

## **A more positive future - State still has serious questions to answer**

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### *MOSSMAN SUGAR MILL*

A company of Mossman settlers was formed in 1894 to take advantage of Government guarantees for sugar mill construction. The Mossman Mill was completed and did its first crush in 1897 .

In 1901 the White Australia Policy was legislated by the new Commonwealth Government and after that many Kanakas,

Malays and Chinese were deported. Labour became scarcer and seasonal Aboriginal employment in the sugar industry grew until the mechanisation of cane harvesting in the early 1960's.

### *THE END OF RESISTANCE*

Sometime between the Mossman River massacre in 1885 and the construction of the Mossman Mill in 1897 Yalanji resistance to settlement in the district ended.

In 1897, with the passing of the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, a new era began. Yalanji numbers had been drastically reduced and the people were demoralised. They lived in a number of small settlements at Mossman and Daintree.

It had been the practise of some of the colonists, for some years, to pay for Aboriginal labour or sexual favours with opium or alcohol. The new Act brought protection from those evils but also strengthened and codified control measures.

Across Queensland whole communities were arbitrarily relocated often being marched hundreds of miles under escort to new camps.

The new camps often forced many cultural groups including even traditional enemies to share a small space.

This often raised powerful emotional conflicts as traditional "avoidance" rules between different classes of kin were no longer practicable.

The speaking of traditional languages and conduct of traditional religious ceremonies were also often prohibited in the new camps. Traditional cultures were being stamped out.

### *THE PROTECTION ACT*

In 1897 the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was passed by the Queensland parliament.

Though amended several times the Act continued in force and its powers were even further extended, even by the Aborigines Act 1971.

The Aborigines Act was eventually repealed in 1984, 87 years (four generations-plus) after the Protection Act was first enacted.

The effect of the Protection Acts was to make Aborigines in Queensland wards of the State and to suspend their civil rights in many respects.

The Act introduced a horrible period for Aboriginal people in which they lost all civil rights and were financially, legally and emotionally abused.

In particular, the Act:

- I Applied to all Aboriginal and "half-caste" people in Queensland - except those granted "exemption";

- I Gave sweeping powers to the "Chief Protector" and through him to Local Protectors to regulate the lives of Aboriginal people, including:

- I Power to direct Aboriginal people to work for specific employers under Protector approved conditions - wages were usually fixed well below award rates, as little as one fifth of the award rate;

- I Power to require all wages due to Aboriginal people to be paid into savings accounts controlled by the Protector - the Protector would then pay the worker a small proportion (half or less) of the meagre wages earned;

I Power to levy against those savings accounts to pay for community expenses (it has been claimed that the construction Mossman Hospital was funded from those accounts);

I Power to control the movement of Aboriginal people to, from and between reserves and missions. People needed approval to travel. Approval could be withheld without reason;

I Power to remove Aboriginal people from any location to a reserve or mission - this power was often used to separate people from their families and cultural groups;

I From 1901 power to manage all property of an Aboriginal person. An Aboriginal person could make a will but it was valid only if approved by a Protector. If there were no claimants on the estate property reverted to the Office of the Chief Protector.

I From 1901 marriage of an Aboriginal woman to a non-Aboriginal man required approval by a Protector or Reserve Superintendent. From 1939 all marriages of Aboriginal people required the approval of a Protector or Superintendent. In practice, in some communities, marriages were arranged by the Superintendent (often a missionary) who would direct a couple to marry.

Applicants for exemption from the Act required letters of support testifying that the applicant was of good character, could manage their own affairs and did not associate with other Aboriginal people.

Exemptions were fairly rare and could be revoked.

The savings accounts established were often raided by Protectors for their own corrupt use.

By 1932 there were 95 Protectorates and widespread corruption had emerged within the administrative practices of the local Protectors.

Despite numerous calls for investigation and an overhaul of the system, corruption continued long after the Office of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals was succeeded in 1939 by the Office of the Director of Native Affairs."

## *FUTURE NEEDS*

The Opium Act set the tone for Aboriginal affairs in Australia and the other States and Territories quickly passed comparable legislation, and while the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 National Apology was primarily the "Stolen Generations", there has as yet been no apology by the States and Territories for those oppressive and disabling regimes.

Aboriginal community members are now concerned that removals are continuing in greater numbers under Queensland's Child Protection Act 1999.

These removals can be performed at will by non-Indigenous officers acting alone without any consultation with the family or community. Removed children can quickly be placed beyond the reach of their distressed families and out of touch with people of their cultural group.

### 2008 Closing the Gap

In making the Apology to the Stolen Generations on February 13 2008, the Federal Government committed to six ambitious targets to "Close the Gap" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Council of Australian Governments endorsed these targets which are:

- 1: Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation;
- 2: Halve the gap in mortality rates for children under five within a decade;
- 3: Halve the gap in employment outcomes within a decade;
- 4: Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade;
- 5: Ensure all four-year-olds in remote communities access to early childhood education within five years; and
- 6: Halve the gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

Although some progress is acknowledged, there has been limited achievement in many regards.

At the celebration next Wednesday, the indigenous community will call for a review of Closing the Gap targets and methods to speed up progress. People attending the celebration will be invited to sign a letter to governments calling for a stronger and better-targeted approach.

The other desired outcomes from this year's celebration include empowering Indigenous and non-indigenous residents of the district to develop ongoing dialogue and mutual understanding and recruiting whole of community resources to be involved in the future volunteer construction of a permanent Yarning Circle at the George Davis Park.

Invitations are extended to contractors, tradesmen, gardeners and other skilled workers from the whole community to be involved. All helpers will be welcomed.

The commemoration of the fifth Anniversary of the National Apology will be held 10-2pm next Wednesday at George Davis Park in Mossman.