote to the Kalgoorlie Miner denouncing appalling conditions. During subsequent debate, William denounced the *Aborigines Act 1905* in the Sunday Times [6 April].
- 1926** Formed the Aboriginals Union [WA]. Intended to unite similar groups throughout the South-West. Aims of the union were voting rights for southern Aboriginals, a uniform law for Aboriginals and whites, and 'justice and fair play'.

- 1927** Central Perth declared a prohibited area where Aboriginal people required passes to enter.
- 1928** On 9 March led the first Aboriginal deputation to meet the WA Premier [Philip Collier] for those who'd suffered under the *1905 Act*.
- 1931** On 13 July, William Harris passed away unmarried, buried at Utacarra Cemetery in Geraldton.



Native Union newsletter 1928, Harris pictured center of article, Department of Aboriginal Affairs: Consignment 1667, 1970-0934.

EDWARD HARRIS (1867-1931)

Edward Harris, the younger brother of William Harris, was also heavily involved in fighting for rights and justice for his people.

Edward was born at Williams in 1878 to an Aboriginal woman from the Busselton area, Mary Madeline Buxnuro (Mattalan Campbell) and William Harris, a Welsh expirée. Mary was the daughter of King Campille who was head of the Williams Tribe.

Edward was the second youngest of six brothers Arthur, Jim, Jack, David, George, Fred and William, and had one sister Alice May. He was placed at Annesfield School in Albany and further educated at the Swan Boys Orphanage in Middle Swan, later known as the Swan Native Half-Caste Mission. Edward's father encouraged all of the children to seek knowledge and keep well informed, and Edward's high level of education is evident by the well-articulated articles he and William wrote for the Native Union Newsletter. Edward was particularly close with his brother William and they used to refer to themselves as 'freedom fighters', along with their nephew Norman. The three could always be found together fighting for rights for Aboriginal people. Whilst residing in Toodyay in 1943, after many failed attempts, Edward was awarded a certificate of exemption by the State.

In March 2017 the Aboriginal History Research Unit conducted an interview with Shirley Kickett (nee Harris), Edward's granddaughter, to gain a snapshot perspective of his story and his legacy that lives on.

Reflections by Shirley Kickett (nee Harris),

**Recorded by the Aboriginal History
Research Unit, March 2017.**

My father Lyndon Charles Harris, born in 1907, kept the legacy of the freedom fighters within the Harris family alive as well as passing the legacy onto the wider community. He was a member of the Coolbaroo Club and became very active in the community campaigning for rights for our people, following on from my grandfather Edward's legacy. My mother is Kathleen Ryder and her mother was Catherine Egan.

I was part of the first mob of Aboriginal people born at King Edward Hospital in 1941. When I was a child we used to camp down in the bush in Embelton, we had rushes to lay on for our mattress, and had a little tin house. The police used to come in every Saturday or Sunday on horseback and they would be banging on things and all the kids would be hiding. My father used to tell us to run out the back up to the high hill where the yellow sand was and that's where we hid so we wouldn't be taken away, otherwise we would run to the swamp and make tracks through the bulrushes and have a little area that was safe and we couldn't be seen from outside. That was our 'safe space' amongst the bulrushes.

To protect us, mum and dad knew we would get anxious about it, so they would tell us to play a game, which would be to go and hide until we heard them whistle. That way we felt like it was fun. This was when I was about

seven years old. It is only later that we realised what was actually going on.

I remember my grandfather Edward, he used to come to the bush where we were living and we would sit outside, my father would be kneeling down in the sand and I would be sitting on his knee, listening to all of the yarns.

We had a lot of the Aboriginal community visiting where the old fellas would come down and speak to the young fellas. And that's how we would really practice our culture in those days. We would go down and get yoomas or gilgies or turtles from the creek and bush tucker and cook them all in ashes with a big fire going and dampers being made. It's a way of getting together, that's what community is, there was never any drink back then.

What I would like to see is people to stop trying to own areas and own sites and work with each other and treat each person as equal. Working together for the betterment of everyone.

The thing about Native Title today is that it has divided Aboriginal families and communities more than it has done any good. Besides the claims for land, which are based on some incorrect information, it makes the inequality breed further, instead of looking at us as equal. We are all part of this country and our ancestor's country and it makes us feel disconnected like we are different and we are not equal. That's in regard to my fellow Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. We should all work together.

I have things to say about inequality because to me our forefathers did the right thing and you can't take discrimination or racist comments coming your way, you have to stand up for your rights. Although their legacies prevailed and things have gotten

slightly better, we really still don't have equality in our community, and the freedom fighters are all gone. That's the sad thing about it.

I didn't vote in the Referendum because I wasn't old enough. The thing is my father always voted. Although the government told him he couldn't back in the early days, he did anyway as he was on the electoral roll as well as my mum. All of my family were on the electoral role because they wanted a say.

I made a choice when I was growing up. To be an agitator I suppose, because of what my father and his father were doing, who they were. When I was growing up my Noongar people didn't have a say and it seemed to me that if we had to get anywhere, we had to have a good education and that's why I went to school and went back to complete my tertiary studies as a mature age person. I started at Technical College in Perth and I completed my Bachelor of Arts when I had a family, which was hard as a woman back then especially because I had to work.

I'm educated but I also have community education, which is what I know my community to be and what happens to my people on my country - Wadjuk Noongar country. I still get involved in these community things, it's something that keeps me going and is important because I want to see all of the right things done, and maybe it will wipe out all of the wrong things and bad memories. It would be better for the kids growing up nowadays because they have no concept of it. Of culture, community. My grandson is seven and he has to fight for himself all of the time, and this shouldn't happen in schools today but it does. He has a nature similar to me where he stays true to himself, and, well, I got that from my father. Being Aboriginal, Noongar, that's my culture and my spirit and who I am.



DID YOU KNOW?

Exemption certificates

were issued in most parts of Australia from the late 1930s onwards to afford certain 'citizenship' rights to

Aboriginal people. In WA, however, the first type of 'exemption' was introduced within a clause of the *Aborigines Act 1905*, in which the Minister for the Aborigines department could exempt individuals from the strict provisions of the Act and enable them to enjoy the rights and privileges of non-Aboriginal society. This type of exemption was far and few as the Minister's decision was generally made upon advice of the Chief Protector of Aborigines.

The second exemption certificate, introduced in WA in 1937, was for 'citizenship' rights and paralleled the conditions of most certificates issued in other states. In line with the government of the day's assimilationist policies this included the right to leave the state, go to school, receive some government benefits (including the old age pension, which was denied to people who lived on reserves or stations), live with less interference from the Protection Board and to drink alcohol.

Some Aboriginal people sought exemption certificates as a way of shielding their children from removal by the Chief Protector of Aborigines. From 1937 to 1944, 276 certificates were issued covering approximately 600 individuals and seventy-five certificates were revoked.

Those who had an exemption certificate had to abandon association with their Aboriginal communities and were not allowed to enter or stay on Aboriginal reserves and stations, even if visiting relatives. It broke connections to family and country, and discouraged the practice of any forms of traditional culture. The need for the certificates to be shown to police officers and officials was a source of humiliation, earning them the nickname 'dog tags'.

DAISY BINDI (1904-1962)

Daisy Bindi, a Nyiyaparli woman, was born circa 1904 on a cattle-station near the Jigalong Aboriginal Reserve, WA. The daughter of Aboriginal parents 'Jimmy' and 'Milly' she worked on Ethel Creek Station, learning household skills, without gaining a formal education. As a child she witnessed the indignities of the police who regularly shot the dogs that the community needed for hunting kangaroos.

Responding to the call of Don McLeod who urged Aboriginal people working on the large sheep and cattle stations in the area to come together and strike against the conditions. Daisy organised a meeting to convey the message. She demanded and received wages from her employer at Roy Hill station and used the money to hire a truck to collect local workers when the strike began on 1 May 1946.

En-route to join the main body of strikers, Daisy talked her way through a police confrontation when she claimed that she had never heard of McLeod. Her initiative was largely responsible for spreading news of the strike to other stations, changing the structure of labour relations in the north of the state.

In the late 1950s Daisy was diagnosed with diabetes, however was able to live in relative comfort at the Pindan cooperative settlement in Port Hedland, one of the early Aboriginal ventures of its kind and a product of the strike. At this settlement, the residents worked in the mining industry and received equal pay for their labour.

Despite having her leg amputated as a result of an accident in the bush, Daisy maintained her activism, successfully lobbying parliamentarians for a school at the Pindan cooperative. During this trip she also visited and spoke at meetings of the WA branch of the Union of Australian Women, which supported Aboriginal rights.

In the late 1960's, Daisy left the cooperative after the group split over thoughts that McLeod's struggles against mining interests were counterproductive to the Aboriginal cause. Daisy passed away on 23 December 1962 at the Native Hospital Port Hedland, and was buried in the local cemetery.



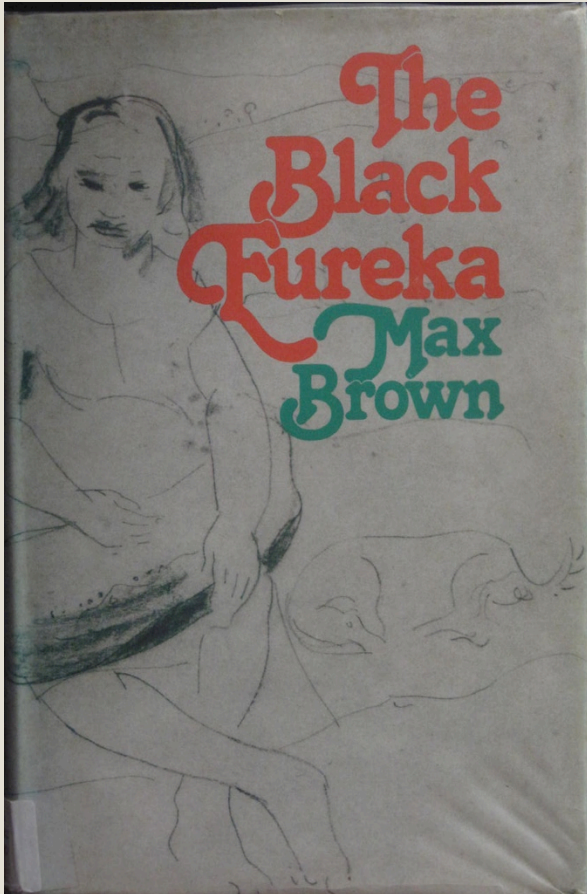
Image: Brown, Max & Hewett, Dorothy [1976].
The Black Eureka. Australasian Book Society,

TIMELINE

- 1904** Born around 1904 on a cattle-station near Jigalong Aboriginal Reserve, WA.
- 1945** Aware of the unfairness of working for no regular pay, Daisy responded to the call made by Don McLeod at Marble Bar station.
- 1946** Roy Hill station strike began 1 May.
- 1950s** Suffered from diabetes, living at the Pindan Pty Ltd cooperative settlement.
- 1950s** Had a leg amputated; visited Perth and successfully lobbied parliamentarians for a school at the Pindan cooperative; also visited and spoke at meetings of the WA branch of the Union of Australian Women.
- 1960s** Left the Pindan cooperative.
- 1962** Daisy Bindi passed away on 23 December from uremia at Port Hedland.

Excerpts from the story about Daisy Bindi's involvement in the 1946 Pastoral Workers' strike

From *Black Eureka*, Max Brown [1976]. 'The story of Don McLeod and the Aboriginal miners' strike in the Pilbara Strike 1946-1949'.



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"Daisy Bindi?"

"From Roy Hill- she outfoxed Alex Spring and brought in 96 people!"

"A week or so before, Daisy Bindi had wired McLeod for a truck, and McLeod had sent a Ford 4x4 with trailer, which had arrived opposite Roy Hill about 11am. The crew had waited on the road and while Daisy Bindi dickered with the manager, man, woman and child had trooped out and climbed aboard. Then the Ford had made it 65 miles through Nullagine and was pulled off the road when the police utility sailed through bound for the Bar [Marble Bar]. The Ford then shadowed the police vehicle for another 70 miles before pulling up short of the Bar for the night. Next morning the party landed at Try Shot!"

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“Which one is Daisy Bindi? Asked Clancy”

“Several people pointed and Clancy caught sight of a print frock. Then he saw a straight legged girlish Aboriginal woman of average height, walking hand-in-hand with an Aboriginal stockman. She was built like a Winchester rifle and looked at the ground as she walked, tossing her slim feet out a little in front, and then lifting her head as if seeing into the distance! She came across and immediately asked if he had everything he needed. Did he have enough petrol? She asked, and carted him off to get something to eat.”

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“Then, back in Perth in 1959, I had the good fortune to meet Daisy Bindi, the desert woman who led the 96 people off Roy Hill station late in the strike. Daisy was down to get a wooden leg, and having heard of how one or two people had died after the failure of credit, I asked her how she had got on during that time of hardship”.

“I was gang boss at Mt Frisco, sixteen in the gang, men and women, she replied. We had nothing. We had no truck, no nothing, none of the stores we had in the working camps when you left. We was starving on ‘roo and water for eighteen months and in that eighteen months we moved all the Yandeyarra people to the Bore hole. Some was working close by for Perron Bros. I was washing clothes for all the whitefellas. Don McLeod was away trying to break the squatters in the Kimberleys.”

“I was out chasing kangaroo. When I come in, Bindi’s [Daisy’s husband] waving his hat in the road and my mummy’s standing with my suitcase in her hand. Where do you reckon you’re going? I asked them. We going Port Hedland! That’s how my mineral gang finished up collecting grass seed at Peedmarer. They wanted wages and I paid them.”

BARBARA JACKSON (NEE HAYWARD) (C1909 – 1976)



Barbara Jackson nee Hayward in Katanning, circa 1920. Courtesy *Nyungar Tradition Glimpses of Aborigines of South-Western Australia 1829-1914*, Louis Tilbrook, 1983, p.117.

The story of Barbara Jackson as told to the Aboriginal History Research Unit by her grandson, Steve Jackson, 2017.

“It’s got to be told not just by historians. Our old people are dying you know, and they’re the ones that know the stories. Especially in the South-West.”

Steve Jackson

Barbara Jackson, a Noongar woman, is an unsung Aboriginal hero from the South-West of WA. She was a strong advocate for Aboriginal rights during her lifetime. Barbara lived in Perth, where she opened her home to all family from far and wide and helped raise her grandchildren.

When it came to Aboriginal rights, Barbara was a proactive and passionate woman, who devoted years to working to improve the lives of her people. She was involved with a number of Aboriginal rights committees throughout her life, including the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship Council Inc and Training Centre for Work Release Prisoners.

In the early 1970s, Barbara single-handedly started the Aboriginal Youth Training Centre. This was situated on Beaufort Street in Northbridge, near the Aboriginal Advancement Council (AAC) building, which still remains at 201 Beaufort Street. At the Centre she taught young Aboriginal people specific skills that would help them in their lives.

Her grandson, Steve Jackson, remembers it was *'mostly to teach all us young blokes and girls something we could put our hand to'*. For example, leatherwork, making coffee tables, dress making and art. Barbara taught the skills herself, but sometimes had people to help take some of the lessons.

Notably, Revel Cooper, a talented artist (one of the Carrolup children artists of the Stolen Generations) taught the children art at the Youth Centre for a period of time. Some of the workers for the Centre came from prison.

Sadly, Barbara only lived for 12 months following her establishment of the Aboriginal Youth Training Centre. She did not live to see its growth, or the positive impact the Centre had in the life of many young Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal children at the time missed out on an education, so Barbara's work was invaluable for those with little to no educational or skill development opportunity. Barbara's grandson Steve was a young man of 18 when she passed away and learnt a lot from the Centre she dedicated to helping her people.

During her life Barbara also volunteered countless hours at a soup kitchen in East Perth. She was readily available whenever they needed help. *'She was there all the time, working and helping out. Any time they had anything like that she put her hand up to do it'*.

Barbara always spoke up for Aboriginal rights and would stand up to others, to educate on the importance of ending the inequality experienced by her people. She was particularly concerned with Aboriginal health. *'She was always talking about Aboriginals having more rights and things like that you know. Anything that come up she would...talk about it, especially on health.'* Unsurprisingly, Barbara voted a strong 'Yes' in the 1967 Referendum, along with the rest of her family.

Barbara's legacy for pursuing Aboriginal rights lives on in her family. Her grandson Steve believes there is still a long way to go and the importance of education for improving Aboriginal rights cannot be emphasised enough. *'I still think Aboriginals haven't got enough voice and there's not enough taught about history in our schools... I don't know if that's funding or something else.'*

GEORGE ABDULLAH (1919-1984)



Courtesy National Museum of Australia.

“My people are not going to be swept under the carpet.”

George Abdullah, undated

George Abdullah, a Noongar man, was born in 1919 at Guildford WA, and was educated at the New Norcia Benedictine Mission. He later worked as a labourer, truck driver and served in the military between 1940-43 [defence of Australia and Papua New Guinea].

During the 1940s George was heavily involved in the Coolbaroo Club/League [Perth], where he did interstate public speaking tours and in 1947 he was granted citizenship.

In 1956 George married Vera Alwyn Moore at her parents' residence in North Perth. This marriage was the first formally recognised mixed-race marriage in Western Australia [although there were other 'mixed-race'

marriages, they were not formally recognised if the Aboriginal person was not granted citizenship].

Throughout the 1960's George was instrumental in the establishment of WA Native Welfare Council [became known as Aboriginal Advancement Council of WA from 1963 onwards]. This was affiliated with the FCAATSI.

During this time, George was also heavily involved in the 1967 Referendum 'Yes' campaign in WA as well as becoming a member of the United Nations Committee on Human Rights and working on the Allawah Grove Settlement. In September 1962 George organised an all-Aboriginal conference on citizenship rights. The conference adopted a motion to call on the government to repeal the *Natives [Citizenship Rights] Act*, and repeal Section 127 of the Australian Constitution so Aboriginal people could be included in the census. From the various committees he was a part of, George was best known for his role as Chair and Senior vice Chair of National Aboriginals Publications Foundation from 1972-81.

The path for Aboriginal rights that George paved through his tireless efforts of activism have been realised in Aboriginal leaders of today. In particular, George's nephew, Ken Wyatt, was the first Aboriginal person elected to the Commonwealth House of Representatives, and the first Aboriginal Minister in the Commonwealth Government. This is especially significant since George was unsuccessful in entering parliament.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Allawah Grove Settlement

was thirty-three temporary houses, established for an

Aboriginal Community near Guildford in 1957. This was administered by the Native Welfare Department until responsibility was handed to the Coolbaroo Club. When it closed a little over a decade later in 1969, the people of Allawah had established their own administration, the Women's Committee, Progress Committee and Advancement Council.



Courtesy West Australian Newspapers Limited.

Aboriginal Rights Council president George Abdullah (left) checks results over the telephone with the WA Electoral Office, while Vice-president Jack Davis lists them on a tally board, assisted by Charles Pell, the manager of the centre.

TIMELINE

- 1919** Born at Guildford WA.
- 1940s** Heavily involved in Coolbaroo Club/League [Perth].
- 1944** On 6 December married Gladys Martha Kelly from the Moore River Native Settlement. They were together a short time.
- 1947** Granted citizenship in January.
- 1956** On 15 June married Vera Alwyn Moore. First formally recognised mixed-race marriage in WA.
- 1958** Established the Western Australian Youth Club, which catered for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and adolescents.
- 1962** In September George organised an all-Aboriginal conference on citizenship rights.
- 1966** Managed the Aboriginal Advancement Council's Centre for a few months at Beaufort St, Perth.
- 1960s** Instrumental in establishment of WA Native Welfare Council [became known as Aboriginal Advancement Council of WA from 1963 onwards]. This was affiliated with the FCAATSI.
- 1960s** Became the Coolbaroo League representative on Native Welfare Council.
- 1960s** Campaigned for the 'Yes' vote for the 1967 Referendum.
- 1960s** Manager of the first Aboriginal Centre [Beaufort St, Perth] and with his wife Alwy, spoke publicly about issues facing Aboriginal people.
- 1970** Became the founding member of The National Tribunal Council.
- 1970** Initiated Aboriginal Rights Council [later became Aboriginal Rights League]. He organised the first Aboriginal debutante balls in Perth to demonstrate equality.
- 1970** A founding executive member of the National Tribunal Council and of the Aboriginal publications Foundation [1972-81]. He also established the Aboriginal Development and Cultural Council at Geraldton.
- 1972-1981** Chair and Senior vice Chair of National Aboriginals Publications Foundation
- 1975** In December George stood unsuccessfully for Senate as an Independent at the Federal election.
- 1977** Active in National Aboriginal Consultative Committee.
- 1970s** Employed as a liaison officer with Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra.
- 1970s** Organised National Aborigines Day Observance Committee [NAIDOC] events.
- 1984** George Abdullah passed away in Perth on 6 August and is buried at Guildford Cemetery.

EDDIE MABO (1936-1992)



Eddie Mabo and Jack Wailu on Mer, 1989, Image: National Archives of Australia: A6180, 9/3/94/23

"One day... all of Australia is going to know my name."

Eddie Mabo, undated

In May 1982, Eddie Mabo and four other Meriam people of the Murray Islands began action in the Australian High Court to legally confirm their traditional land rights. They claimed that the Meriam people of Murray Island [Mer] could prove continuous possession of the island. On 3 June 1992, the High Court ruled by a majority of six to one,

that the Meriam people were '*entitled as against the whole world to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of [most of] the lands of the Murray Islands*'. The High Court found that Native Title rights withstood settlement, and the judgement, at long last, rejected the colonial 'terra nullius' legal fiction. Read more about Land Rights and the Mabo Case in section six of this toolkit.

IMPORTANT ABORIGINAL LEADERS OF TODAY

For over a century, there has been growing perception that the Government has made decisions for Aboriginal people, with the voices and cultural needs of Aboriginal people ignored.

Growing representation in Parliament has seen a greater Aboriginal voice in federal decision-making, and appropriate input into issues that affect the lives of Aboriginal people. Linda Burney and Ken Wyatt have both made history for their election into the Australian Parliament and are symbols of progress and hope for Aboriginal people across Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are members of the 49th Federal Parliament:

- **Hon Linda Burney MP**
- **Senator Patrick Dodson**
- **Senator Jacqui Lambie**
- **Senator Malarndirri McCarthy**
- **Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP**

In addition to those members of Federal Parliament, there are many Aboriginal leaders today who are also working tirelessly for their communities and to progress the rights of their people.

MICHAEL 'MICK' DODSON (1950-)

Mick Dodson AM, a Yawuru man, was born in April 1950 at Katherine in the Northern Territory. Both of his parents passed away in 1960, when Dodson was just 10 years old. His aunt and uncle fought for and won custody of Dodson and his siblings, which included his brother Patrick Dodson, now a federal senator.

After earning a scholarship in 1963 to stay at Monivae College, Mick was able to attend Monash University, graduating from law school with a Bachelor of Jurisprudence and Bachelor of Laws degrees. Mick has also earned an honorary degree of Doctor of University from University of Canberra.

Throughout his life he has worked with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service in Melbourne, and as a senior legal advisor and director of the Northern Land Council. His tireless efforts campaigning for Aboriginal rights were recognised in 2009 when Mick was admirably awarded Australian of the Year. Since then he has participated in the drafting of the text for the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations [WGIP], an inter-sessional Working Group of Human Rights Commission which was adopted overwhelmingly in 2007 by the United Nations General Assembly. Mick was also involved in conducting the hearings for the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families [Stolen Generations], which resulted in the *Bringing Them Home Report*.

Mick is a prominent advocate for land rights and other issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as vigorous advocate of justice and interests of Indigenous peoples around the world. He equates land rights with the rights of equity, non-discrimination and prohibition of racial discrimination. Mick has argued for formal recognition in the Australian Constitution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as original owners, occupiers and custodians of the land.



Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A6180, 18/2/80/14.

TIMELINE

- 1950** Born in Katherine, NT.
- 1963** Earned a scholarship to Monivae College [a boarding school] in Victoria. Mick then attended Monash University.
- 1976** Began at Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service in Melbourne- devoted particular attention to land rights and native title rights.
- 1978** Graduated from law school [Monash University] as the first Indigenous person to graduate from law in Australia.
- 1981** Admitted to the Victorian Bar as a barrister.
- 1984** Joined Northern Land Council as Senior Legal Adviser.
- 1990** Became Director of the Council.
- 1993** In April was appointed Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner with Human Right Commission.
- 1993** Was Co-Deputy Chair of Technical Committee for 1993 International Year of the World's Indigenous People, was chairman on UN Advisory Group for the Voluntary Fund of the Decade of Indigenous Peoples.
- 1998** Awarded honorary Doctor of Letter from University of Technology Sydney in 1998.
- 1988-1990** Counsel assisted Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.
- 2009** Named Australian of the Year by the National Australia Day Council.
- 2010** Awarded honorary Doctor of University from University of Canberra in recognition of his contribution to human rights, social justice and Indigenous affairs in both Australia and around the world.
- 2011 - 2012** Harvard University Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam Harvard Chair in Australian Studies and a Visiting Professor, Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development.

Past involvement on boards/committees:

- Former Director of Indigenous Law Centre at UNSW.
- Former Chairman of National Aboriginal Youth Law Centre Advisory board.
- Former member of National Children's & Youth Centre Board and advisory panels of Rob Riley and Koowarta Scholarships.
- Has been member of Victorian Equal opportunity Advisory Council and secretary of North Australian Legal Aid Service.
- Former member on board of Reconciliation, was Co-Chair until recently.
- Founding member and chairman of Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre.
- Served 5 years as member of Board of Trustees of UN Indigenous Voluntary Fund and in January 2005, commenced 3 year appointment as member of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues- was subsequently appointed for further three years to December 2010.

Current involvement on boards/committees:

- Director of National Centre for Indigenous Studies at ANU and Professor of Law and ANU College of Law, Director of Dodson, Bauman and Associates Pty Ltd- Legal and Anthropological Consultants.
- Current chair of Council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and member of AIATSIS.
- Member of the publications Committee for University of New South Wales' Australian Indigenous Law Review [formerly Australian Indigenous Law Reporter].
- On editorial Board of Australian Aboriginal Studies publication.
- Member of NSW Judicial Commission [former special commissioner with the Law Reform Commission of WA].
- Chair of ANU Reconciliation Action Plan [RAP] Committee.
- Member of the Board of the Lingiari Foundation.



Mick Dodson - AHRC RightsTalk 14 November 2016, Image: Australian Human Rights Commission.

HON LINDA BURNEY MP (1957-)



Courtesy Linda Burney's Office.

"If I can stand in this place, so can they [Young Indigenous people] – never let anyone tell you that you are limited by anything."

Hon Linda Burney, MP, 2016

Wiradjuri woman Linda Burney was the first Aboriginal person to serve in the New South Wales parliament and the first Aboriginal woman to be elected to the Australian House of Representatives when she won the seat of Barton in the 2016 federal election.

[Linda's maiden speech.](#)

HON KEN WYATT AM MP (1952-)



Courtesy Ken Wyatt's Office.

"The decisions we make determine our destiny and the choices we make shape our personal future."

Hon Ken Wyatt, AM MP, 2016

Minister Ken Wyatt, a Noongar/ Yamatji man from WA, was the first Aboriginal Minister in the federal parliament (2017) and the first Aboriginal man to be elected to the Australian House of Representatives as the member for Hasluck. He also chaired the joint select committee on Constitutional Recognition in 2015.

[Ken's maiden speech.](#)

COMMITTEES AND CLUBS

There are many committees and councils that have been formed by Aboriginal people, with the intention of improving Aboriginal rights, equality, and living and working conditions. The committees and councils mentioned throughout the hero profiles are listed below:

- Aboriginals Union [est. Nov 1926]
- Australian Aborigines League [AAL] [est. 1927-1932]
- Australian Aborigines Progressive Association [AAPA] [est. 1924]
- National Aborigines Day Observance Committee [est. 1956- was an all Aboriginal board for the first time in 1974].
- Coolbaroo Club [est. 1947]
- FCAATSI: Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders [1958]
- WA Native Welfare Council: became Aboriginal Advancement Council from 1963
- Aborigines' Advancement Council [1965]
- Aborigines Centre Perth, [est. 1960s, exact year unknown]
- United Nations Committee on Human Rights [est. 1976]
- Aboriginal Rights Council, became Aboriginal Rights League, [est. 1970]
- National Tribunal Council [est. 1970]
- National Aboriginal Consultative Committee [1973-1977- initiative of Whitlam government. Denounced when the Fraser government announced creation of a new body, the National Aboriginal Conference]
- Aboriginal Development and Cultural Council [est. 1970s, exact year unknown.
- Aboriginal Publications Foundation, founded by Jack Davis in 1973
- Council for Aboriginal Rights [est. March 1951]
- New Era Aboriginal Fellowship Inc. [pre 1976]. Today's Aboriginal Medical Centre in Perth, and the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA developed from the Justice Committee of the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship Inc.

THE FEDERAL COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ABORIGINES AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS (FCAATSI)



Indigenous delegates and observers at the 1967 FCAATSI conference in Canberra. Courtesy AIATSIS: JACKOMOS.A04.BW-N03746_04a, N4416.34

The FCAATSI was a significant and instrumental council in the lead up to the 1967 Referendum, and the general recognition of Aboriginal rights. Many of the heroes in this section were closely involved in or affected by the work and mission of FCAATSI. It was a national council, with its influence reaching across the country to WA.

History

- In February 1958, a federal council was formed in Adelaide to unite existing state bodies to press for greater Commonwealth involvement in

Aboriginal affairs, and to work for the removal of discriminatory state legislation. The official Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) elected a committee and established a set of principles to guide the new body. The first core executive members of the council (1958) were:

President: Charles Duguid
Vice Presidents: Herbert S Groves,
W Grayden and Ada Bromham
Secretary: Stan Davey
Secretarial Consultants: Doris
Blackburn and Shirley Andrews

- The FCAA held annual national conferences (1958-1972) to bring together Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal supporters. The meetings featured prominent Aboriginal activists and people who fought for, or were willing to fight and stand up for Aboriginal rights. This committee and its meeting certainly created a new wave of activism in Australia that would be realised in the 1967 Referendum. The members were responsible for promoting and publicising the 'Yes' vote for the Referendum.
- The committee was divided into different areas, including:
 - Wages and Employment
 - Education
 - Land and reserves
 - Legislative reform
 - Publicity
 - Housing
 - Fundraising
 - Aboriginal Industries
 - Publications
 - Trade Union
 - Cultural Development (later called Arts and Crafts)
 - Health
 - Abschol (scholarships to help Aboriginal people go to university)
- Initially called FCAA, requests were made from Torres Strait Islander people of Torres Strait Far North Queensland to be included and to be given a voice as well.

- In 1965 the FCAA was renamed to Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) to include Indigenous people from the Torres Strait. It took over responsibility for keeping the Constitutional amendment issue politically alive.

The 1967 Referendum

- The work and establishment of the FCAATSI is largely responsible for the success of the 1967 Referendum. On March 2nd 1967 Prime Minister Harold Holt introduced legislation for a referendum to be held on May 27, 1967.
- In April 1967, FCAATSI organised a deputation to Canberra to seek support for a 'Yes' vote on the Aboriginal question. FCAATSI feared that voters would not understand the effect of a 'yes' or 'no' vote and wanted to check on what politicians had done in their electorates to support a 'Yes' vote.
- FCAATSI was helped by the heads of churches who also supported a 'Yes' vote, distributed how-to-vote cards and tried to explain to voters what it was all about.
- FCAATSI played a significant role in pushing for the Referendum, publicising the 'Yes' vote, and the general pursuing of Indigenous rights.
- The Federal Government suddenly cut funding from FCAATSI in 1978- in this event, it was forced to close/finish.

JOE MCGINNESS

“[Joe was a] tireless worker for the 1967 Referendum [and that while] his vision and tremendous commitment might not be replaced ... it will leave many throughout this country in good tread to continue the work for reconciliation”

Faith Bandler, undated

Joe McGinness was a well-known campaigner for Aboriginal rights in Australia and throughout his life, was a significant member of the FCAATSI.

Joe was born in 1914 the son of Alyandabu, a Kungarakany woman from the Northern Territory, and Stephen McGinness, an Irish immigrant. In 1943 Joe enlisted and served with the Australian Imperial Force in Borneo with the 2/13 Field Ambulance during the Second World War. Following his service he worked on the wharves in Queensland, where he was a member of the Waterside Workers Federation [WWF] during the 1950's and 1960's.

Joe and Faith Bandler were the first Aboriginal presidents [co-chaired] of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement in 1961 [later known as the FCAATSI]. In 1967 during the Vote 'Yes' campaign for the Referendum Joe travelled throughout Australia putting the 'Yes' case forward.

In 1973 Joe McGinness became a member of the National Aboriginal Consultative Council, the first federal government body of Aboriginal advisers. He was manager of the North Eastern Region of Aboriginal Hostels from 1975 to 1979. He continued to work, through the 1970s and 1980s, in a number of Aboriginal organisations. He was widely known and loved across northern Australia as 'Uncle Joe' and was awarded an Order of Australia in recognition of his work for Aboriginal Australians. His autobiography *Son of Alyandabu: My Fight for Aboriginal Rights* was published in 1991.

THE COOLBAROO CLUB

The Coolbaroo Club was an influential and significant organisation based in Perth. It was established in 1947 and catered specifically for the Aboriginal community at a time when Aboriginal people were not allowed to enter regular social clubs and organisations. It now represents the active resistance of the community against oppressive policies of the day. When the State Government prohibited Aboriginal people from entering a large area or zone of Perth city, the club was established to have somewhere for Aboriginal people to enjoy themselves socially and meet others. It was unique in that it was created and run by and *for* Aboriginal people, although it was open and inclusive of all people, of any race.

- The Coolbaroo Club was profoundly successful in bringing Aboriginal people together (as well as supporters of Aboriginal rights who were non-Aboriginal). The Club held many weekly dances and annual balls attended by hundreds of people and became an influential political activist body, which saw important messages and information about Aboriginal rights communicated out to the community.
- The Club played a major role in raising awareness for rights, activism, promoting the 'Yes' campaign for the Referendum. It was an influential organisation for the local community.
- The Club closed in the early 60s. Many of its leaders like George Abdullah went on to form the Aboriginal Advancement Council (1965) - the same year Aboriginal workers won the right to equal pay.

Access the [City of Perth's Coolbaroo Club catalogue](#).

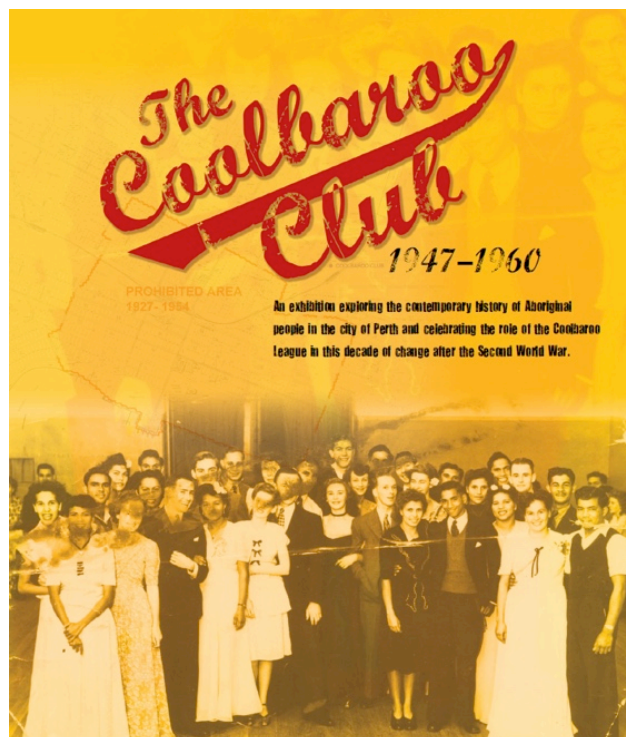


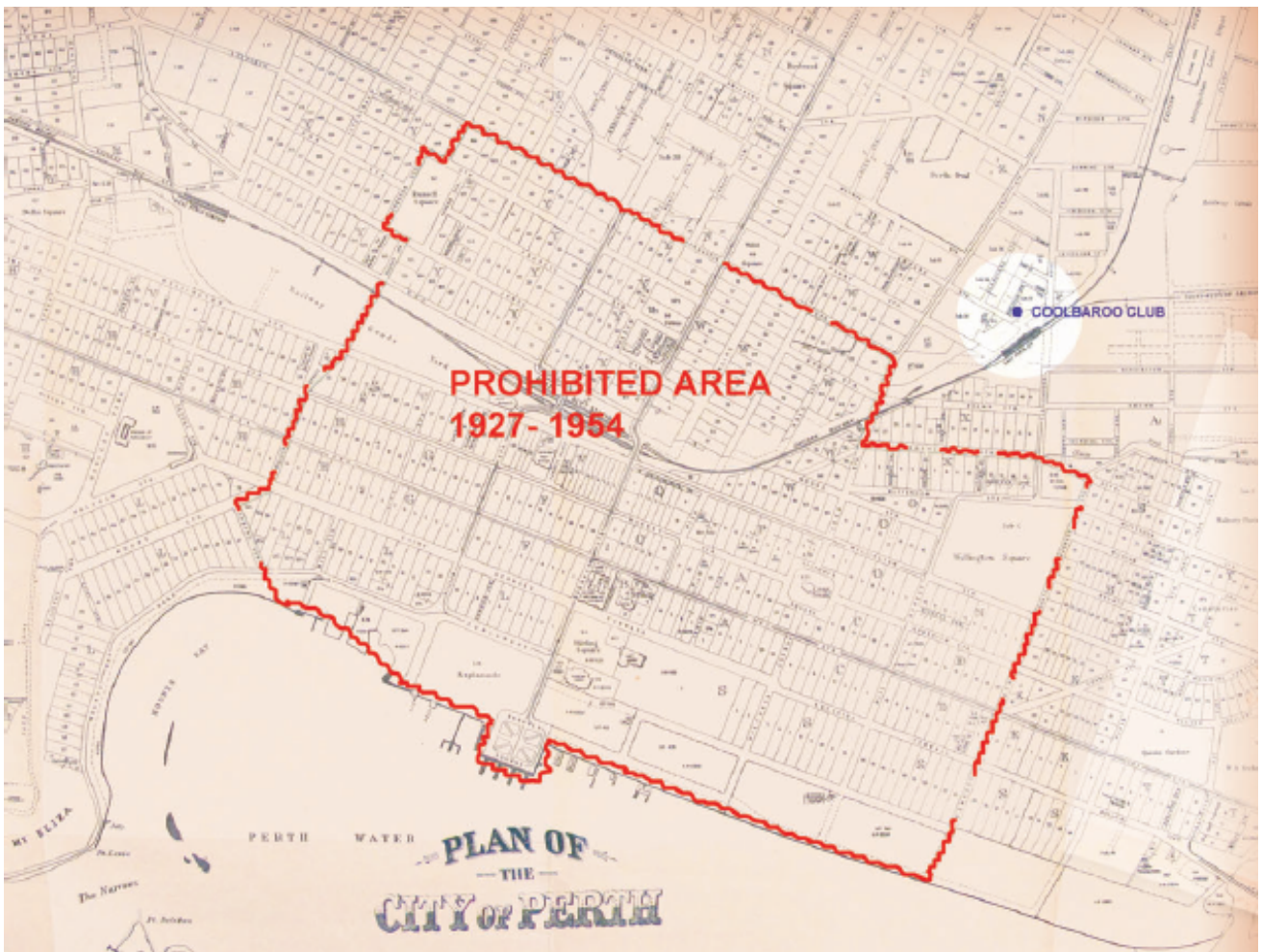
Image: City of Perth History Centre Collection.

DID YOU KNOW?

Perth's CBD was a prohibited area for Aboriginal people between 1927 and 1954. On 18 March

1927, the Governor of

Western Australia relied on the *Aborigines Act 1905* to declare the City of Perth a prohibited area for Aboriginal people. This particularly affected Noongar people who lived and worked in the area and could no longer visit the town. They were required to have a pass for work and entering the area, in the event officials stopped them. In Perth, there was a 6.00pm curfew, which made it illegal for Aboriginal people to be in town past that time of day.



Prohibited Areas map, image redrawn from the original Map of the Prohibited Area of Perth
Courtesy Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Research Questions:

What are some commonalities between all of the heroes mentioned in this section?

Do you think the Aboriginal heroes from Western Australia are well known to the broader public? Why or why not?

What do you think the Referendum result meant (or would have meant) to each of the Aboriginal heroes featured in this section?

Activities:

Biography. Using the material provided and your own research, write a biography for a Western Australian Aboriginal hero, including a timeline of events.

Creative writing. Imagine you are one of these heroes. Create a 'dear diary' entry, as if this person is writing in their diary after the result of the Referendum was announced. Think about the emotive language that would have been used at that time and the freedom and justice this event would have symbolised, socially.

Please see 'Teachers Resource' section for more resources and project suggestions.

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