INVESTIGATION THREE

NEGOTIATING COEXISTENCE

A selection or extracts from records left by three key eyewitnesses provide readers with opportunities to analyse contemporary understandings of how the colonists and First Nations Peoples were learning to live together at the Murray Crossing Place and its surrounds. The three witnesses were depicting 'contact zones,' that is 'places where people geographically and historically separated, encountered each other, and were beginning to establish ongoing relations.'[1] They each noted challenges that were made to the dominance of the culture of the invaders.

List of Sources

1. Lady Franklin's letters.
2. George Augustus Robinson's journals, correspondence and publication.
3. Tommy McRae's drawings.

LEAD QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: How were colonists learning to live with First Nations Peoples?

QUESTION 2: How were First Nations Peoples learning to live with colonists?

QUESTION 3: How might historians weigh the value of (i) a collection of private letters, (ii) unpublished private journals (iii) drawings made by a Wiradjuri man and (iv) drawings made by a colonial artist as evidence of post-contact interactions?

QUESTION 4: The analysis of disparate jottings in letters or diaries requires patience, whereas the assessment of visual depictions can be more immediate. How might historians weigh time constraints in studying different kinds of sources?

QUESTION 5: Inquiries begin and end with the 'so what?" question. Why are contemporary impressions of people interacting important? Which of the interactions reported are still important today?

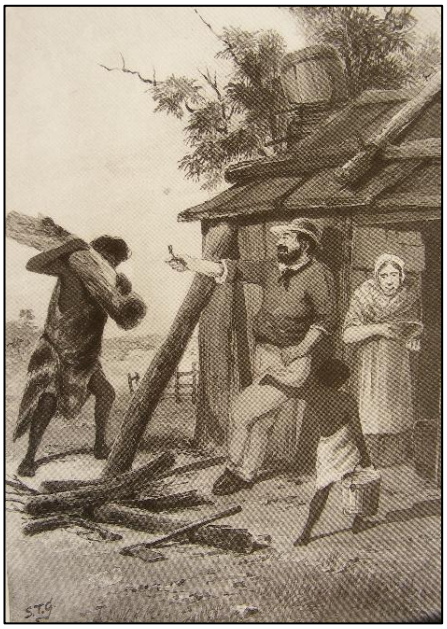
Introductory written and visual comments

Richard Broome, writing of Victoria generally, has observed:

> Aboriginal people manipulated, accommodated, imitated, and resisted the European presence. They maintained their cultural ideas, practised their rituals, and continued to seek bush tucker along with forays into the European economy. [They] devised ways of surviving the wild times, although the majority of them did not succeed [principally because of disease, dispossession and violence.]'[2] [He suggests that] to see Aboriginal people simply as victims of colonisation is to miss their efforts to voyage, to survive, and indeed transform themselves in order to retain their Aboriginal identity in the new settler society.[3]

QUESTION 6: How well does Broome's observation hold for describing First Nations Peoples responses to the colonists' intrusion into the lands about and near the route through the Murray River crossing?

Richard Broome and Amanda Nettelbeck have drawn attention to the drawings of Samuel T Gill as insightful depictions of post-contact interactions. Gill was a prolific artist who portrayed aspects of the 'the social and economic milieu of colonial life' in early South Australia in the 1840s and in the gold rush. [4] Two of Gill's drawings catch Broome's attention: 'The Colonized' and 'Scene at the Door.' 'Scene at the Door' echoes the experiences of J F H Mitchell who left memories of growing up near the Murray River Crossing Place. [5] Mitchell recalled that as 11-year-old in 1842 he played with First Nations boys. The words he learned and recorded related to his interests at that age – sports and pastimes, swear words, songs and stories of strange customs, for example, initiation and 'buckeening.'[6]



S T Gill 'The Colonized'

S T Gill, 'Scene at the Door'

Broome poses two questions of these pictures:

QUESTION 7: What feelings about colonisation are expressed in these images?
QUESTION 8: How do the images differ from each other?

TRAVELLING OVERLAND WITH LADY FRANKLIN, 1839 [7]

There were ten people in Lady Franklin's party making the trip from Melbourne to Sydney in April-May 1839. The party included two police escorts, three male escorts, a young lady companion and three convict servants. They had a large luggage carriage that carried, amongst other things, Lady Franklin's bedstead. There was a small spring cart, in which she preferred to travel, all the while being prepared to leap out at perilous moments as it lurched roughly by creek banks and up and down ungraded hills. There was one pony and one side saddle which she and her companion used in turn.

In letters on 14, 15 and 16 April at, then beyond Broken River, Lady Franklin tells of her party's difficulties in finding and keeping to the new road. At the request of Governor Gipps, Major Nunn, Commandant of the Mounted Police, had given instructions that the mounted police should assist the visiting vice-Regal visitor. They provided escorts who accompanied the party, first from Broken River, then from the Murray River.

Lady Franklin reports frequently on her conversations with an 'intelligent' but unnamed corporal (probably Corporal Thomas Whitmill) who escorted the party from Broken River. He told her stories of the attack on the Faithfull overlanders and more generally of 'blacks' whom he had met on the Murray as well as on the Broken River. His stories show he admired 'blacks' for their bushcraft and respected them as adversaries, but he did not like the way that they cruelly preyed on lone or small groups of travellers passing through their lands.

The corporal told her he enjoyed his job. He explained to her how the mounted police took up five-year appointments. They were paid 30 shillings per month but also got a bounty of 20 shillings for each runaway they caught and even 30 shillings if the convict had escaped from an ironed gang and was caught within 30 hours.

Lady Franklin enjoyed his company and told her husband, 'They seem a choice body of men, these mounted police, intelligent, well behaved, active and efficient. They must be a blessing to the country which they not only protect but serve to humanize.'[8]

ANTICIPATION:
Readers can expect in these excerpts to see Lady Franklin conveying useful information to her husband including her views on how colonists and First Nations Peoples interacted.
Readers might give close attention to the context and content of her letter written at the Murray River crossing on 20 April 1839.

14 April 1839
[A rainy morning sixteen miles north of the Broken River police hut.]

We had scarcely arrived before it began to pour. Tent put up – tarpaulin for gents – potatoes, rice & tea prepared at soldiers' fire – & cold ham & tongue. We gave a handful of pork to the new orderlies here – waded thro' sea of water in outer intended room to inner place where soldiers berth – here water poured in many places & contents of first room overflowed into it – Thunder, lightning and torrents – when the weather moderated a little after dinner, Captain Moriarty carried me & Mr Elliot, Sophy [the young lady companion] to the distant tent, from which we did not emerge again. It was placed on elevated ground near edge of pond filled with large bulrushes – a trench was dug round it to drain off the water.

Between 9 & 10 at night, when Snatchall [the convict wagon driver] had retired and Sophy gone to sleep, & gents were also in their tarpaulin, I heard what appeared to me **a distant shout** a few minutes after **I heard another**. I called Sophy, who was sound asleep did not hear – a few minutes after I heard **a short cry** & then roused Sophy & consulted whether we should go to the gents – set off to their tarpaulin with lantern & called Captain Moriarty, who is said to be a light sleeper. He aroused at my second call.

I told him my story & he said it was **probably somebody adrift** & he would **give them a shot** [make a noise to locate their party]. After this Sophy and I both heard **distant sound of a dog**. They fired, after some delay, several shots, **but no answer** – & Captain Moriarty came to me and said we might go to bed – the **Corporal & another would keep up on watch all night**. The Corporal had often mistaken for shots the falling of trees & as for the dogs, he had some always about at night, they were probably in search of possums.

QUESTION 1: Why did Lady Franklin have an uncomfortable night?
QUESTION 2: How did her companions help her?
QUESTION 3: What effect would the firing of a volley of shots have?

Her corporal friend told her the local Taungurung people were 'not friendly.' He was sure they were watching the party, but it had too many people for them to attack.

16 April 1839

[At the Ovens River crossing. The horses were restive.]

The Corporal instantly said the blacks had **scented the horses** … They were on the other side of the river close to us. There was no alarm during night. In morning some **cooees** were said to be heard − the tribe in this neighbourhood is said to be **not friendly**.

18 April 1839

[The party camped at Indigo Creek, near the foot of what is now known as Mount Lady Franklin, the night before they reached the Murray.]

We found a native **in European clothes** with a pipe in his mouth hanging about the huts – he is employed there.
She took this as a sign she was approaching more settled territory.

19 April 1839

[Arrived at the Murray.]

Lady Franklin was pleased to find the ford easy to cross and to see that it was guarded by police stationed nearby. She was surprised to see a large crop of maize at Robert Brown's store. She tells how her party camped safely within the mounted police paddock.

We encamped within **fenced paddock** of mounted police between river on one side and the embanking hills other. Their [police] station is on side of hill – begun in October when they arrived – finished in 17 days – 4 men and a sergeant – The 4 rooms are neat – **Joe & Mary are blacks, buy wood and water – jabber English**.

QUESTION 4: Why the term 'jabber English'?

20 April 1839

[Lady Franklin was happy to pass easily over the 'formidable' river and to complete half of her journey to Yass. She thought it useful to tell her husband the maize was grown and marketed.]

A native black, named Jem, dressed in **a jacket and trousers**, with his **gun by his side** and a pipe in his mouth was squatting on the ground by the side of [Mr Brown's] maize field and on the riverbank to **frighten away the crows** … I heard a good account of the **useful and amiable properties** of this man, as well as of another named Joe who is particularly **attached to the police station**, where he, with his wife and young daughter perform the **drudgery of bringing wood and water** for the house, all being paid **to their entire satisfaction** for their services by such **refuse victuals** as may be given them. They eagerly seized upon the potatoes' parings and raw outside stalks of our culinary fare and were ready to make themselves useful in any way they could for the sake **anything left upon the plates and which would otherwise have been thrown to the dogs.**

We were told that Joe used his gin (wife) very kindly.

They were all, including another woman, who was probably Jem's wife, and an old man and boy whom I did not see, uglier than the people we saw at Melbourne but the women's figures were better. One was dressed in a **thin cotton shift, the other in an opossum skin, and the child held a small blanket about her** with which she at times concealed her figure completely from observation, as if intent on doing so, while at another, after seating herself with great care upon the ground she would let her dingy mantel drop, and display her juvenile proportions with **childish insouciance**. This young girl, who appeared to about 12 years of age, was not yet arrived at the age when the scarifications with which these poor savages, female as well as male, disfigure their skins are performed. The operation however was soon to be performed on her. The gashes are made with broken glass, they are not allowed to close, but I believe are kept open by some stringent bark granulations formed at each edge − these come together, and the skin forms over them and makes ridges.

The hair of some of these blacks was extremely curly and that of others was nearly straight. The women wore it short, as well as the men, but extremely thick. One of the women's head was a perfect mop, impeding her sight.

As we have spent a whole day on the bank of the Murray in order **to rest the horses**, we had **time to amuse ourselves a little with these people**. One of them has been out to **search for opossums and flying squirrels** on the trunks of the trees. Their **acute sense can detect by the scratches** which these animals will make on the bark in climbing, as well as the holes in the trunks, such trees as they have rested in, and however lofty or branchless the trunk, they will by the help of tomahawk (taw-win) soon notch and **toe** their way to the top … Joe was not successful in his first search, and indeed did **not appear to be to be very ardent** in the pursuit; either he was too lazy or thought he had little to gain by it, or he had no great hopes of finding what he sought for, and rather humoured his employers than follow his own behests. To an unpractised eye the most obvious sign that a tree was or had been occupied by a flying squirrel was the young twigs which strewed the ground beneath, bitten off sharp by the teeth of that beautiful little animal.

Jem was invited on the evening of our arrival to **dance at the fire but he seemed to have little inclination for it**, whenever he began to attempt it the dogs barked at him, and he seemed as much afraid of the dogs as our horses at the Ovens were of blackfellows in the scent and complexion. [Lady Franklin concludes her 20 April letter with several observations:]

The blacks in general in this neighbourhood are said to be quite quiet, but at Mr Brown's sheep station miles off, they had been spearing someone's cattle, and between this and the Murrumbidgee they had attacked several other properties in a similar manner.

[She bid farewell in her usual way: Your affectionate wife, Jane Franklin.]

QUESTION 5: What arrangements did the mounted police hosts make to entertain their vice-regal party visitors on the party's rest day?

QUESTION 6: What signs of civilisation did Lady Franklin find in this outpost of the colony?

QUESTION 7: Lady Franklin was a privileged lady used to receiving respect. How was she sensitive to the defiant ways Jem and Joe responded to the requests to entertain her?

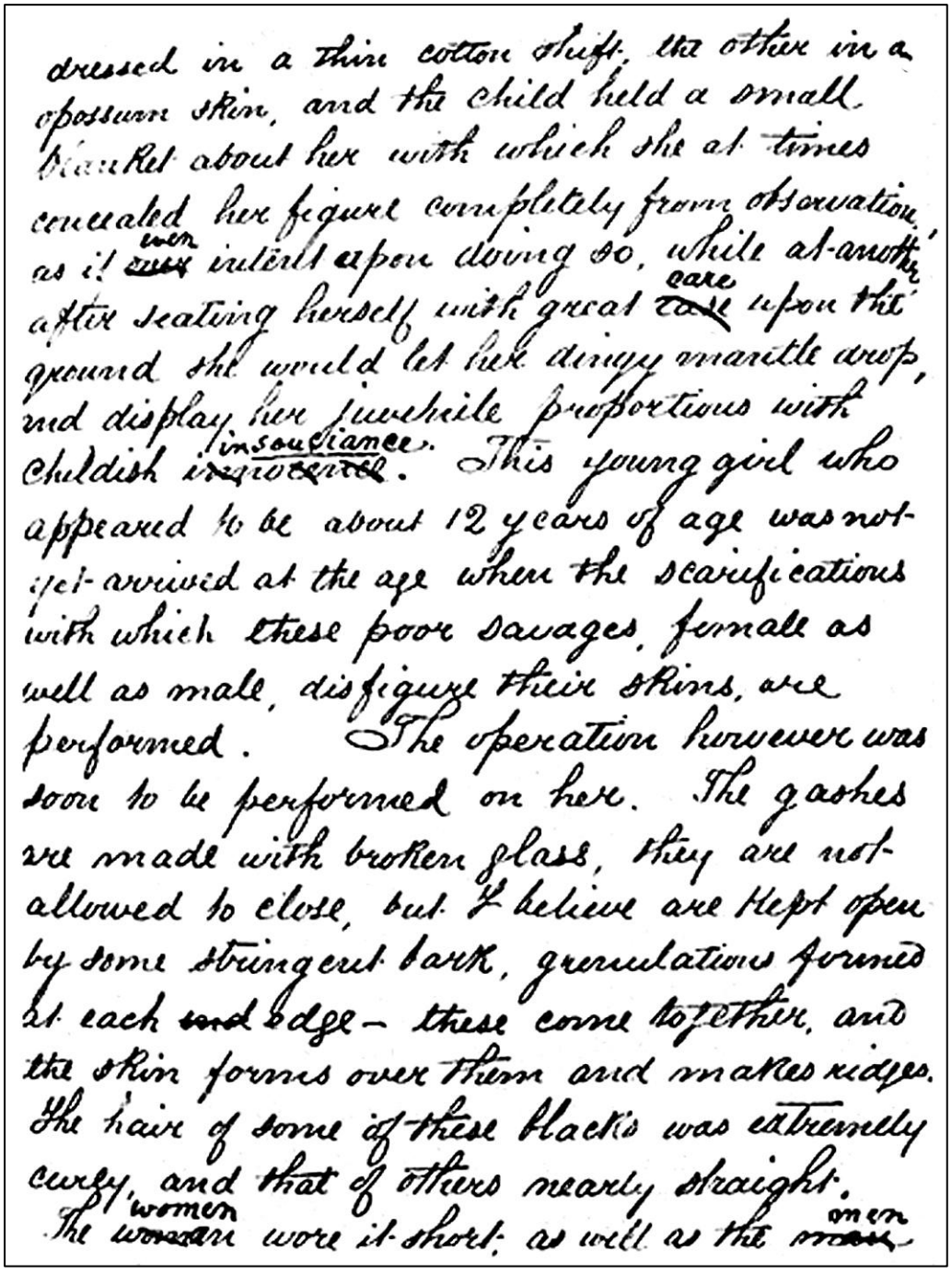
QUESTION 8: Lady Franklin does not explicitly comment on the work agreements that had been made by the publican and by the mounted police with First Nations Peoples, but what impressions did she convey to her husband about what each party won and lost with those agreements? What did the parties bring to and take from the negotiations?

QUESTION 9: What was the general impression she gave of circumstances of the First Nations Peoples she met in this part of the colony?

QUESTION 10: What aspects of the appearance and the behaviour of the First Nations Peoples caught Lady Franklin's attention?

Addendum: 20 April 1839: Extracts from the manuscript of the letter

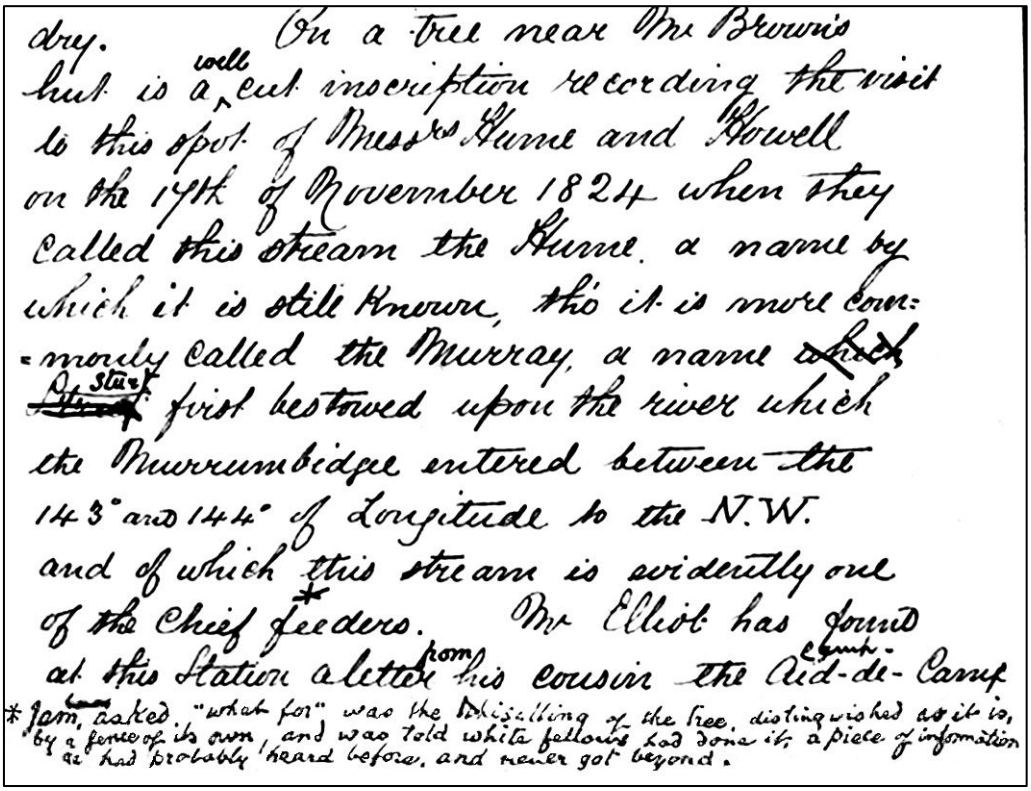
After her death, Lady Franklin's letters and diaries were cared for by her companion Sophy Carcroft. In 1939, they became public. In 2002, they became more generally accessible in Australia via the National Library, which holds microfilm of the manuscripts. Excerpts from the 21-page manuscript of the letter Lady Franklin wrote at the Murray River crossing place show her to be a perceptive observer and a shrewd wordsmith.



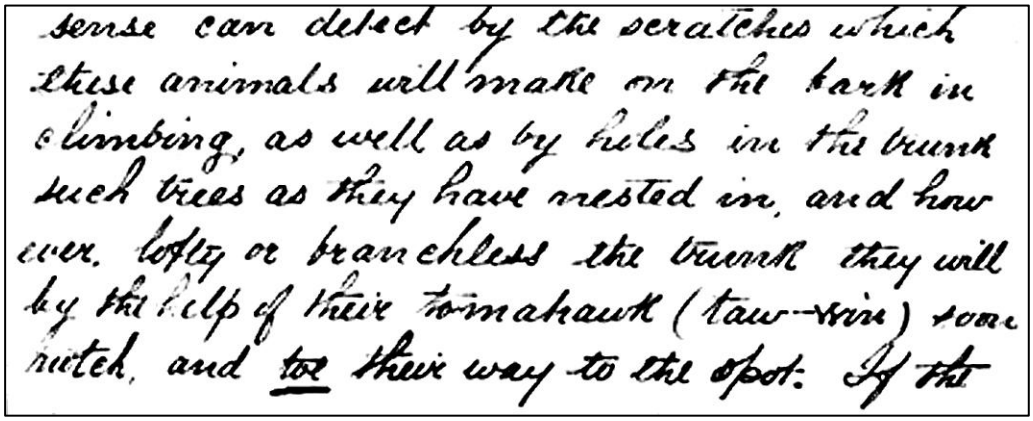
dressed in a thin cotton shift, the other in a opossum skin, and the child held a small blanket about her with which she at times concealed her figure completely from observation, as if ~~ever~~ even intent upon doing so, while at another after seating herself with great ~~care~~ care upon the ground she would let her dingy mantle drop, and display her juvenile proportions with ~~childish innocence~~ insouciance. This young girl who appeared to be about 12 years of age was not yet arrived at the age when the scarifications with which these poor savages, female as well as male, disfigure their skins, are performed. The operation however was soon to be performed on her. The gashes are made with broken glass, they are not allowed to close, but I believe are kept open by some stringent bark, granulations formed at each ~~end~~ edge – these come together, and the skin forms over them and makes ridges. The hair of some of these blacks was extremely curly, and that of others nearly straight. The ~~woman~~ women wore it short: as well as the ~~men~~ men

Lady Franklin observes the girl's discomfort at being examined by an older woman's prying eyes. That discomfort is overcome by her hunger. Lady Franklin substituted the word 'insouciance' for 'innocent.' 'Innocent' implied a lack of worldly knowledge; 'insousiance' implied indifference, a lack of concern about what people might think.

QUESTION 11: Why did she change the word?


dry. On a tree near Mr Brown's
hut is a well cut inscription recording the visit
to this spot of Messrs Hume and Howell
on the 17th of November 1824 when they
called this stream the Hume. a name by
which it is still known, tho it is more com-
monly called the Murray, a name which
Ptt Stu[illegible] first bestowed upon the river which
the Murrumbidgee entered between the
143° and 144° of Longitude to the N.W.
and of which this stream is evidently one
of the Chief feeders. Mr Elliot has found
at this Station a letter from his cousin the Aid-de-Camp
* Jem, asked "what for" was the whitewashing of the tree, distinguished as it is, by a fence of its own, and was told white fellows had done it; a piece of information as he had probably heard before, and never got beyond.

QUESTION 12: Why does she tell her husband, in a crowded addendum at the end of her letter, that Jem was indifferent to the tree that marked the Hume and Hovell expedition?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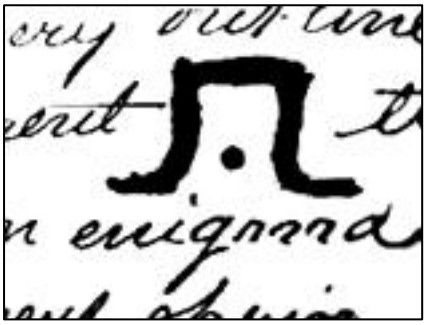
such trees as they have rested in, and how
ever lofty or branchless the trunk they will
by the help of their tomahawk (taw-wir) soon
notch, and toe their way to the spot. If the

QUESTION 13: Why did she underline the word 'toe' in telling how Joe climbed the tree?

Elsewhere in the manuscript, Lady Franklin inserts a small drawing:



Lady Franklin sketched the pattern of the trenches dug to divert rain around her tent. On leaving, she planted white clover seeds in the trenches in the hope that the cultivation of pretty clover might help 'civilise' this outpost. Future visitors might ponder 'the enigma' of the pattern of flowers which would appear. It was not a blazed tree, but it too, showed 'Jane Franklin was here.'

As her corporal friend left, relieved of his escort duties, she gave him some of her clover seed to spread similarly. He seemed please to help. Penny Russell notes that Hamilton Hume had also planted peach stones and clover seed at the foot of a tree he had blazed in 1824, but there was no sign of them ten years later.[9]

QUESTION 14: What are advantages and disadvantages of working with manuscript originals rather than printed copies?
QUESTION 15: What questions might historians face when working with private correspondence as evidence?

After leaving the Murray, the density of the widely scattered white population increased. The party encountered more travellers along the road. At the same time, they became wary of bushrangers. Lady Franklin was relieved to note on 27 April '**no bushmen presented their guns or pistols to our heads.'**

24 April 1839
At Kyeamba Creek she met an inhospitable and 'sulky' Mrs Smith who 'spoke with great contempt for natives.' Her husband explained he had stopped pilfering by flogging offenders.

25 April 1839
At Tarcutta Creek she found First Nations Peoples doing menial work for payment in kind, as at the Murray River. She noted that some of the 'Aboriginal men were entirely naked.' Dabtoe, the chief, dressed in a cotton shirt gave a display of throwing a boomerang. She was disappointed when he refused her request for the boomerang.

27 April 1839
At Gundagai Mr Brodribb, a pastoralist, gave her 'an account of the savages.' According to him those from the Murrumbidgee and from the Goulburn fought each other and ate their enemies. Their worst trait was their treatment of their gins (wives).

QUESTION 16: What might a reader of these extracts from Lady Franklin's letters be able to deduce about how the dispossessed and the dispossessors were learning to live together?
QUESTION 17: Were the workers being exploited?

So what?

The letters provide one person's impressions of a few First Nations Peoples and lots of hearsay about how First Nations Peoples generally were faring in the early days of white settlement. They demonstrate attitudes that prevailed widely. They only obliquely deal with First Peoples' experiences and to government policies that shaped those experiences.

QUESTION 18: What were the principal impressions of her trip that she was conveying to her husband in her letter of 20 April 1839?

QUESTION 19: How do the letters start or advance conversations re the negotiation of co-existence?

QUESTION 20: How useful are the letters in gathering glimpses of 'Aboriginal Peoples' experiences of colonisation'?

TRAVELLING NORTH, THEN SOUTH, WITH GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON, 1840-1844 [10]

As Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Port Phillip district of New South Wales, George Augustus Robinson made many journeys through and just beyond Port Phillip. The trips were usually in response to orders from Governor George Gipps and/or Superintendent Charles Joseph La Trobe to investigate collisions between European settlers and First Nations Peoples. Wherever he went, however, Robinson was keen to observe how people were interacting.

Robinson's journals record some of the information he gathered by talking with First Nations peoples. He asked about their cultural practices and family networks. He tried to unravel their intricate pattern of tribal affiliations. Often, he gave personal items and pieces of paper promising blankets and clothes and safe passage for their 'information' and in exchange for things they had made. He often recorded First Nations Peoples' perspectives on the causes and results of violent interactions. He regretted that neither the settlers nor the natives tried to understand each other. He was particularly interested in how First Nations Peoples were being employed by colonists.

ANTICIPATION: Readers can expect in these excerpts to see Robinson undertaking his duties as the Chief Protector. They might ponder what the journals reveal directly and indirectly about how the colonists and the First Nations Peoples interacted. And they might think about the value of Robinson's testimony.

SOURCE 1: Duties of the Chief Protector of Aborigines

A report of a House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines had in 1837 recommended that the British Government appoint protectors of Aboriginal people and specified some of tasks the protectors should undertake: [11]

- [ensure] the maintenance of such lands as may be necessary for the support [of the Aboriginal people]. So long as agriculture shall be distasteful to them, they should be provided with the means of pursuing the chase without molestation.
- [assist] with the education of the young.
- [as a magistrate] promote the prosecution of all crimes committed against [native] persons or their property … and undertake or superintend [their] defence [as an] accused party.
- [to help devise] short and simple rules as may form a temporary and provisional code for the regulation of the Aborigines, until advancing knowledge and civilisation shall have superseded the necessity for any such special laws.
- in the event of a native being slain [act] as coroner.
- cultivate a personal knowledge of the natives and a personal intercourse with them.
- acquire an adequate familiarity with the native language.
- win the confidence of the natives with presents.
- ascertain what is the species of industry which is least foreign to their habits and disposition … and provide all the necessary means of supplying them with such employment.
- [encourage the employment of Aborigines as a special group of Native Police] 'to detect and counteract the thefts practised by the convicts in the remoter districts of the colony.'
- collect accurate statistical information; and explain any diminution in numbers.
- make recommendations to improve the conditions of the natives.

SOURCE 2. Travelling north to the Murray River, 1840

30 March 1840

[Robinson was first ordered to go to the Goulburn River district in March 1840 to investigate a complaint made by Peter Snodgrass, a pastoralist, about a group of Taungurung men, led by Winberri and armed with guns robbing his station and threatening one of his men.]

2 April 1840

Before departure, met three travellers from the Ovens River. John Chisholm mentioned some settler at the Broken River, named Broadribb, who has always a large party of blacks about his place. He is very kind to them and **finds them very useful. They keep his sheep and watch his herds. Would that other settlers did the same.**

21 April 1840

[Robinson reached Rev Joseph Docker's station near the Ovens River.]

Was well lodged and hospitably entertained … On the banks of the river are numerous lagoons abounding in fish and roots and must have been a favorite resort of the Aboriginal natives.

22 April 1840

As **it was of primary importance to see the blacks** and, understanding some of them were encamped on the lagoons, went first in that direction … [He met a small group of 4 or 5] They were much pleased to hear me speak to them, and also at my understanding their names of tribes and localities &c. I informed them who we were and the nature of our office and told them not [sic] to feel guilty of stealing or spearing cattle or sheep, to the whole of which they prevailed compliance and said they never did so … Rode over to where they were encamped. The greater part of the men were concealed but the women and children were quietly sitting at their fires at different employment. One woman was knitting a pillim, a net to carry their property in. I saw a fishing net and desirous of possessing a specimen succeeded in getting it in exchange for a silk handkerchief. The man who gave me was Weeng.er.bil, I believe a chief. The net was made by his wife.

We got their names … Had some conversation with these people … explained our office at which they were much pleased. The entire number of natives on this part of the river were about 15 men, 8 or 9 women, 3 or 4 girls, total about 13. They appeared in tolerable good conditions … The native women were fishing in this lagoon. This is done by means of a net, their own manufacture. It is about four feet deep and five feet wide [1.2 x 1.5 m], some are longer. This is held out by two or three women whilst others with stick beat the water and so disturb the fish and force them into the net … The natives brought to the house a fish about 65lbs [29kgs] weight called by those natives Wee.run.gul The Taungurung call it Boo.lad.ge. It resembled a tench or perch. As the natives are, in a great measure, **ichthyologists,** their **being deprived of the rivers and lagoons as they have been by the occupation of the settlers is a great hardship, as it has reprieved them of a chief article of their consumption.**

23 April 1840

[Docker told him the First Nations Peoples who visited him a month before were 'not in a friendly manner.' This time was different.]

They had been very peaceable and friendly; had assisted in moving hurdles and in other work he required them to perform. **He gave them meat, tobacco, bread &c in return for their labour.** Mr Docker seemed much pleased at their visiting him.

24 April 1840

A large group of First Nations Peoples bid Robinson farewell as he left Rev J Docker's station to travel a 'well beaten' road to the Murray River. Robinson gave them pieces of paper promising them blankets and provisions from the Goulburn River protectorate office and shook hands with them.

Poor people, they are sadly treated and imposed upon by a government who ought to take care and provide for them. **All I can do is get information**. I have nothing but promises to present them with in return for their words of invaluable information. **At the present time not an acre of land has been**

set apart for the exclusive benefit of the Aboriginal native. It is painful to witness these scenes. The stock keeper and the shepherd have tobacco and bread to give but I have nothing … It is a common mockery. **I am called to protect and the means of protection is withheld.** To be a magistrate under such circumstances is a burlesque. No constable nor means whatever is provided. I have not been, nor has the department been treated with common respect but on the contrary with contempt &c.

20 April 1840

[Travelling north he reached Henry Broadribb's station.]

Mr Broadribb said they had had no trouble with the natives since they had been at the river. They **assist in all kinds of labour** they are able to perform: as fetching bark, looking after stock, fetching and chopping wood, looking after cattle, and one that goes out regularly in attendance on a flock of sheep, which he has his charge of for some time.

QUESTION 1: The journal was a private one, yet Robinson goes to some lengths to report that he established good relations with First Nations people. Why might he do that?
QUESTION 2: Is there any way of finding out how well he was received?
QUESTION 3: What does he admire about the ways First Nations Peoples lived?
QUESTION 4: What were his complaints about his difficult job?
QUESTION 5: Why does he seem pleased to note the ways First Nations Peoples were employed?

SOURCE 3. Encounters at the Murray River

25 April 1840

I was much satisfied with this, my first view of the far-famed Murray River. On the north and near to the road was some low ranges terminating nearly to the banks of the river … On the acclivity of which were situated about 50 or 60 feet up, **the police barrack, having a neat cottage appearance with a verandah in front. A road wound up the hill to same, and the whole formed a pretty and conspicuous object in the neighbourhood**. The stables and garden is on the flat at the foot of the hill and the whole enclosed with a fence confining an area of 20 acres [8ha]. The name of this hill, I afterwards learnt from the natives in the neighbourhood was Deer.re.mer ... The river is about [30m] wide. The banks consist of red loam and were about [6m] above the water. The bottom of the river at **the fording place** was hard and gravelly, and the water up to the horses girth and strong current. We crossed without difficulty, and the water is clear and good …

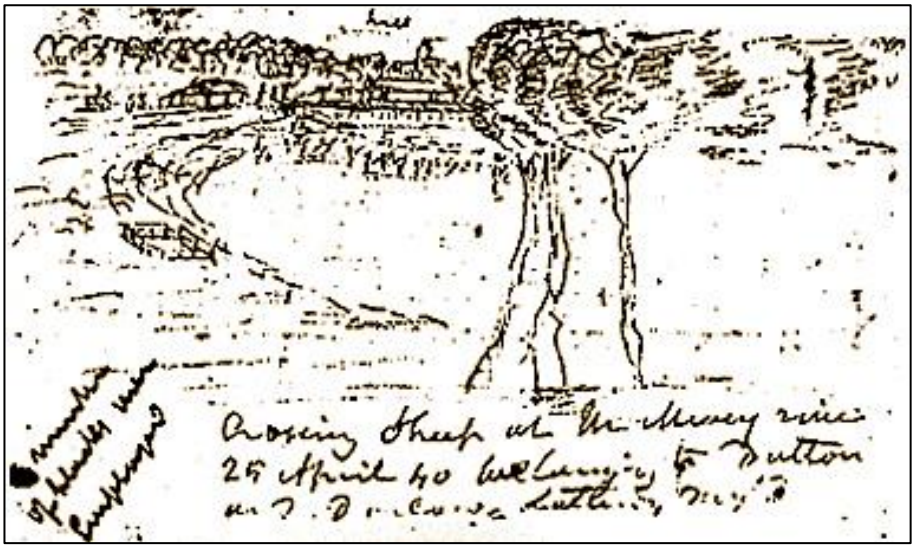
As we approached the river, we observed unusual noise and bustle. Men, carts, bullocks and horses and sheep appeared on either side in great numbers. Several tents were erected and fires blazing. A tolerable good size building, which I afterwards found was the public inn [Robert Brown's], together with out-buildings, stood on the opposite side of the river and where, as I understand, a township has been laid out [Albury] … The **great noise and bustle** we saw and heard at a distance we found on joining river to be occasioned by a large drove of sheep belonging to Dutton and Darlow which were being crossed on their way to Melbourne, beside cattle and carts belonging to other persons. It would be difficult for any person who had never witnessed such a scene to imagine the **noise and din** made in crossing stock. The sheep are brought down to the river … and then forced into the water, 20 or 30 men shouting and splashing the water to urge them forward. Then the sheep streamed in swimming to the opposite site. A line is then formed … and thus it frequently happens, when the water is low, hundreds of sheep will cross without any loss. At other times when the water is high and the current strong, the sheep are hoarded together and are frequently, unless great care be taken, drowned in numbers. And it frequently happens that men's lives are also on these occasions ...

The line of road from Sydney downward is lined with sheep and cattle and is rapidly increasing … I saw Dutton's and Darlow's sheep crossed and a great loss was sustained. Dead sheep were laying on the banks and crows and black fellows had in consequence a fine feed … It was a **gratifying sight to see so much livestock …**

Visited the black's encampment. They had several carcasses and entrails of sheep. The sheep had been drowned in crossing. One black was singing a song and said he has made it about a black fellow tired crossing sheep.
At the crossing place on the east side there is an old tree with "HUME' cut out of the wood.
Got a collection of words and information from the blacks.
A black was staying with the soldiers at the barrack, had been there 15 or 18 months. **He is quite domestic, does all the work that a white person could do.**

1. Wor.rum.me.yeer; 2. Ome.he; alias Joe, the Hume black. He was cooking a sheep's head, was good natured and was singing. I asked what was the burden or nature of his song. Said it was his song. Said it was one he had made about **black fellow being tired crossing sheep** and indeed such exertions deserved to be recognised in song, for I witnessed their efforts and labor. **They worked hard indeed and was more useful than any white man …**

The number of blacks at the Hume were 6 men, 2 women, and 2 boys. Others were in the neighbourhood. They came yesterday in consequence of the large quantities of sheep …



Robinson's sketch 'Crossing sheep at the Murry (sic) River' shows the crossing place as a contact zone in which First Nations Peoples were being integrated into the colonial economy.

[An extract from Robinson's lists of names and words of the Murray blacks:]
Wor.rag ger.ree: The name of the Murray tribe or section of the tribe at the Murray River crossing place.
Weeer,moo, Wa.you.rsoo: the tribe at Broadribb's.
Bung.gain. re.art.eter: the name of crossing place of Murray River.
Wor.dong.her: name of a locality on the east side of the Murray opposite barrack where the inn is.
Deer.re.mer: name of the hill on which the mounted police hut stood.
Po.py, little; gul.lin, water; ween, fire; boor.ry, child; wy, blackfellow; goo.in, white fellow; mil, eye; yare.rer, to eat; yarer, talk; wil.ee, opossum.

QUESTION 6: Why was Robinson 'much satisfied' with his first view of the Murray River?
QUESTION 7: Why was it 'gratifying' to see so many stock?
QUESTION 8: How were First Nations Peoples and colonists adapting to each other at the Crossing Place?
QUESTION 9: Like Lady Franklin, Robinson does not explicitly comment on the work agreements that had been made by the mounted police with First Nations Peoples, but what impressions did he convey about what each party won and lost with those agreements? What did the parties bring to and take from the negotiations?
QUESTION 10: What does this collection of names and words say about Robinson?

SOURCE 4. Encounters at Indigo Creek

26 April 1840

[Robinson arrived at Indigo Creek.]

The man in charge of Barber's station spoke very highly of these blacks; says they are **always there.** That they are a well-conducted set of people. Very honest and faithful and well disposed. **He should be at a great loss without them: they go after cattle and track horses and do various other kinds of work. He was sure they would not allow any other blacks to come near the place to injure it** … Barber's station has a slab hut and a large paddock, fenced in with split post and rail fence. He grew some good wheat last season. It is a good dairy station.

There were a number of blacks at Barber's. Belonged to the Wore.rag.ger.ry tribe. There were 14 in number, viz: 4 women; 8 men; 2 children.

With some difficulty, I obtained a few of their names. Pe.der.re, **'Black Cannibal,'** poor fellow, the gravity with which he told me this name, showed his simplicity. I wondered at that man who could wish to impose such an appellation to these poor ignorant creatures. I soon informed them into the contrary, and gave this man, as he said, the name of 'Harry.'

QUESTION 11: Why was the man in charge pleased to have First Nations Peoples at the station?
QUESTION 12: Why would someone endow Pe.der.re with the name 'Black Cannibal'? Why did Robinson change the name?

SOURCE 5. Returning to the Ovens River

29 April 1840

[Robinson returned to Docker's station at the Ovens River. With Rev Joseph Docker, his host, and James Dredge, his assistant protector, he made an excursion to the junction of the Ovens and Murray Rivers.]

The river was fordable, about 4 feet deep. **Saw numerous indications of the natives, quite recent**, much of the trees notched to climb for opossum; ember of old fires; huts – these were of rather singular character to what I had been accustomed. They were made by large sheets of box bark, some of them 4 feet wide and a length sufficient of the hut purposed to constructed …

There were also several **small vessels for holding water**. These were the bark from the excrescence [outgrowth] of a tree, stunted box kind thus [sketch] and **shows the ingenuity of these singular people**. The excrescence cut out in the form of diamond [sketch]. Several old spears were at the huts and the grass had been burnt at different places along the river …

In about half an hour made the Murray River, this noble river was flowing in a magnificent stream with width and freeness of timber when compared to the Ovens along which we had been travelling. Gave to this first view a gratifying effect … Came to the junction with the Murray supposed to be about 50 miles [80 km] from the crossing place at the Murray. [About 3 km below the junction, they cut their initials into a large tree and buried a bottle with their names, date]. 'sat down on a log and refreshed ourselves with the good food and drank the health of our most gracious Queen Victoria.' Saw numerous indications where the native had been all along the banks of the Ovens and the Murray. No doubt but it is **numerously inhabited.**

QUESTION 13: What were the signs that the river lands were well inhabited?
QUESTION 14: How did the items at the river junction demonstrate 'the ingenuity of a singular people'?
QUESTION 15: Why might Robinson and Rev Docker have become friends?

SOURCE 6. Listening to reports of violence at Stuckey's
10 May 1840

[Robinson reached Stuckey's station on an arm of the Broken River.]
Was informed by Mr Stuckey that on about Saturday the 25 of April last, a party of blacks visited his station, and on the day following made an attack upon it, but without doing any injury except spearing in the back of the shoulder **a domesticated native in Mr Stuckey's employ, and who belongs to the Murrumbidgee tribe** ... Mr Stuckey is quite a youth. His uncle lives at the Murrumbidgee. [Stuckey] had five men at the station, four whites and one assigned servant and a Murrumbidgee black. [Robinson stayed the night].

The [visiting Goulburn blacks] **wanted guns** they said to shoot ducks the same as they did for other gentlemen. [They fired a shot at Mr Stucky and threw spears at the men]. It is evident, and this I have subsequently learnt, that their sole object was to kill the native from the Murrumbidgee, who was working for Stucky, as they **asked for the black man who worked as soon as they came** … When the blacks made the attack, they called out, no white fellow **only black fellow** and hence, it is feasible the attack was intended only for the black as they enquired first for him and their attack was at him …

The Murrumbidgee black at Stuckey's is **a very industrious and clever fellow**, is a good bullock driver and stockman and horseman. Can plait and make straw hats also plait and make good bullock whips [over 3m] long, both of which I saw. He soled and heeled his boots. Made a wheelbarrow, mended his clothes, can reap as well as white men; can milk cows, can split post and rail. Nearly all the posts at Stucky's paddock were morticed by him. Eighteen months ago he and another black went into the mountains and broke up some ground and put in wheat, barley, pumpkins, turnips and had a good crop. Twelve months since, he put in 13.6k of wheat, barley and vegetables. This Mr Stucky owned, the black told me. He is also a good shepherd. I obtained from the black [Ko.nung alias Harry or Yarra] several additional words in the Wayradgery language to which tribe he belongs.

[The glass tipped spear penetrated along the shoulder bone 23cms.] The white men poulticed Yara's wound and got out a good deal of glass. Yarra, like most of his people, thought he should die. [They are fatalists]. He, however, took courage and is doing well.

Robinson sketched Stuckey's substantial fortress. The small slab hut (3.6 x 2.4m) was capable of protecting eight people with loopholes facing in all directions.

QUESTION 16: Why did Stuckey build a fortress?
QUESTION 17: How did Yarra show he was adapting to the colonial economy?
QUESTION 18: Why might the Wiradjuri man from the Murrumbidgee have been speared?
QUESTION 19: Why were the colonists at Stuckey's confused to find this attack was not a predatory raid, but a threat ostensibly aimed at a particular person? What did they expect would motivate an attack?
QUESTION 20: Why did those reporting the attack mention that the First Nations warriors were after guns?

SOURCE 7. Hearing about the attack at Chisholm's station, Myrrhee

[There was a murder and robbery at Chisholm's station a few days later. Robinson and Dredge visited the site where they learnt that a party of nine young men, 'strange blacks' with three guns and spears had robbed the station and killed and mutilated a hutkeeper. Robinson listed the items stolen from Chisholm's station:]

75 lbs [about ½ kg] salt beef; 12 flour seconds; 3 tea; 26 sugar; ¼ tobacco; ½ soap.
1 powder flask; 3 double blankets, one new, large size; 1 razor; 1 carbine, flint, the mounting over the trigger bruised, the barrel bronzed; 1 old musket; 3 shirts.[12]

13 May 1840

[A week later Robinson encountered a group of nine young men led by Bit.time.]

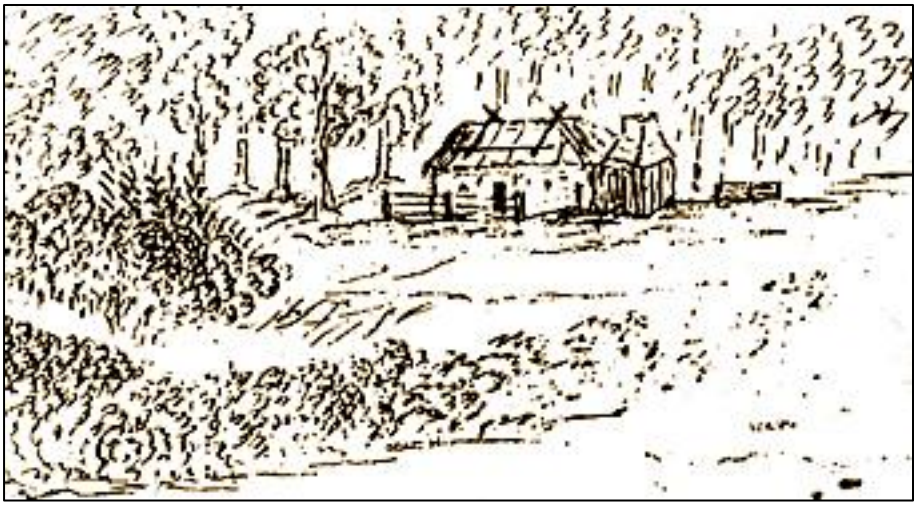
A party of nine black men arrived with spears … **Bit.time said they were his blackfellows**. Went towards them and beckoned them stop. They seemed unwilling. I proceeded and Bittime called for them to come. They, at length, apparently reluctantly **put down their spears and guns**.

One I observed put down what to me appeared a new carbine and it was my impression that it was the one taken from the 15 mile creek [Chisholm's run]. Nine men was the number that went to Broadribb's and **had no doubt there were the murderers of Chisholm's man.** I looked on them as such.

Mr Dredge **gave them his hand.** The greater part [of the group] had been at his place [the Goulburn River protectorate station] and I certainly **with reluctance** did the same. Their unwillingness to come to us was a proof they had **done mischief**.

One man, that Bit.time said was his son, and brother to Winberri, has a **cold hard look**. Bittime is father to Winberri. One answered the description given at Stuckey's of the man who had thrown the spear [at Yarra]. Afterwards **obtained their names** [3 of them were Worileuns and 6 Yal.ler.nil. lums, that is Taungurung tribes led by Taungurung men]

[Robinson had let it be known he wanted to interview Winberri who was accused of leading the attack on Snodgrass' station back in March. Winberri did not make his appearance. However, Robinson was told that Winberri had boldly brandished what had become his emblematic gun at two other stations.[13]]



Robinson sketched Chisholm's 'excellent and extensive run.'[14] Here as elsewhere he commented on the potential of the land for pastoralists and agriculturalists. So, too, he described David Waugh's Devil's River run, with its loopholed hut, as 'well grassed' and 'eligible.'[15]

At the same time, Robinson made a hasty sketch of three horsemen armed with guns and pistols going in in pursuit of the band of robbers and murderers.[16] Sydney Gazette was critical of the way that Robinson did not join the party going to apprehend offenders. Instead, Robinson kept on his journey, with his assistant James Dredge, to Dredge's protectorate station on the Goulburn River [near Seymour].[17]

A day or two later, Robinson was told a party of nine First Nations men had subsequently called at another station and asked for guns. At Mackay's and at Waugh's they asked for powder and ammunition.

QUESTION 21: Why would the items the robbers take from Chisholm's be valuable to them?

QUESTION 22: Why was Robinson reluctant 'to give his hand'?

QUESTION 23: Why were guns considered important in these encounters?

QUESTION 24: If Robinson had reflected on his first trip north, what might he have reported to the Governor as the principal tasks the Chief Protector of Aborigines might undertake in this area of the colony?

SOURCE 8. Returning to the Ovens River in 1841

[Robinson arranged for the release of three prisoners who had been brought to Melbourne gaol by Border policemen on charges made before Dr Mackay but without witness or evidence to support those charges. Robinson saw that the released men were provisioned with blankets, clothes and rations for the journey back north, where they had been apprehended. He also provided them with safe passage journeying with him as he went to enquire into the Rev Docker's complaints of aggression against the Aboriginal people after the attack at Whorouly. Robinson had also been charged with collecting **'further information respecting the condition of the aborigines in the neighbourhood of the River Ovens.'**[18] Docker had been particularly upset about the apprehension of Mol.le.min.ner, alias Joe, one of his best workers.]

3 February 1841

Went to gaol with Mr. Simpson [officer in charge of the prison] and Mr Simpson said he would discharge the three natives sent down from the Hume by Dr Mackay. They had been in gaol since the 1st January. Mr Simpson directed his constable to call Dr Mackay three times at the gaol door which being done, the three men were discharged, viz. Simon, Larry and Joe …

1. Mol.lo.nin.ner, alias Joe, Pal.len.gan.mitty country Panderrambo, father name Dar.ry.ger.rene, alias Timmy, is married, wife's name is Kon.ner.ke country Pandderambo. Joe is about 18 years.
2. Coyamber, alias Larry, brother Mol.lo.nin.ner, is married. Wife's name Nal.lad.ger.rook, one little son named Wor.rer.mun.
3. Tan.roug.en, alias Simon, Kub.bo.bit.tum section, Wiradjuri tribe or nation. Hone.but.tul, alias Caroline, wife to Simon. Gum.bo.gun, a large plain name of the country near Billybong.

8 February 1841

Crossed the Ovens and encamped on the east side, ford up to the men's knees. **Joe and the other natives are intelligent good men, particularly Joe.** Had conversation with him tonight and he gave me the names of localities and other information. Said he would tell all the blackfellows about me and make a song about me and give me rugs, baskets spear &c. Said Wool.gid.yer.dow.well, alias Big Micky, killed Faithfull's men [in the April 1838 attack] … The three blacks are **going back with a light heart and walk well** … The three blacks eat all their three weeks pork on Monday [food supplied for the whole journey] … Joe said at Broken River he wanted to go for his king, this was his brass plate which he had left at police barracks.

Robinson sketched Joe Mol-ler-niner's brass king plate, which indicated a squatter's acknowledgment that Joe was a leader. At the Broken River, the party paused while Joe retrieved his king plate from the police barracks.[19] Its safe custody and ready retrieval at the police barracks points to mutual trust and respect.

9 February 1841

Mr Docker was pleased and surprised to see me, particularly Joe whom he said he had missed very much … **Mr Docker and family were pleased to see me and the natives to see Joe returned** … The natives were numerous at Mr Dockers' and came and surrounded me. I found some of my old friends there … Took down their names The natives said they had made a corroboree about me … Several of the natives gave me spears and other things, one gave me a necklace made of the antlers of crawfish.

10 February 1841

[Rev Docker reported that four days before their arrival a party of strange First Nations men had stolen 123 sheep but he did not want any proceedings taken against them.]

Am very busy taken names of the blacks … Appointed three blacks 'gentlemen,' viz.
1 Bad.ge.bow.sur.nung, alias Jem Crow;
2 Mol.ler.nin.ner, alias Joe;
3 Jar.rer.quar.rer.poepe, [alias] Mickey.
Told these three gentlemen to each [select] three constables of their own choosing which they did ... [Jem Crow selected Minnup aka Merriman]. They understood it well, knew **they would do their duty and not let the blacks steal** …
Tonight Coyamber, alias Larry, who came up with me delivered an **harangue** about one hour and a half to the natives at their camp about their stealing Docker's sheep.
At Dockers therewith parts of **four nations**, viz. 1 Taungurung; 2 Wiradjuri; 3 Bangarang;
4 Waveroo.
I suppose there were 150 or 200 natives in the neighborhood.

The native of Australian Felix have as large a share of mental capability as any of the Australian Aborigines I am acquainted with. A want of knowledge of the language and customs of the Australian natives make them appear more interesting to us. It is precisely the same with the natives towards the white. **They look upon the whites with indifference notwithstanding their boasted superiority. They think [the whites] stupid because they cannot, like themselves, subsist from the forest or find their way through the labyrinth of the forest &c**.

12 February 1841

Preparing to leave, gave tickets to the shepherd, my paper [cards entitling them to pick up blankets etc at the Goulburn River protectorate station]. Gave my dressing gown, waistcoat, tommy hawks, tobacco to natives for fishing nets, spears &c … The natives were highly pleased with the stockings [sox].

[Robinson records his conversation with Nar.rac.cul.ler. bope, alias Micky:]
In taking the names this morning I found one difficult to get the sound and had almost exhausted the patience of my friend when to soothe him **I said I was plenty stupid.** He replied sharply no one stupid. I replied oh no not you but me stupid. He said oh and was satisfied at the explanation. He was not surprised at my being stupid but would not admit that he was … Left Docker's. Stopped at Mr Cropper's [on the King River] Mr Cropper was at home. Smith of Kyeamba was there and another. **They all spoke well of Joe.Mol.le.min.er**.

QUESTION 1: What were Robinson's principal impressions of the released men?
QUESTION 2: How would Robinson's encounters with First Nations Peoples have helped him with this task of collecting further information respecting their conditions, in the neighbourhood of the River Ovens? What would he report?
QUESTION 3: Why was it important for him to note the long talk given by Coyamber, aka Larry?
QUESTION 4: Why did he note there were four nations represented at Docker's?
QUESTION 5: Why did he note the stories of perceptions of stupidity?
QUESTION 6: Why does he dwell on being so well liked?
QUESTION 7: What principal impressions of how First Nations were faring with colonisation did Robinson convey in his second trip to the Ovens River in 1841? Were they different from or like those he formed on his first trip in 1840?

SOURCE 9. Riding south with George Augustus Robinson, 1844

[Robinson travelled along the road again in 1844 – this time, on his return from a very long journey through Gippsland, which, driven by curiosity, he extended to Twofold Bay and across to Tumut and Yass, before returning home down the road to Port Phillip. He was not charged with any specific investigation but he recorded his impressions on how First Nations Peoples were faring in his journal and in an unpublished report. His correspondence also references his visit to the Murray River in 1844.]

28 September 1844

[At Kyeamba Creek] Smith said the Natives never injured him though they were committing injuries in the neighbourhood, he had a good name. Two lads had stolen a sheep. Next morning went to the camp, the two native boys were apprehended, might be **flogged with a switch** each time, gave them three strokes and the offence was then expiated. They themselves inflicted the punishment. He then proceeded to take no further steps in the matter and gave them pieces of tobacco each. Never lost anything after this …

A man at Mitty's said **99 out of every 100 Natives should be shot.** [That man offered Robinson the loan of a bed for the night.] I would have none of his bed.

QUESTION 1: Mr Smith congratulates himself on the way he has dealt with First Nations Peoples. Robinson seems to make no judgement. Or does he imply approval/disapproval?
QUESTION 2: Why was Robinson not so circumspect in showing disapproval of the idea of extermination?
QUESTION 3: How did he show his disapproval of the sentiment still being expressed in 1844 that First Nations Peoples should be exterminated?

2 October 1844

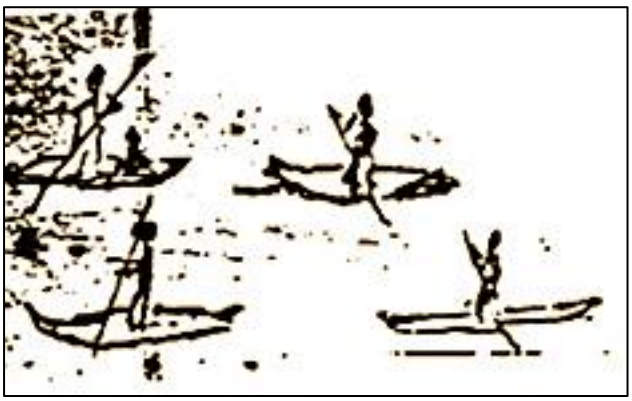
[At the Murray River] Rain heavy. River still bank high. Natives visited me at police station Baw Baw Natives wear rugs. Three men with **venereal disease** … Venereal called womboot.
A doctor named Dr Creighton resides three years at crossing place Hume.
pm to [Robert Brown's public house] spoke to Dr, introduced to Ammie Huon and Charles Huon. At Hume about five years ago. **Spoke disease Natives, said Natives very bad. Want write me letter on subject**.

A half caste of the country living at Brown's, a [blank] alias Jenny Brown, lived servant several years with Brown, since I liberated from gaol. Came and saw me. [Jenny was not listed as one of the three that Robinson brought back in 1841.]

Number of natives about 20 altogether. I counted 50 huts, ordered a bullock for the natives. Natives **bad off, cold weather**, issued a number of cards to the most deserving, raining. Went to native camp.

3 October 1844

Fine, river over banks and still up. Natives made several canoes ... **Received letter from Hume settlers on the disease of the Natives. Bullock killed, given to Natives** … fortnightly mail at the crossing place. Evening went to **corroboree**, same as I saw at Mount Clay Portland Bay … Men in body leave spear and forming single file gracefully moving their arms to and fro as they dance ... shaking their legs as usual. **A very lively time**.



Robinson made a sketch of the corroboree and of the canoeists.
He was impressed with the way the canoeists could transport fire in the front of their craft.
His journal shows he was uncomfortable having to cross the river in a canoe. He was a non-swimmer.

QUESTION 4: Compare Robinson's journal entries for his first visit in 1840 and his last visit in 1844. How had life altered for the First Nations Peoples living at or near the Murray Crossing during this time?

So what?
The journals provide Robinson's impressions of how colonists and First Nations Peoples were interacting as part of a bigger picture of how First Nations Peoples were faring in the early days of white settlement.

QUESTION 5: How useful are the journal extracts in gathering glimpses of First Nations Peoples experiencing colonisation'?

QUESTION 6: Readers might expect private journals to be self-interested or even self-promotional. Robinson likes to report on how he won respect. Where? When? Why?

QUESTION 7: How do the journal extracts start or advance conversations about the negotiation of co-existence?

SOURCE 10: An item from Robinson's correspondence

[Robinson's correspondence includes the following letter:]

Albury Hume River
3 October 1844
Sir,

We the undersigned resident settlers of the district of Albury understanding you are at present on an Official Visit to enquire into the state of the Aboriginal Natives of this district, beg to call your attention to the fearful stare of disease and consequent suffering to which they are exposed and which a little medical attendance would very much alleviate.

At the recent moment there are few stations in the district at which there are not from one to three Aborigines suffering under the various stages of Venereal, and besides the mortality it causes amongst the Natives themselves, it is also the means of propagating the disease amongst the labouring men of the district to a very great extent. There is, and we fear will be until religion gradually works a change, a great deal of promiscuous intercourse between the European and the Aboriginal Native; the consequences of which is the rapid increase of disease in the district.

As you may possible not be aware there is a medical gentleman who has been a resident in the district for the past three years we beg leave to offer a suggestion that you would recommend the Government to make him some compensation by which his services might be retained for the benefit of those poor creatures, who we can say from experience would gladly avail themselves of such attendance.

To Robinson Esq.
Aboriginal Protector
Albury

We have the honour to be &c.
Charles Huon
John R Rae
A.A. Huon
William Huon
Robert Brown

QUESTION 8: What arguments did the respectable settlers think might win government action? The government took no action. Can you suggest why?

QUESTION 9: Why was Robinson pleased to receive this letter?

SOURCE 11: Robinson's publication, 1844

[Robinson prepared a publication of a record of his long journey in October 1844.[20]
He ended the publication with a reflection echoing the pessimism of the time with his observation that 'As a people the Aborigines are rapidly on the decay. They are greatly reduced. They are but Remnant Tribes. Sections are extinct.' However, he found in 1844 about the Murray River Crossing Place:]

> The Wiradjuri are the Original Inhabitants: they **are in general well conducted and are employed by the Settlers** … From all the respectable Settlers I received attention and civility and was glad to find **a sympathy evinced on behalf of the Aborigines and a desire for their general amelioration**, a feeling I felt it my duty to foster and encourage, and I am happy to state that the Country generally as far as the Aboriginal and European Inhabitants were concerned was **perfectly tranquil**.[21]

QUESTION 10: Why might the Chief Protector be pleased to proclaim 'tranquillity'?

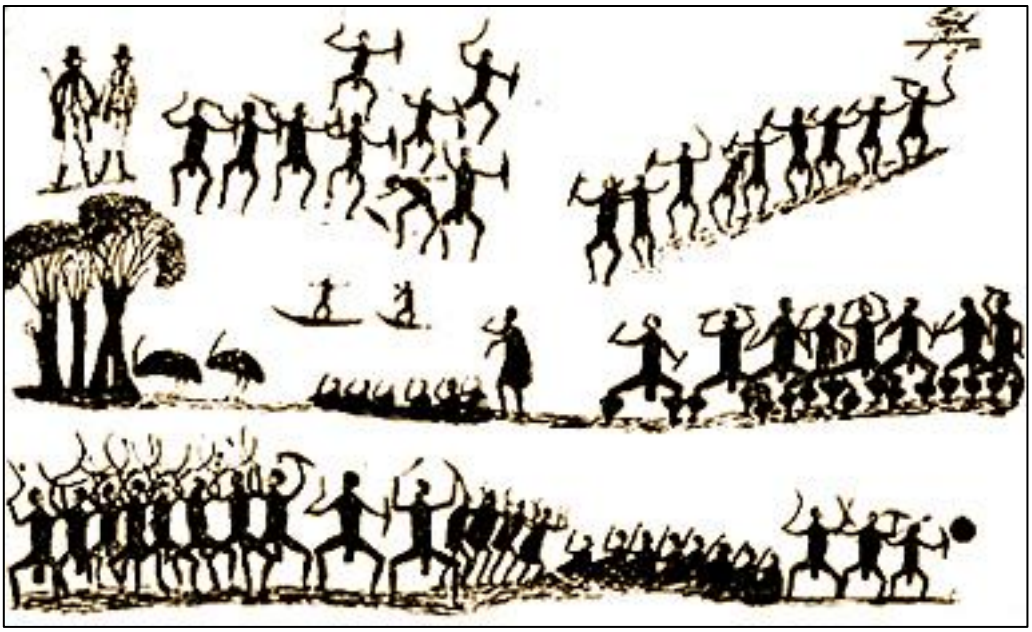
QUESTION 11: In what ways were some First Nations men and women well-placed or well-endowed to find places in the colonial economy? Did economic adaptation lead to or entail social absorption? Why did First Nations Peoples insist on retaining cultural distinctiveness?

LOOKING AT COLONISATION THROUGH TOMMY McRAE'S EYES

Most of Tommy McRae's work drew on his mind's eye. They appear to have been inspired by his attempts to hold hard to cultural traditions which were being overwhelmed and forgotten. Other works relied on his everyday eye, depicting life about him. [22]

SOURCE 1. Tommy McRae's Drawings – Remembering

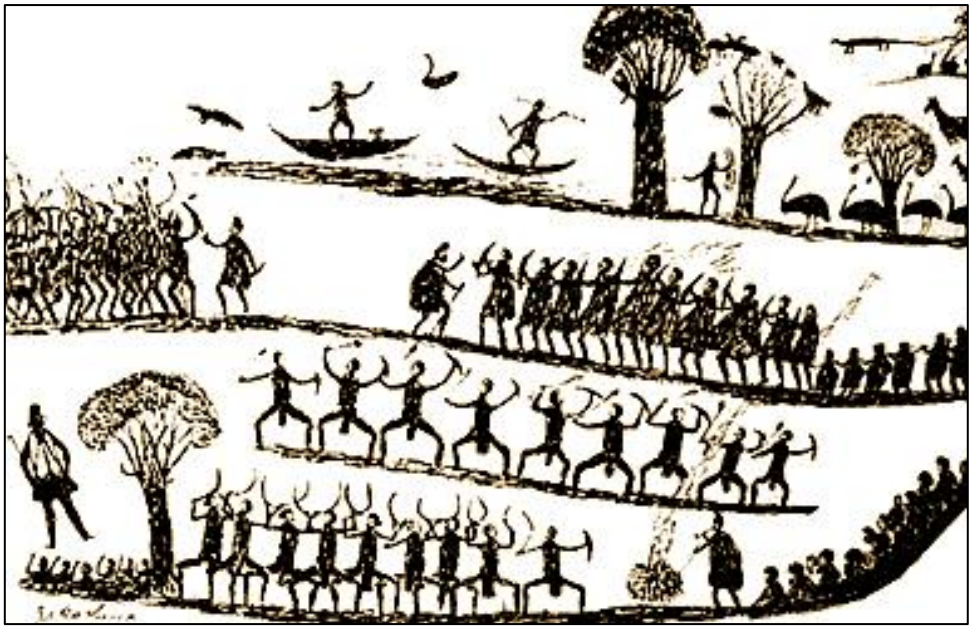
Johathan Jones claims that McRae was actively resisting colonisation and the annihilation of his cultural life. '[His] works are timeless, – gifts for future generations – and depict the many losses that occurred in their lives, they continue to teach and lead the community'? [23] Two of McRae's early works helped establish his national reputation as an artist. Like other drawings they are composites, including apparently unrelated scenes.



Tommy McRae, 'Views of a corroboree and a battle,' SLNSW, DG SSV/2,
Image courtesy SL NSW. Moral permission Jean Morgan-Kelly.

Hilary Jankelson, a Tommy McRae biographer, has helped in reading this picture:

> At the bottom left the interlacing of legs and boomerangs, clubs and shields suggest excited dancing. Above that are hunting scenes: a possum-hunting climber, watched by inquisitive emus, makes a notch to climb further; two fishermen are in canoes. Top left, squatters maintain western clothing standards and seem to be looking at what they might call First Nations Peoples' antics. Bottom right and mid-picture seated women make up the orchestra for corroborees. Top right is a battle between First Nations tribes perhaps staged for two squatter spectators. The dancers, mid-picture, have amplified grassed legs. [24]



Tommy McRae, 'Views of a corroboree and a battle.' SLNSW, DG SSV/1,
Image courtesy SL NSW, Moral permission Jean Morgan-Kelly

QUESTION 1: How might the second images be read in a similar way to the first?
QUESTION 2: What is meant by the term 'cultural resistance'?

SOURCE 2. Tommy McRae's Drawings – Observing

McRae was also looking about in his own time. It seemed to Johnathan Jones that McRae, with some of his line drawings, was making 'very clear statements about colonisation' by parodying the self-satisfied, proprietorial squatters. Indeed, McRae was gently challenging the colonial power base. Gently, for McRae drew to sell his works and 'to amuse the invaders with images of yesteryear.' [25]

Tommy McRae, 'Civilisation,' Sketchbook held by the National Museum of Australia, no date, M4, 9.
Re-printed as a postcard, Museum of Sydney, no date. Moral permission Jean Morgan-Kelly.

The text beneath the drawing of seven silhouetted men reads:

> Civilisation: This picture represents a few natives who have been employed at the shearing time on some stations and taken their wages in "plenty good fellow clothes" and made themselves "along a white fellow swell." The Australian natives are very fond of copying "white men" manners and dress when they can manage to do so.

Neither the title nor the text may have been supplied by McRae, but the drawing clearly mocks accepted views of the absorption of First Nations Peoples into the colonial economy. It points to First Peoples' limited prospects of employment and their payment in kind rather than money.

QUESTION 3: What did McRae seem to think of the idea that by bringing opportunities for First Nations Peoples to acquire European clothing, colonists were endowing them with something called 'civilisation'?

QUESTION 4: Mary Louise Pratt, a cultural theorist, described 'products of the contact zone,' which embodied legacies of resistance to subordination by way of parody critiques. (Mary-Louise Pratt, '*Profession*,' [Modern Language Association of America], 1991, pp 33-40).
Has this picture, drawn to humour a European purchaser, challenging dark undertones?

THREE NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS OF TOMMY McRAE AND LAKE MOODEMERE

During the 1880s two newspaper reporters discovered Tommy McRae and his family living at Lake Moodemere, a small native encampment on the fringe of a country town. In 1943 a local historian thought a summary of their stories would interest servicemen and women reading the local newspaper on the front.

All three acknowledged McRae's achievement as an artist but smirked at what they saw as his hunger for money. All three depicted Lake Moodemere as an impoverished, fringe, riverside encampment. The third report had comic descriptions of how McRae hawked his curios of platypus skins, painted gum leaves and emu eggs in a horse-drawn carriage.

SOURCE 3. 'A BLACKFELLOW FAMILY MAN,' 1881 [26]

In a communication to the "Australasian," descriptive of Corowa and Wahgunyah (New South Wales and Victorian towns on either side of the Murray, a bridge across which connects them), by a special reporter the following interesting account of a native black occurs:–

One of the strangest sights to be seen in any inland Australian town is to be met with in Corowa. It consists of a native blackfellow driving his wife and the other ladies of his family and children in **his own American waggon**. They are all dressed in European **clothes of quite as good quality as the families of labouring men in the bush usually wear**. The waggon is a very good one, and the horse, though not of much value, is in fair condition, and the harness is in good repair and well looked after.

The owner of the turnout is a middle-aged man, known throughout the countryside as Tommy McRae, an expert fisherman, who, by the exercise of his calling, has saved sufficient money to purchase the horse and vehicle, and **live in a somewhat civilised fashion**. The only thing that speaks of the Australian aboriginal is the pack of **mongrel curs** [dogs] that follow the vehicle.

This instance shows that the native blacks are not incapable of civilisation, for this man has become an owner of property by his own unaided exertions.

The secret of his success is that he never drinks intoxicating liquors. The McRae family are all singularly adept at **card playing**, and it is said that few Europeans are a match for them at cribbage and euchre. They dearly love to have a small stake on the game, playing for love being, in their opinion, a mere waste of time. Like other businessmen, Mr McRae receives letters, to which he sends replies, a white friend acting as his secretary, for **he can neither read nor write**.

He is **somewhat of an artist**, and the sketch books which he fills in his moments of leisure are much sought after, and their sale **forms no inconsiderable portion of his income**.

QUESTION 5: According to the author what was uncommon about Tommy McRae?
QUESTION 6: Does the report acknowledge or belittle McRae's achievement as an artist?
QUESTION 7: In what ways was the report racist?

SOURCE 4. 'A VISIT TO THE BORDER,' 1886 [27]

Lake Moodemere is three or four miles west of the township of Wahgunyah, close to the river, of two miles long and two or three hundred yards wide, and a favourite haunt of waterfowl, from black swan to wild duck. It is also a favourite resort of local picnic parties, and regattas are occasionally held here, the boats used, being ported from the Murray over a narrow neck of land…

On the Murray Flats, facing the lake, we came upon **a native encampment** wherein were assembled the **remnant of a powerful tribe** which had here reigned supreme **fifty years ago**. But **six** souls now remained –Tommy McRae, the chief, and his wife Lily, a middle-aged man named Jimmy, a younger man whose name did not transpire, and two children. The eldest of the latter was a half-caste, but as Lily and Tommy jointly accept the parentage, it is to be presumed that the colour is merely a freak of nature. Of the baby black Tommy seemed very proud, introducing him as Alec McRae.

When we came in sight Jimmy had no breeks [breachers/trousers] on, and he bolted into his hut, from which he smilingly emerged with his nether limbs encased, the native costume being now discarded by those **semi-civilised beings,** who all – especially Lily – speak **tolerably good English.**

They have also abandoned the mia-mia form of habitation, sleeping in very small **bark huts** apart from each other, but one common drawing room or parlour – the angle of a couple of fallen trees, with a log in front, against which a tiny fire was burning. Children, dogs, poultry and possum rugs were huddled up in this place, and all seemed happy.

Tommy Mc'Crae is **a man of substance**; it is said that **he has a banking account and is the proud proprietor of a horse and buggy!** [He is a teetotaller and temperance advocate]. A native of less provident habits lately asked Tommy how he raised the buggy, and the answer was significant: "Me no drink, save money, get buggy and go up (pointing to the heavens). You drink, no money, no get buggy, and go down" (pointing to the earth).

It is said, however, that Tommy is not over-scrupulous as to how he makes money as long as he gets it. He raises **poultry, spears the Murray cod, and manufactures possum rugs; nor is he above accepting white money without working for it**, while Lilly can **beg** admirably when visiting the townships, the clothing of herself and piccaninnies being thus obtained.

Tommy **is a bit of a genius** in his way, and had he been educated would probably have made his mark. As it is, he is an **astute financier, somewhat of a wag, and a draughtsman**. A Corowa gentlemen of our party had previously engaged Tommy to draw a book of native birds; but having paid in advance, the book has not yet been seen.

While chatting with the aboriginals, Lilly requested a gentleman of our party she knew to read aloud a letter she had received from one of her sisters, who had migrated with others of the tribe to **a distant mission station,** [Maloga Mission] where she had evidently been fairly educated. At all events, the calligraphy and orthography of Lily's letter would compare more than favourably with the penmanship and composition of many educated whites we have come across. It was a singular budget of aboriginal domestic news, in which native and Christian names were much mixed. Births, marriages and deaths – migrations, accidents and other incidents – were duly recorded, and the various announcements, were received with apparently stoical indifference, even when the deaths of near relatives were mentioned, Lily only interjecting to correct the pronunciation of native names. One item, stating that another sister of Lily's had given birth to a baby, with the additional information that she was not married, was calmly received, yet it is probable the blacks thought much although they said little.

QUESTION 8: 'A remnant of a powerful tribe which had here reigned supreme fifty years ago.' What had happened fifty years before 1886?
QUESTION 9: In what ways were people at Lake Moodemere 'semi-civilised'?
QUESTION 10: How does the reporter account for McRae's wealth and Lily's literacy? Why were they surprising?
QUESTION 11: Why does the reporter detail Lily's letter?
QUESTION 12: What is the principal impression of Lake Moodemere that the reporter wants to convey?

SOURCE 5. A LINK WITH THE WAHGUNYAH ABORIGINES, 1943[28]

(From Our Wahgunyah Correspondent)
I am reading "On the Wallaby" quest and adventure in many lands by Charles Barrett, FRZS. Knowing how our servicemen and women delight to have news of old Wahgunyah, and knowing also that many of them have the *[Border Morning Mail]* posted direct to them at their battle stations, I quote the following from the book in the hope that it will prove of interest to them in their "exile":—

When Wahgunyah's first justice of the peace, R Kilborn (father of Mrs J A Foord, of Rochester, who gave me this information), handed **a sketch book** to a young man of the local tribe and asked him to fill it with drawings, Tommy McRae was delighted. The book was intended for the **Governor of Victoria, Lord Hopetoun**. In a letter from Wahgunyah, Mrs G C Kilborn gave me an outline biography of the **talented** aborigine, who was a member of a Murray river tribe.

As a young man he was employed as a stockman on Andrew Hume's Brocklesby Station, near Corowa, and made several trips to Melbourne with cattle for the market. He witnessed the opening of the Hobson's Bay railway. In 1865, Tommy's first drawings were made in a pocketbook for Mrs Kilborn's father, who provided the native artist with **several drawing books, together with pens and ink.** Tommy earned many a half sovereign by sketching in books supplied by white fellows. **Ten shillings a book was his standard fee**.

Throughout the country between Albury and Yarrawonga, Tommy was a well-known character. In later days the artist and the oldest members of the tribe travelled from place to place in a **covered wagonette**, followed afoot by other blacks **and a pack of mongrel dogs**. The outfit included half a dozen fowls and whenever Tommy was ready to move off to a new camping ground, the fowls would fly up into the vehicle and make themselves comfortable. On arrival at the destination, the rooster would hop down and crow an order immediately obeyed by the hens which followed their lord and commenced scratching for feed.

Tommy McCrae, who was a **happy natured and very kindly** man, died in 1901 at the **Blacks' Reservation, Lake Moodemere, near Wahgunyah.** Two drawings, [done] a year before his death, are among those preserved at the **National Museum, Melbourne**. A grandson of Tommy of Wahgunyah inherited the old man's gift. Jimmy McCrae, who lives at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Mission Station, does clever pen-and-ink sketches. An important fact I had almost forgotten to mention: Tommy McCrae was a teetotaller. **Did Lord Hopetoun value those McCrae sketches, I wonder**?

QUESTION 13: How does the reporter acknowledge McRae as 'a talented Aborigine'? Why does he end questioning it?
QUESTION 14: Compare this newspaper report with the other two. What comic embellishments are made? What purpose do they serve?

PLACING TOMMY McRAE

Newspaper reporters depicted Lake Moodemere, where McRae lived and worked, as an encampment of 'black gins and mongrel dogs.'[29]

Lake Moodemere operated as an unofficial encampment. It served as a ration depot in the 1870s and was gazetted as a reserve as late as 1892. Habitations were crude; living conditions poor. In 1885 a petition for housing was unsuccessful. However, the residents were left to make their own ways. They preferred Lake Moodemere as a 'less restrictive alternative to the oppressive yoke of the missions that were closely monitored by the Aboriginal Protection Board.'[30] In particular, the encampment held the advantage of being conveniently placed for families to make cross-border escapes from the Aboriginal Protection Board rounding up children to be institutionalised. Two children were stolen from the McRae family in the 1890s.

Aboriginal family group at Wahgunyah, c. 1908, Godson Collection. State Library of South Australia. *https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/PRG+1258/2/2422.*

Residents and 'parlour' were pictured in a photograph dated approximately 1908.

As an out-of-town, cross-river Aboriginal encampment/reserve, Lake Moodemere lingered into the early twentieth century. It was still used for the distribution of blankets in 1937. The last of the residents were eventually moved from Lake Moodemere to reserves at Coranderrk, Lake Tyers and Cummeragunja. The 'Black's Reserve' faded from sight thereafter.

Faded, but did not disappear. Waywurru historian, Megan Carter has visited and revisited Lake Moodemere to see 'what the country my ancestors lived on once looked like before colonisation.'[31] She describes and pictures a natural billabong, rich with native bird life, which served as an encampment area for many years, even before white settlement.[32] She marvels at the survival of the huge burnt-out trees, large enough to house least four adults in poor weather.

Carter sees Lake Moodemere as a 'refuge,' a 'sanctuary' – and as a space of dispossession. Sharing her family connections with the place, Carter hunts down the names of the First Nations Peoples who lived there. She shares joy in their resilience. She points to McRae as one of the long-term residents and tells how he eked out a living by selling curios, such as painted emu eggs and gum leaves and possum skin rugs made by the women in the camp. She explains how he also organised displays of singing, dancing and boomerang throwing to earn money to supplement the rations supplied from the police station. She tells how McRae was a leading spokesperson requesting the Aboriginal Protection Board to erect housing at Lake Moodemere. The place and the person provide her with a connection to country.

QUESTION 15: How can we try to understand what LakeNSW Moodemere meant to Wiradjuri and Waywurru people then and now?
QUESTION 16: How might schools begin to consult with local First Nations People on 'how Aboriginal men, women and children were and continue to be impacted by colonisation'? (NSW Curriculum content)

So What?
Tommy McRae, a Wiradjuri man living in an impoverished Wiradjuri/Waywurru encampment, drew pictures of olden times and of his present-day to sell so as to supplement his meagre income.
QUESTION 17: How do his drawings start or advance conversations regarding the negotiation of co-existence?
QUESTION 18: How useful are his drawings in gathering glimpses of 'Aboriginal Peoples' experiences of colonisation'?
QUESTION 19: Why is the Wiradjuri/Waywurru encampment significant in the story of dispossession?

ENDNOTES – INVESTIGATION THREE: NEGOTIATING COEXISTENCE

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[3] Richard Broome, 'Aboriginal workers on south-eastern frontiers,' *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 26 no 103, 1994, pp 230.
[4] 'The Colonized,' c.1860 and 'Scene at the Door,' n.d. National Library of Australia..
Richard Broome, *The Colonial Experience, The Port Phillip District/ Victoria, 1834-1860*, La Trobe University History Department, Bundoora, 4th edition 2016, p 38 and p 41.
[5] JFH Mitchell, *Aboriginal Dictionary: Woradgery Tongues*, J Walker, Albury 1906.
[6] 'Notes on Current Events,' *Albury Banner*, 6 April 1906 and WM Sherrie, 'The Woradjery Tribe,' *Argus*, 13 October 1906.
[7] The material used in this investigation is drawn from Penny Russell, *This errant lady: Jane Franklin's overland journey to Port Phillip and Sydney, 1839,* National Library of Australia, 2002, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-5174472.
[8] Russell, *This Errant Lady,* p 16.
[9] Russell, *This Errant Lady,* p 221.
[10] The material used in this investigation is principally drawn from Ian D Clark ed. *The Journals of George August Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate,* Heritage Matters, Melbourne, 1988.
[11] Gipps to Glenelg, 22 July 1839, Enclosure 3, *BPP* p 24.
[12] Robinson, *Journal*, 1 May 1840.
[13] Robinson, *Journal*, 14 May 1840.
[14] Robinson, *Journal*, 7 May 1840.
[15] Robinson, *Journal*, 12 May 1840.
[16] Robinson, *Journal*, 7 May 1840.
[17] *Sydney Gazette*, 28 June 1840.
[18] Gipps to Russell, 9 April 1843, *BPP*, p 107.
[19] Robinson, *Journal*, 8 February 1841.
[20] G Mackaness, 'George Augustus Robinson's Journey into South-Eastern Australia,' *JRAHS,* vol 27, no 50, 1949.
[21] Mackaness, *Robinson's Journal,* p 344 and pp 348-349.
[22] The material used within this investigation draws on Bruce Pennay & Yalmambirra, 'Picturing Civilisation,' *JRAHS,* vol 111, no 2, December 2025.
[23] Jones, *Following footsteps*, p 228.
[24] Hilary Jankelson, *Tommy McRae: His cultural interaction with the Colonial World*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2019, pp 133-134.
[25] Jones, *Following footsteps*, pp 221-230.
[26] 'A Blackfellow Family,' *Town and Country Journal,* 17 September 1881.
[27] 'A Visit to the Border,' *Corowa Free Press*, 14 May 1886.
[28] *Border Morning Mail*, 9 April 1943.
[29] *Corowa Free Press,* 1 June 1945.
[30] Durrant, *Ngurai-ilam, Waywurru and Dhudhuroa,* pp 226-263.
[31] Megan Carter, *Djimbi Ngai: Here I am, A History of the First Nations People in North-East Victoria,* 2018-2024,: https://dhudhuroaandwaywurruancestors.wordpress.com/2019/06/03/day-two-lake-moodemere-and-barnawatha/ (Accessed 1 December 2024).
[32] Arthur Andrews, *The First Settlement of the Upper Murray*, Albury, 1921, pp 34-35.