CHAPTER 8

PUNISHMENT

A PUNISHMENT PLACE

DAWN MAY

THE PENAL SETTLEMENT of Palm Island, 65 kilometres from Townsville, held 1248 Aborigines—children, alleged troublemakers, unmarried mothers of 'half-caste' children, aged and sick, petty offenders and hardened criminals shipped from all over the state. They were controlled by a superintendent whose vast discretionary power was magnified by a rapid turnover of staff and bitter sectarian rivalry between resident Anglican and Catholic clergy. He decided how his charges passed almost every moment of their lives.

Aborigines going to Palm Island, one of them remembers, were first taken to nearby Fantome Island to be tested for leprosy and venereal disease:

> You got to stop there two or three weeks but while you are there they don't just leave you there, you got to work. [A friend] say 'You stay with me'. We couldn't stay anywhere else because there are too many flies on Fantome Island and you can't go anywhere on the island only round the front. Anyway a fellow called George Parker examine us and say; 'You are all right. You can go to Palm tomorrow.' Next day we leave that place to go to Palm Island.

On Palm the superintendent would ask

> 'You know anybody here?' We say that we know Mundy William, one of our countrymen, an old fellow. He say, 'Yes, he got plenty of room' but he got no room at all. His house is very small. He only pleased to have his own countrymen there. Anyway we stop there through the Christmas holidays.

Aborigines from many different areas were crowded together, which periodically provoked conflict. Keeping it in check was one job of the settlement's 25 native police. 'Tribal fighting wasn't allowed', one policeman recalls:

> If people [were] caught walking around with deadly weapons we took it off them you see. We wouldn't allow them to use them—not even carry them—not a knife or anything. Only the ordinary wire spear that was allowed to be carried around. We'd know then that they were going hunting not to kill anyone. [Even so] they used to be given passes in those days to go hunting ... That's why they were issued passes. We'd know where they were.

The most common offence was 'not working or something like that'. Everyone had to work

> to keep the place going. If you didn't go to work you might be sent to do hard labour for fourteen days, maybe a week or something like that. Anyone caught around the town idle doing nothing would be put in custody and kept in the gaol house. Had to then report to the superintendent's court—he was the sole judge, prosecutor and everything. If you had a doctor's certificate you would be O.K. If you didn't have that you would be gaoled or would be made to work or ...

Even children could be gaoled. One remembers:

> I was singing this song 'Who said I was a bum?'. I didn't know the matron was coming through the dormitory. Next thing I found myself in gaol for the night because I was singing that song and using the word 'bum' ... Next time I went to gaol we were hunting for stuff on the reef when we saw this big fish in the lagoon. A big one. Of course we started chasing it. We had no sandshoes on but we were running over the coral chasing this fish. The police were blowing the whistle for us to come in and we never heard it. We were too busy chasing the fish. Finally we caught it and the police caught us and marched us off to gaol. We kicked that fish all the way ...

The police were recruited from among the islanders, and combined discipline with respect for Aboriginal law. One policeman recalls that

> The native sergeant selected recruits for the police force. If he thought we were fit he would join us up. You could work your way up from a constable to a senior sergeant. I was tough in those days—didn't favour my brother, cousin, mother, sister—they would have to do the right thing. [I] treated everyone the same and punished only those that did wrong. I took them to the court first—I didn't do the punishing myself of course. The superintendent did that.
>
> A lot of our old fellows couldn't read or write but they never had trouble keeping law and order in this place ... They knew right from wrong. They were brought up on the old tribal laws and you couldn't break any tribal laws without being punished ... the police used to drill like soldiers ... They would go on parade in the morning—down among the workers. I'd put on the parade there and break them off ... had to be spanking clean, starched uniforms, clean shaven, boots polished. You could see the uniform shine on us that's how good we were ...
>
> Every morning the bell would go at eight o'clock in the morning and everyone would line up. The superintendent didn't take the parade ... he'd only get the reports in the afternoon from us ... Some mornings [the workers] would be given tobacco—the old mission pack. It wasn't extra good but we had to smoke it. There was no other tobacco.
>
> The unpaid men would work until four—the paid men would go on to five. [After work they] used to go to the dormitory to visit girl friends—have a few hours with them—half an hour or fifteen minutes or something like that. Had

N. DUFFEY, ANU

to ask the matron for permission to see the girls ... Quite a few girls did run away. When they were caught they might be made to sweep the streets for a week. They would be punished alright.

Single girls over four lived and sometimes worked in dormitories. In 1938 they were enclosed in a new dormitory with a huge wire fence around the verandah. One remembers being

really locked in. In the daytime the place was open but we weren't allowed in once that dormitory had been scrubbed out. At five o'clock in morning we were all belted out of bed—had to get up, start the work and there would be so many girls allotted to scrub the domitory which was huge, so many to make the

Archbishop Michael Kelly leaving Palm Island. Kelly is being carried over the coral and into the shallow waters to board a flattie which will take him out to the launch in deeper water. George Watson, a local Aboriginal leader, is holding the front, Tommy Bygorra is on his right.
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

beds—there might have been 200 beds. Cooking, cleaning of the dining rooms, toilet, bathroom all had to be done before breakfast.

We were all made to go down to the sea for our daily dip every morning, winter summer didn't make any difference. We never had anything to wipe on of course. In winter you'd come home shivering and then had to get under the cold shower and put on whatever clothes you had ... Then you had to go to school ... In the afternoon we had to go up to the hills and cut grass to make brooms to sweep the yard. That all had to be done too. The yard had to be swept before school in the morning.

Our meals? Lucky if we got porridge for breakfast—can't remember if we had any milk but they did have cows on the island—not too many. Most times dinner and the meal at night was bread and fat, bread and syrup, bread and condensed milk. Maybe once a week we might get a stew ... We were often hungry in the early days. Often we would cry ourselves to sleep ... Sometimes our mothers would bring us a small damper and if they got a fish they might bring that up. They couldn't do it too often. Sometimes they brought turtle meat or dugong meat. Apart from that we were scratching around looking for pawpaw seeds, roots, rotten eggs and what not.

Boys also lived in a dormitory.

The rest of the people were scattered in camps at Clump Point, Yarrabah, Cooktown, Lumaluma, the Sundowners and elsewhere, where they built 'a sort of grass building [like those] in a New Guinea village'. Outside these huts,

> We used to make a little building with a flat roof where we used to cook our meals so that the sparks wouldn't catch the house. You see we used to be careful with the house. Still some used to burn down but they would put them up again.
>
> We cut all the palm trees up on the mountains—split them up to make battens long battens you know, to hold the bark. We used to get the rope from the mountains, wild rope ... from the vines, cut it all and break it up and pull it like a string ... to tie the battens to hold the grass down.

A Palm Island corroboree for tourists in the 1930s.
NORTH QUEENSLAND COLLECTION, JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

But many customs were suppressed. Weddings had to be in church and required permission from the chief protector in Brisbane, although wedding ceremonies still borrowed from tradition. One islander recalls that men

> had to visit the girls in the dormitory and when they were sure of one another, that the mother and father agreed and consented to them getting married ... the superintendent would send them to the doctor and both [would be] examined for many things—not only for disease but to see they were fit and then they could get married. We would go to that big celebration—put on a big feast, get a couple of goats, pig, kill a bullock ... everyone invited.

Other traditional rituals were disappearing. Watching a mourning ceremony, which was rarely performed by 1938, a young islander

> saw about three old folks all painted up coming up from the creek—dancing towards a particular house, dancing all around it. They went in and started smoking the house out ... One of the old chaps had died and they were smoking his clothes to frighten spirits away so that people living in the house would not be haunted ... It lasted twenty minutes or half an hour, something like that. There were no restrictions on who could watch. A lot of people and kids [were] around.

Some traditions were kept to earn money. 'Tourists came here in the hundreds', remembers an islander:

> We had all the different dances ... Cooktown, Mareeba, from right up north and from Mt. Isa, Cloncurry and right down to Boulia, and Alice Springs ... all of us workers would go out in the whale boats—two or three big boats to bring the passengers in to the beach. People would make spears, boomerangs, shields ... We used to sell everything we had ... [Normally, if] I want to buy something out of the store, they would give me an order and write down what I got ... rice, sugar, tea, jam, a packet of flour or something like that ... when the tourists come we used to have dinky di money in our pockets.

For compulsory work Palm Island paid only rations. An Aborigine who tried to avoid diving for shells complained:

> You pick up the shells all right but the government takes them. We get nothing for it. We only get tobacco and we make damper and dumpling. That's all we eat so I refuse to go diving ... The temporary superintendent say 'you refuse to go round there to dive? Okay I send you to Mundy Bay ... cutting timber.'

Compulsory timbercutting led to similar complaints:

> So I go around there cutting timber. We go to Barber Bay cutting pine trees. We cut a swag from there every Monday and every Monday we walk nine miles over them logs, right up to Barber Bay, where they call it Carpet Snake Creek. We camp there inside Barber Island and we cut big pines. We go on top and push all the big pine down about five, six or seven hundred yards. We bark the pine so we push them down. We cut the pine and shoot them down into the water, used them as floaters.

THE LOCAL PROTECTOR

> The great trouble is that in the outback places the local policeman is made the protector, and if he gets a 'down' on the owner of a station he will take away his best aborigine and deport him to Palm Island where most of them die, and some have been known to die within five days. Taking them away from their own country is a terrible thing. The local policeman, being the protector, can do what he likes with the blacks by threatening to send them to the island if they do not do what he asks them to do.
>
> McGregor Watson, north Queensland pastoralist, in evidence to the NSW Select Committee on the Administration of the Aborigines Protection Board, 30 Nov 1937.

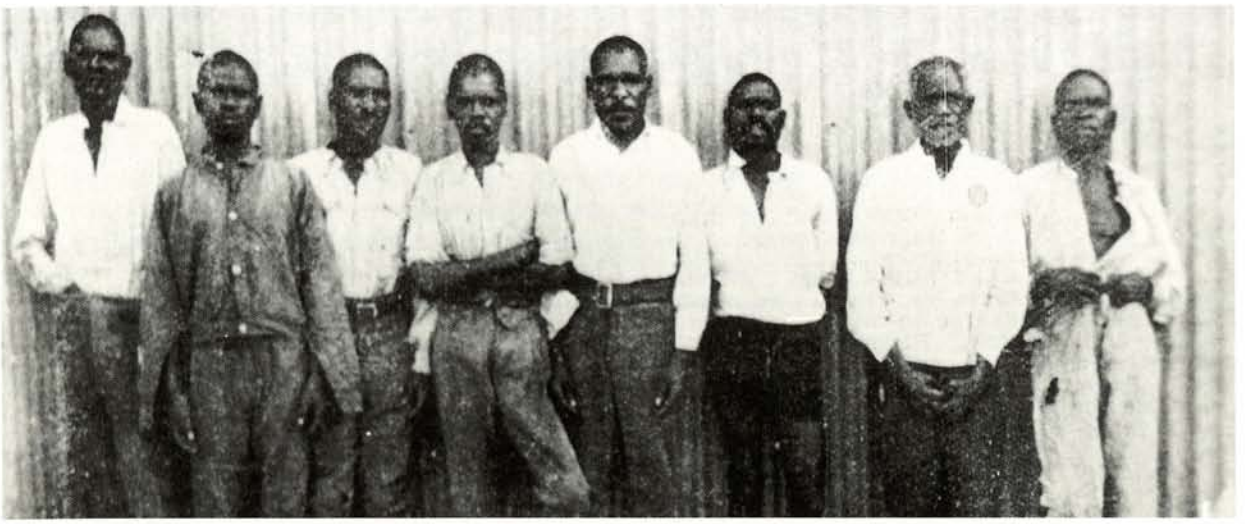
> We bore holes, take them to Carpet Snake Creek, anchor them there while we wait for the launch to come on Friday morning to take the logs to the mill ... It was really hard but you had to keep it up. Six or seven logs at a time; you got to shift them all the time because if you let them dry the rope break. We were like that for three or four months. Only get tobacco, flour and rice—no money.

For relaxation people played football, organised traditional dances, and

> Every Saturday night all the tribes would get together, Cooktown, Lumaluma, Casement, Sundowners. They were good times. We used to have bullock riding, horse riding, big races, corroborees, foot races, big cup murray [earth oven cooked food].

But these good times could not outweigh the drudgery and loss of freedom. An island policeman found that

> People used to try and escape from Palm Island by swimming to the other islands. Some used logs and others didn't. We [native police] were sent to the mainland to track them down and bring them back. I was up against that



Prisoners from the Normanton area en route to Palm Island. Two of these men subsequently escaped and made their way back to their traditional land. Photograph, 30 June 1924.
NORTH QUEENSLAND REGISTRAR

altogether. I didn't like that. I had many go ins with the Queensland government over that ... I wanted my people to be treated like human beings not like animals.

Others could be sent to work on the mainland, usually exchanging one harsh environment for another. 'I'd just been sacked from down at the matron's', a girl recounts,

not for anything I did but because it was thought that I was covering up for Alice. She was pregnant but I didn't know that ... However I got put off. We knew that [station people] had come over to Palm to get a couple of girls but they picked Bessie was working for the matron and that's what steamed the old matron up. I just happened to walk into the dormitory when the matron stormed, 'You get your things packed and be on the boat tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock.' Not that I had anything to pack mind you. Next day we were told that people were going to pick us up in Townsville.

We went straight from the boat to the watchhouse. I think this was because my employers wanted to stop over in Townsville for the weekend. We couldn't take a walk on our own—we were too frightened anyway. If there was anyone at the watchhouse free they would take us for a walk downtown and we had to be back at a certain hour. I was not really excited about the idea of leaving Palm. I was frightened and stunned really. I didn't know what was happening. Everything was new to me. I remember being surprised at the size of Townsville. It was very frightening.

We went out to the station through Charters Towers in the back of a truck. Another Palm girl was with me. She was older but hadn't been taught to do anything because she was partly crippled. I found out later that she was sent out to help me settle. I was a domestic on the station. The work was a bit harder than on Palm Island as I had more to do. We used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to have breakfast ... [then] cart the milk up to put through the separator to get the cream to make butter ... When that was finished I would undo the separator and soak it, go away and wash up, back to the dairy and wash up there, then I had to start the housework. I had to take out all the goatskin mats and bash them against the palings, sweep through the house and do the big lounge. If it was washing day I would start on that. Nelly would already have

started the washing while I was doing the dairy. [We] ... sometimes ... [had] up to 10 pairs of heavy jodphurs to wash. They had to be boiled and rinsed before being wrung out. After a while I worked out that it was easier to let them drain and do something else before I hung them out ...

Being under the Act and working on stations had many restrictions. You couldn't eat with those that were out of the Act who had separate eating areas. Each station had its own set of rules about where you ate and the manner of feeding. On some stations they put you outside but let you carve up your own meat but separate from the house. On other stations they wouldn't let you touch the food whatsoever. You had to sit and wait till you were fed by the white bosses.

Palm Islanders did station work for twelve months at a time. One man, who considered himself unfairly treated, left before his time was up. He reported to the Charters Towers protector, a police sergeant. 'The sergeant went for me when I told him who I was and where I came from', he recalls:

He said, 'You're the bloke who ran away before your time. You're signed on from January till the end of the year ... You've got to go back.' I said, 'Not on your life.' He said, 'You get on your horse and get back there. You're due back at that station in a couple of days.' I said, 'Not on your life sergeant.' ... I was as sweet as a lolly with him because I thought if I roughed him up he'd hit me or something ... He said that if I didn't go back he would send me to the island. 'What Palm Island?' I said, 'That'll do me sergeant ... They've got a lot of girls over there all fenced in.' He thought for a bit and then said, 'No I won't. You'll only get into trouble over there. Too many girls.' Instead I was sent out to work on another station.

Station hands got a small wage, officially 26s a week, but most or all of it was put into a savings account controlled by the protector, who, Aboriginal workers discovered,

had all the say. I've seen times when [Aborigines] used to sit outside the police station waiting for money—even a few bob. Ten pounds was the highest you would be allowed to draw. You would sit there all day frightened to go away and get a feed for fear you would miss out. Then at 5 o'clock he would come and say 'Nothing today. Come back tomorrow' ... It was just like a big kick up the ribs when it was your own money anyway.

Protectors commonly cheated people of their savings:

You would go out the back of the police station and would sit on the grass and your name would be called. Do you want any money today? How much do you want? You would say, '£4, £5, £10'. They would go ... and get the money out of the Commmonwealth [Bank]. When it came my turn instead of giving me £1 notes, he counted out ten shilling notes. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. I said, 'I'm sorry sir that's not £10. They're all ten bob notes.' 'Oh,' he said, 'my mistake.' He apologised but if I'd have walked out with the ten bob notes, he would have pocketed the rest. He would have been gaining £5 on me.

He might also have sent this man to Palm for being cheeky. That threat hung over all Queensland Aborigines who stood up for their rights. 'Palm Island', in the words of one of its residents,

was a punishment place. What used to happen would be that you would come into town at Christmas time. You'd be allowed a week and then you'd have to

ABSCONDING FROM PALM ISLAND

To the Chief Protector of Aboriginals:

Re Jack Bruno, Tommy Pitcombe, Coglan and Billy Flower—absconding from Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement... I have... to inform you that up to the present none of the abovenamed has been captured...

Commissioner, Qld Police Department, 8 Feb 1938

To the Commissioner, Qld Police Department:

I have the honour to report... that two of the escaped aboriginals, Jack Bruno and Billy Flowers are now at the Mitchell River Mission, but the Supt. of the Mission has advised that he has no means of holding them... [A patrol] was compelled to return after... 70 miles, owing to the flooded rivers. The patrol was therefore abandoned for the time being.

Inspector of Police, Cairns, 15 Mar 1938

To Inspector of Police, Cairns:

The Patrol was successful in effecting the arrest of Jack Bruno, and Fitztom, on the 14th June 1938. The latter it appears is identical with Tommy Pitcombe... Just prior to the Patrols departure from the Mission for Normanton, I was informed by other natives that Billy Flowers and Coglan were camped on the Alice River... about 90 miles from the Mission. The Troop horses were getting low in condition and sore footed, and having five Aboriginals to escort per foot to Normanton, I considered that the best course to pursue would be return immediately to Normanton with the Aboriginals in hand.

Police constable, Normanton, 13 July 1938

To Commissioner, Qld Police Department

I attach hereto Order... for the removal of the aboriginals Bruno and Fitztom... to the Aboriginal Settlement at Palm Island.

Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 14 July 1938

To Commissioner, Qld Police Department

Advice has been received from the Medical Superintendent, Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement, that five natives... absconded from the Settlement on 11th November in a large flattie... It would be appreciated if you will... endeavour to ascertain the whereabout of these natives and the flattie, which is the property of the Queensland Government.

Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 22 Nov 1938

QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES

be ready to go out on the mail truck on Monday morning. If you weren't on that mail truck, the police would be around to escort you to the next one or else you were sent to Palm Island. It put the fear into my relations. They would be there on the mail truck regularly. My uncle stood up for himself and wouldn't be walked over by the police. They ended up sending him to Palm Island because they said he was a trouble maker.

Being on Palm itself wasn't so bad. It was our beautiful home and we loved it except for the fact that we were under the Act and *so* controlled.

Red Sandhills

Watercolour, 1938, by Albert Namatjira

Albert Namatjira, a member of the Arunta people, was born on 28 July 1902 at Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission near Alice Springs, where he attended the mission school and was initiated into tribal life. Namatjira received tuition in painting watercolour landscapes from Melbourne artists Rex Battarbee and John Gardner when they visited Hermannsburg in 1932, 1934 and 1936. His first painting sold in 1936 for five shillings. Battarbee helped to organise Namatjira's first exhibition of some forty watercolours at the Fine Art Society Gallery, Melbourne, in December 1938. Within two days all Namatjira's work was sold, with prices ranging from one to six guineas. The exhibition catalogue noted that the most remarkable feature of Namatjira's work was the 'invariably fine selection of subject'. It went on,

> The clarity of the sunlight in the arid Centre is excellently conveyed and the strange and startling hues of those remarkable ranges, the Macdonnells, have been faithfully observed, and as faithfully stated. The perceptions of a lifetime thus confirm the impressions of the few white artists who have painted in that country and who scarcely dared to show the result because of its unbelievable richness of colour.

Alan McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art* vol 2, Melbourne 1984; exhibition catalogue, Albert Namatjira Central Australian Water Colours, 1938.

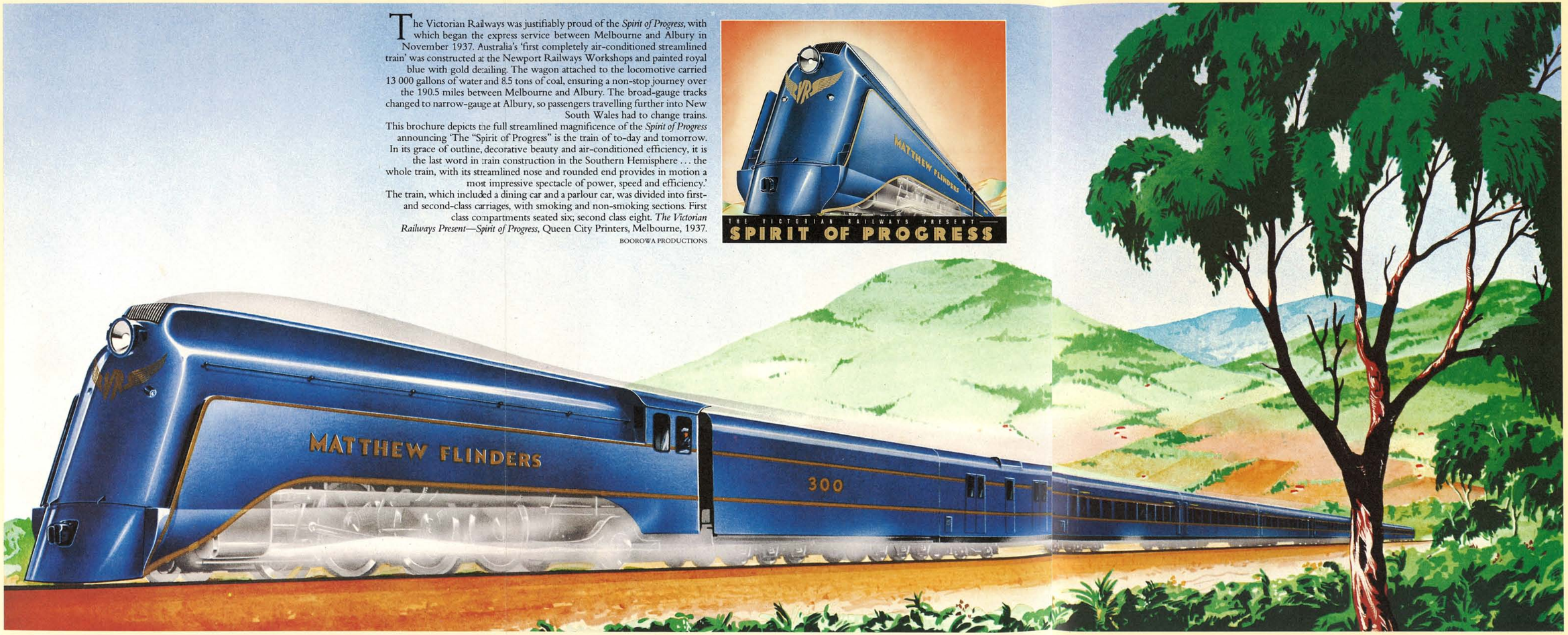
DUGUID COLLECTION

The Victorian Railways was justifiably proud of the *Spirit of Progress*, with which began the express service between Melbourne and Albury in November 1937. Australia's 'first completely air-conditioned streamlined train' was constructed at the Newport Railways Workshops and painted royal blue with gold detailing. The wagon attached to the locomotive carried 13 000 gallons of water and 8.5 tons of coal, ensuring a non-stop journey over the 190.5 miles between Melbourne and Albury. The broad-gauge tracks changed to narrow-gauge at Albury, so passengers travelling further into New South Wales had to change trains.

This brochure depicts the full streamlined magnificence of the *Spirit of Progress* announcing 'The "Spirit of Progress" is the train of to-day and tomorrow. In its grace of outline, decorative beauty and air-conditioned efficiency, it is the last word in train construction in the Southern Hemisphere . . . the whole train, with its streamlined nose and rounded end provides in motion a most impressive spectacle of power, speed and efficiency.'

The train, which included a dining car and a parlour car, was divided into first- and second-class carriages, with smoking and non-smoking sections. First class compartments seated six; second class eight. *The Victorian Railways Present—Spirit of Progress*, Queen City Printers, Melbourne, 1937.

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS

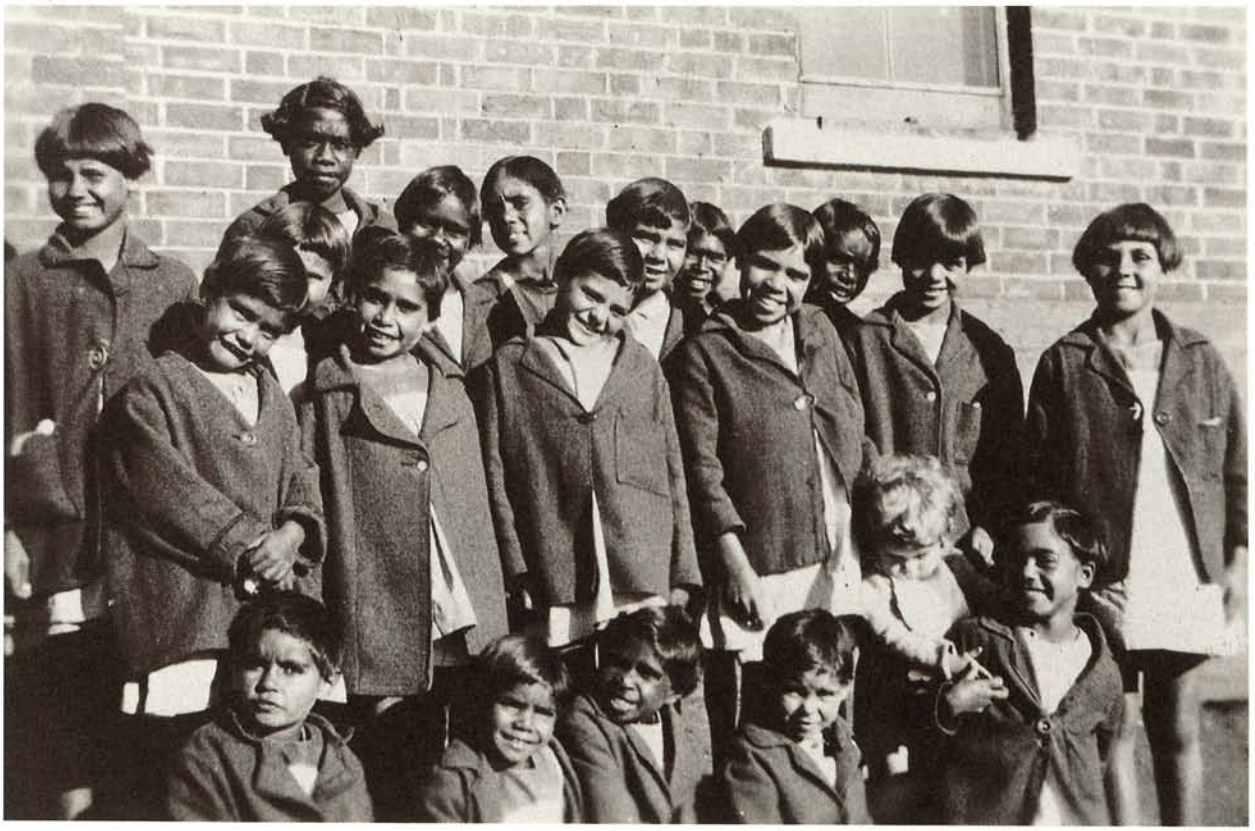


IN PLACE OF PARENTS

In the 1930s it was common practice to remove part-Aboriginal children from their mothers. In April 1937 Mr A. O. Neville, Commissioner of Native Affairs in Western Australia, explained the procedure adopted under his administration to a gathering of officials from the various states and territories:

It seems to me that the task which confronts us is educating and training these people to enable them to be assimilated into the white community. Accordingly we have taken steps to improve the health and physical fitness of the coloured population. At present only about 10 per cent of these people show any sign of ill-health, and the majority of the complaints from which they may suffer are trifling. This has been ascertained over two or three years of intensive medical inspection. If the coloured people of this country are to be absorbed into the general community they must be thoroughly fit and educated at least to the extent of the three R's. If they can read, write and count, and know what wages they should get, and how to enter into an agreement with an employer, that is all that should be necessary. Once that is accomplished there is no reason in the world why these coloured people should not be absorbed into the community. To achieve this end, however, we must have charge of the children at the age of six years; it is useless to wait until they are twelve or thirteen years of age. In Western Australia we have power under the act to take any child from its mother at any stage of its life, no matter whether the mother is legally married or not...

It is well known that coloured races all over the world detest institutionalism. They have a tremendous affection for their children. In Western Australia, we have



Cootamundra Home, c1938.
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Girls at 'Goota House', c1938. 'The Aborigines welfare board established Goota Mundra Girls' Home in the south western New South Wales town, as part of its Aboriginal Assimilation Policy. The institution was 'Home' for Aboriginal girls regarded by the board as 'Neglected' or 'Uncontrollable'. There they were trained to sew, wash and iron, cook and clean and scrub floors before being sent into domestic service in various parts of the state. Conditions were harsh and discipline severe.'
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

only a few institutions for the reception of half-caste illegitimate children, but there are hundreds living in camps close to the country towns under revolting conditions. It is infinitely better to take a child from its mother, and, put it in an institution, where it will be looked after, than to allow it to be brought up subject to the influence of such camps. We allow the mothers to go to the institutions also, though they are separated from the children. The mothers are camped some distance away, while the children live in dormitories. The parents may go out to work, and return to see that their children are well and properly looked after. We generally find that, after a few months, they are quite content to leave their children there.

MR HARKNESS (Member of the Aborigines Protection Board, N.S.W.): What happens to these children afterwards?

MR NEVILLE: They leave in time and go into service or other employment, and they may return to the institution at any time, if they like. Our experience is that they come to regard the institution as their home, and are happy to return to it for their holidays. These homes are simply clearing stations for the future members of the race. We recognise that we cannot do much with the older people, except look after them and see that they are fed. As regards the younger people, from twenty years upwards, we find employment for them if possible, but it is of the children that we must take notice. You cannot change a native after he has reached the age of puberty, but before that it is possible to mould him. When the quarter-caste home, in which there are now nearly 100 children, was started we had some trouble with the mothers. Although the children were illegitimate, the mothers were greatly attached to them, and did not wish to be parted from them. I adopted the practice of allowing the mothers to go to the institution with the children until

they satisfied themselves that they were properly looked after. The mothers were then usually content to leave them there, and some eventually forgot all about them.

MR BAILEY (Chief Secretary, Victoria, Chairman of the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines): Are the children, during their hours of recreation, allowed to run back to their mothers who are camped at the institution?

MR NEVILLE: No. The native settlement is divided into two parts, the compound, and the camp, which is about half a mile away. When they enter the institution the children are removed from the parents, who are allowed to see them occasionally in order to satisfy themselves that they are being properly looked after. At first the mothers tried to entice the children back to the camps, but that difficulty is now being overcome.

DR MORRIS (Member of the Aborigines Protection Board, N.S.W.): What percentage of these quarter-caste children marry whites when they grow up?

MR NEVILLE: There has not yet been time for them to grow up.

MR HARKNESS: Can your department take them by force up to any age?

MR NEVILLE: Yes, up to the age of 21 ... The young Aborigines of our State are wards of the Commissioner up to the age of 21 years. The Commissioner is entitled to treat these young coloured people *in loco parentis* [in place of parents]. That applies to quarter-caste children living under native conditions, but quarter-caste children living under other conditions, may, if necessary, be taken to court to be declared natives within the law. Our method of dealing with these young people has been to find decent employers for them. A good many employers have taken both boys and girls at a fairly early age. Up to sixteen years no question of wages arises but when sixteen years of age is reached the scale of wages becomes applicable. Children taken under such conditions never go back to their beginnings. They take their food in the kitchen with the rest of the staff on a homestead. We do not permit them to go back to native conditions. When their holiday time comes they travel to Perth and if they wish to go to see their parents on the reserve they are allowed to do so for a limited time. If they lose one position we do our best to find them another. When they are 21 years of age they become practically free and can do as they like as members of the general community. First and last with us it is a matter of the money available. If we had more money we could do very much more than we have been doing.

Taldree, Kamballa, formerly Parramatta Girls' Home, now incorporates the Norma Parker Centre, a prison for women. Photograph by Kevin Diletti, 1986.

The rear entrance gate to Parramatta Girls' Home. Photograph by Kevin Diletti, 1986.

CONDITIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Every effort should be made to merge those people into the white population. Their potentialities are, of course, very great. In my experience, I have come across quite competent men and women of fine character, and if we could merge them into the general population, the problem would become a minor, and not a major, one ... We also have a system of taking girls in the early adolescent stage and training them for domestic service. These girls reach quite a high standard. Unfortunately, of course, if they go back to the old surroundings, they revert to the old habits, and particularly to the lower moral standard, and become the mothers of illegitimate children early in life. It is not for this generation that we must work, it is for the next generation. My brother has taken one of these boys as a gardener, and is getting quite good work from him, and I have taken a girl into domestic service. She is intelligent, industrious, and clean, and submits to reasonable discipline. I do not think that if she were to go back to her station she would revert to the old standards, but, of course, one never knows. I am sure that if we can put into operation some improved technique in the handling of these people we shall

The main gate at Parramatta Girls' Home. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal girls who had reached puberty and were found by the New South Wales courts to be neglected or 'sexually delinquent' were sent to Parramatta Girls' Home. Although by 1938 conditions had improved since the introduction in 1923 of the New South Wales Child Welfare Act, the underlying assumption that girls were particularly susceptible to immorality, vice and corruption and, as such, in need of special care, remained. The home placed strong emphasis on religion as a pass to morality. All girls received religious instruction and were required to attend services regularly. They received training in the domestic arts and a limited formal education. Recreation periods were few. Dormitory accommodation was spartan and, despite the formidable gaol-like walls, escapes were not uncommon. Most girls remained in the home until they were eighteen or until they were released on probation. Photograph by Kevin Diletti, 1986.

be able to alter their attitude to life, and make it possible for them to be assimilated into the community, and become good citizens.

Statements have been made from time to time about aboriginal girls in domestic service becoming pregnant. In New South Wales, we throw the responsibility on the employer for the physical and moral well-being of apprentices. As a matter of fact, the number of girls who get into trouble is negligible. Most of them serve right through their apprenticeship, and continue in the same employment for years. We consider that if we can keep them away from the dangers of camp life until

they reach years of discretion we are doing good work. They are employed both in the country and in the city, and we are very careful in the selection of the homes into which they are introduced. In the cities there is a constant demand for them from the best class of suburb, and we never have any difficulty in finding places for them.

DR MORRIS: What chance is there of those girls marrying?

MR PETTITT: We make provision for that by allowing them to return to their own homes for a holiday after a number of years. There they generally meet some young fellow of their own colour. Sometimes they are married more or less immediately, and remain, or arrange to marry some time in the future. The problem then, of course, is to set the young man up in life independent of the reserve.

MR McLEAN: Are these girls constrained by force to remain in their employment, and, if so, what happens when they quarrel with their employers?

MR PETTITT: We deal with each case on its merits. Very often we find that it is a question of incompatibility of temperament, and we move the girl to other employment. It has sometimes happened that, after two or three shifts, a girl meets with an employer with whom she is perfectly happy. We do not force a child to remain in a place if she is miserable there.

MR BAILEY: Is it your experience that, when half-castes marry and set up homes of their own, they tend to harbour other blacks?

MR PETTITT: There is a tendency in that direction, but we have many instances in which the setting up of such homes has been attended by outstanding success. I know of one couple who married, and built a first-class cottage which was fully paid for, and their standard of living is equal to that of any one else.

MR BAILEY: My own opinion is that it would be better in the interests of half-castes to take them away from their parents, but I know that public opinion would not sanction such a course.

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN LEGISLATION

MR NEVILLE: The opinion held by Western Australian authorities is that the problem of the native race, including half-castes, should be dealt with on a long-range plan. We should ask ourselves what will be the position, say 50 years hence; it is not so much the position to-day that has to be considered. Western Australia has gone further in the development of such a long-range policy than has any other State, by accepting the view that ultimately the natives must be absorbed into the white population of Australia. That is the principal objective of legislation which was passed by the Parliament of Western Australia in its last session. I followed closely the long debates which accompanied the passage of that measure, and although some divergence was, at times, displayed, most members expressed the view that sooner or later the native and the white population of Australia must become merged. The Western Australian law to which I have referred is based on the presumption that the aborigines of Australia sprang from the same stock as we did ourselves; that is to say, they are not negroid, but give evidence of Caucasion origin. I think that the Adelaide Anthropological Board has voiced the opinion that there is no such thing as atavism in the aboriginal, and Dr. Cilento has expressed the view to which I have referred. We have accepted that view in Western Australia.

In Western Australia the problem of the aborigines has three phases. In the far-north there are between 7,000 and 8,000 pure-blooded aborigines; in the middle-north the number of half-castes is increasing, and the full-blooded

aborigines are becoming detribalized, and in the south-west there are about 5,000 coloured people. We have dropped the use of the term "half-caste". As a matter of fact, in the legislation passed last session the term "aborigines" has been discarded altogether; we refer to them as natives whether they be full-blooded or half-caste. Quadroons over the age of 21 years are, however, excluded. From childhood quadroons are to be treated as whites. In my State there are several institutions for the treatment of the natives, including eleven missions and a number of departmental establishments. At the mission stations, the natives are encouraged to multiply by marriage, with a consequent increase of population. The missions are thus able to claim that they are doing valuable work for the natives. Undoubtedly they are doing good work, but they keep an increasing number of natives on their properties, whereas the departmental institutions, whilst approving marriages, encourage the natives to mix with the general community, and earn their own living which, I am glad to say, they are doing. As a matter of fact, for some years now I have not been able to supply sufficient youngsters of both sexes to meet the demand for their labour.

As I have pointed out, the policy of the missions is in direct contrast to that of the department, because they do not encourage the young people born on the mission properties to leave them. The ultimate result of this policy in Western Australia will be an increase of the number of coloured people, that is, half-castes, and a diminution of the number of full-blooded aborigines. It seems to me that the task which confronts us is educating and training these people to enable them to be assimilated into the white community. Accordingly we have taken steps to improve the health and physical fitness of the coloured population.

Aborigines at Copper Mine Creek in the northwest of Western Australia, September 1938.
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PRINTER

Children From The Wilds Come To Mission

Native Games help newcomers to the mission station to forget their strangeness . . . Aboriginal children are particularly quick to learn the tunes of hymns and songs . . . After hearing a tune once or twice they can pick out the notes on the keyboard of a piano or harmonium. . . They are cheerful and bright.

Unkempt And Ill-Nourished, these children are newcomers to the mission . . . Aboriginal children frequently suffer from under-nourishment, acording to one of the missionaries . . . They respond quickly to kind treatment, soon show the effects of their new environment . . . Many of them are orphans.

Gertie, another Bomaderry inmate . . . Girls in their teens are sent away for domestic training.

Margaret is typical of the healthy children who are housed at the Bomaderry mission home.

Jimmy of Bomaderry . . . Adolescent boys, go to a Government centre to be trained for country work.

CONDITIONS IN VICTORIA

MR BAILEY: A citation of the conditions obtaining in Victoria may be of interest in view of the statement by Mr. Neville of the desire of Western Australia to absorb the half-caste population into the white population. Victoria's coloured population is small, and it is concentrated at Lake Tyers, whereas, formerly, there were three aboriginal centres in the State. The intention behind the establishment of the Lake Tyers camp was the training of half-castes to enable their absorption into the general community. This is where the difference between densely populated and sparsely populated States becomes evident. At Lake Tyers we have a school at which three Education Department teachers are employed. There is a sewing class for the training of the girls who are very apt pupils. We also train the boys and men in farm work. I agree that it is difficult to get them to do any such work; they have to be kept under constant supervision. They are employed on clearing land, road construction, dairying and similar pursuits. Our principal difficulty is that as soon as a girl becomes competent to take a position as a domestic servant and enters domestic service, it is no time before she comes back to the Lake Tyers Station either pregnant or, worse still, with two or three little children. It is difficult in a State with a large white population to prevent such things from happening. Shortly after I became Chief Secretary I investigated the case of a girl who had been with the Salvation Army for eight years and the case of two other girls who were in the Oakleigh Convent. The lady in charge of the Salvation Army Home told me that the girl was thoroughly domesticated and a magnificent cook, capable of taking a position anywhere. Accordingly I decided to give her a trial outside. I obtained a position for her with a farmer in the Western District. The two girls at the Oakleigh Convent were doing splendid fancy-work and I also decided to give them a trial outside. Within six months those girls were just about as degraded as they could possibly be. They all came under the influence of some hoboes and went off with them, with the result that not long after they came back to the Lake Tyers Station diseased. These are not the only examples I could cite; they are three outstanding cases which I have in mind and they exemplify the difficulty of absorbing this class of people amongst the whites in areas where there are large white populations. The half-castes get into the hands of degenerate whites, and that is the end; they go on breeding in the same way.

MR NEVILLE: We have had much the same difficulty in Western Australia. Every administration has trouble with half-caste girls. I know of 200 or 300 girls, however, in Western Australia who have gone into domestic service and the majority are doing very well. Our policy is to send them out into the white community, and if a girl comes back pregnant our rule is to keep her for two years. The child is then taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. Thus those children grow up as whites, knowing nothing of their own environment. At the expiration of the period of two years the mother goes back into service so it really does not matter if she has half a dozen children. Our new legislation makes it an offence for a white man to have sexual intercourse with a colored girl. About twelve prosecutions are pending for contraventions of that provision of the new act, and before long I am sure that there will be a diminution of that trouble.

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Aborigines on the move along the Murray River, South Australia, in the 1930s.
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TOURIST BUREAU