

The Brothers up North and the Sisters down South: the Mackay family and the frontier

*Draft only*

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As the beneficiaries of the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, European women, along with men were complicit in an imperialist civilising project that saw the near destruction of Australia's indigenous peoples and their language and culture.<sup>11</sup>

'The question now arises as to whether it is possible to have a reconciled history of Australia, within which all Australians can locate themselves.'<sup>12</sup>

As we wake from what has been termed the 'great Australian silence' on Aboriginal history in Australia and mindful of the contemporary struggles about Native Title, The Stolen Generation and Deaths in Custody we struggle to write a history that is not totally schizophrenic or the 'parallel histories' noted by Peter Read. Amid the debates of a 'black armband history' opposed by a 'white blindfold history'<sup>13</sup> - we can ask along with Noel Pearson whether 'a reconciled history' is possible. A number of historians are looking for a way forward. Ann Curthoys has written 'Like many others I am now looking for ways to confront the past in an honest way which is energising rather than threatening.'<sup>14</sup>

While there was earlier a tendency to position white women as victims of white men, along with Aboriginal people, recently there has been a greater recognition of white women as complicit and beneficiaries.<sup>5</sup> Jackie Huggins has shown how white women mistreated young Aboriginal women working as domestic servants.<sup>6</sup> Grimshaw et al have noted that 'The European settlement of Australia was necessarily a female as well as a male enterprise,'<sup>7</sup> but there have been few close explorations of that complicity.

With the past a 'hotly contested territory'<sup>8</sup> in Australia, a reconciled history may not yet be possible, but here I explore the notion of the complicity of settler women in the dispossession and near destruction of the Aboriginal people through an examination of the experiences of one family, the Mackays, who came to Australia as poor dispossessed crofters from Scotland in 1855. Initially they settled in the South East of South Australia, but a decade later a number of the brothers began to make their way North, to make their fortunes. While one brother, Alick, was a government surveyor in the Northern Territory, the others

were land-takers, who built up a large squatting empire in Western Australia. The mention of the brothers up north and the sisters down south is at once a stylistic device, which suggests a feminine and settled south and a masculine, violent northern frontier. But it is also something close to the reality of this particular family, with a number of the brothers out on the frontier in northern Australia and the sisters, and their mother, living in the by-then pacified south.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting to look at the Mackay family, because of the apparent great differences between various siblings. Indeed the question might be asked, how could these people all be in the same family? On the one hand, in the South East town, Mount Gambier we have Mary Mackay, teacher, Labour Party supporter and W.C.T.U. activist and her younger sister, Catherine (referred to throughout this paper by her married name - Catherine Martin), teacher and writer. In 1923, Martin published *The Incredible Journey*, which told of the quest of two Aboriginal women to recover the son of one of them, who had been taken away by a white man. Aboriginal people are represented in this text in a manner, relatively sympathetic for the time. The critic J. J. Healy described Martin as a writer who 'sensed the rich, often gentle world of Aboriginal mythology'.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, in particular, were three of their brothers Roderick, Donald and Donald McDonald (referred to as 'Dody') Mackay<sup>11</sup> who took large tracts of land in the North West of Western Australia (the Pilbara) where they established a number of sheep stations. Mundabullangana, Roy Hill and their other stations were built on Aboriginal land and with Aboriginal labour. The brothers and Donald's sons, Jack and Sam were known for their cruelty towards their Aboriginal workers on the stations and on the pearling luggers which they ran off the coast. One historian has described the Mackays in the Pilbara region as 'a strong, violent family'.<sup>12</sup> The apparent difference between these women and their violent squatter brothers, should not however draw attention from what they shared. This paper aims to explore the different histories of the brothers and sisters and to sketch out some of the strands of shared attitudes and histories, of love and family pride, of complicity and of benefits gained. Finally it notes how



one member of the family, at the end of her life begins to speak truthfully of the violence of settlement.

The Mackay family emigrated to Australia from the Isle of Skye, in the Scottish Highlands, dispossessed by the economic and social changes that had beggared the crofting class. The father, Samuel Mackay was a leaseholder with only about three acres. Unable to pay his rent and in debt, neither he, nor for that matter - the island economy, was able to offer employment to his nine children, whose ages ranged in 1855 from 24 to six years. The landlords turned to the introduction of sheep as a way to make their estates profitable. They desired to clear the land of the excess population to make the Highlands a 'great sheep walk'.

Two of the older sons came first to Australia in 1854 and in 1855 the rest of the family followed under the auspices of the charitable Highlands and Islands Emigration scheme. Described as 'poor but respectable' they owed almost £50 for their fare.<sup>13</sup> Some of their fellow passengers on the *Switzerland* were those cleared from Suishnish and Boreraig on Skye in the winter of 1853-4. An eye-witness recorded the tragic scene,

a strange wailing sound reached my ears...I could see a long and motley procession winding along the road that led north from Suishnish...There were old men and women, too feeble to walk, who were placed in carts; the younger members of the community on foot were carrying their bundles of clothes and household effects, while the children, with looks of alarm, walked alongside...Everyone was in tears.<sup>14</sup>

In shaping this story, I hesitate to quote this account of misery and dispossession, mindful that for so long the telling of such accounts has fostered the notion of the settler as victim and has been allowed to justify the taking of Aboriginal land and the exploitation and murder of Aboriginal people.<sup>15</sup> But here too could be posed Noel Pearson's question to Aboriginal people: 'do we require Anglo-Celtic Australians to spurn their origins in the name of penance and of solidarity with us?'<sup>16</sup>

The Mackays took up positions on the Lawson property on Buandig land near Naracoorte in the South East of South Australia, where the young men learned bush skills in the pastoralist industry, while the parents became hut-keepers

some miles out from the head station. Early in 1856, Samuel died of fever and perhaps of homesickness for his island home. Later his son Alick recalled the sad scene, 'we stood weeping around a father's corpse how desolate.[sic] Orphan strangers in a wild unsympathising stranger land.'<sup>17</sup>

Now the older siblings set about making their living and supporting their mother and younger siblings. The brothers cast out of their own land, fatherless and thinking of themselves as orphans, worked as drovers, stockmen and overseers in the pastoral industry in the South East and in Western Victoria.<sup>18</sup> They were determined to gain wealth and prestige. As they saved their wages to get together some capital, there are some glimpses of shrewd and violent tactics. In 1868, the local court heard that a Mr. Mackay was said to have 'stuck to the cashbox at Bowden's' raising enough money to buy a flock of sheep while working with Mitchell and by implication helping himself to some of his employer's funds.<sup>19</sup> Donald Mackay was charged for pasturing sheep on Crown Land.<sup>20</sup> He was also imprisoned for assaulting the publican at Kincraig, Naracoorte who refused to serve him a drink after closing hours.<sup>21</sup>

This was the land of the Buandig, who were often in and around the town of Naracoorte during the 1850s. Local white historians note of the later 1850s, 'Blacks were still numerous, as many as five hundred at a time coming into the town and holding a corroboree'.<sup>22</sup> The Mackays working on and around stations in the district would have witnessed the disintegration of the Aboriginal community just as they themselves gained a foothold in and slowly rose through colonial society. Aboriginal people worked on the stations, but they were not able to accumulate capital like the Mackay brothers, generally being paid only in rations.

### **The sisters**

There were four sisters, Flora b.1839, Mary b.1841, Maggie b.1846 and Catherine b.1848. Flora married Alec Bethune in 1858 and began to raise a family. Some accounts suggest that the marriage was not ultimately very happy and given Flora's strong attraction to the W.C.T.U. it is possible that her husband, an overseer and later a drover was a drinker.<sup>23</sup> Maggie<sup>24</sup>, Mary and Catherine all worked as school-teachers. The youngest daughter, Catherine Mackay (1848-1937), later Catherine Martin, has been the focus of my research.



In 1866 the Misses Mackay set up a school in Mount Gambier, which they ran for some ten years. Their mother kept house for them and looked after any school boarders. Some of the brothers' children, Sam, Isabelle and Jack Mackay attended the school and as Isabelle grew, she assisted her aunts in the school.

In Mount Gambier, the Misses Mackay and their mother were seen as respectable women. They women sought social standing and security by means of education and culture. Their livelihood depended upon their reputations and the support of their school by the local Presbyterian minister was important to their respectability. Mary was to stay for the rest of her life in Mount Gambier, mostly supporting herself running a little school at the home she shared with her elderly mother. She became a leading member of the W.C.T.U. movement, not only in Mount Gambier but across the South East district and was seen as a 'social reformer'. A member of the Labour Party, she left it in disgust during the First World War over the conscription issue.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1860s and 1870s there were a number of Aboriginal people in and around Mount Gambier.<sup>26</sup> The Mackay women knew the missionary, Mrs Christina Smith who ran a school and home for Aboriginal people. She was aware of some of the forces which had overwhelmed these people. Writing in the 1880s, Mrs Smith acknowledged the cruelty and violence of the settlers towards the Buandig people. But she located this in the past and within an discourse of evolutionary progress:

This once numerous and powerful tribe of South-Eastern natives is now represented by a miserable remnant which will in a few years, with other aboriginal people of Southern Australia, have withered away before the new mode of life forced upon them by the advent of European colonists in their midst, assisted too often by the cruelties practised upon them by the early settlers.<sup>27</sup>

The school was closed in 1868 due to a lack of funds and there were reports in the local press of Aboriginal people being famished. We don't know whether the Mackay women sought to assist these destitute people, but perhaps they did for Catherine later wrote of the influence of her mother, 'who, so far from looking on the Blacks as outcasts or untouchables, treated them with the unfailing kindness of a gentlewoman in contact with lowly and very destitute kinfolk'.<sup>28</sup>

For Catherine, a life of school, community work and church-going in Mount Gambier, was confining. Her move to Adelaide in 1877 was precipitated by the break up of the family school, the sudden death of her beloved brother Alick and her desire to develop her talents as a writer. From the mid 1860s when she was in her teens, she had been publishing verse, stories and serials in the local press. Her volume, *The Explorers and Other Poems* had been published in Melbourne in 1874. It was a radical step, but she moved from the usual vein of women's verse to write on a topic of national scope: her work mythologised and memorialised the 'explorers', Burke and Wills.<sup>29</sup> In her early writing there is little mention of Aboriginal people. Only in the serial, *The Moated Grange* (1877) is there a brief glimpse of a figure who could be termed 'the resistant aborigine'. An old woman, speaks back to missionary discourse, claiming she will be happy to go to hell as there will be plenty of white men there from whom she can get 'plenty baccy and grog.'<sup>30</sup>

In Adelaide, Catherine worked as a clerk, continued her writing, and became part of a circle of educated social reformers, like Catherine Helen Spence: reformers who were wholly concerned with the white population and apparently never spoke or thought about Aboriginal people. In 1882, she married Frederick Martin, an accountant and a member of this group.

### **The brothers**

While Donald and Dody worked at making their way in the South East, Roderick sought to strike out further afield. He had gathered a small amount of capital together and in 1865 he joined a 'push' of ambitious young men from the South East and the Western districts to take up land, some thousands of miles away in the North West of Western Australia, in the Pilbara region. Later Dody and then Donald would join Roderick in the North.

The youngest in the family, Alick Mackay was also to go north, as a public servant. In January 1869, he was en route to Darwin as a member of a South Australian survey party under the command of Goyder, Surveyor General. With the issue of weapons to members of the survey party, Alick noted in his diary,

I have got a very good one I think, hope however I wont have to use it on the poor blacks, for I should be loath to shoot any of them.<sup>31</sup>

His work of surveying was a precursor to white settlement as he noted 'We have been running through some fine country today really splendid country, I hope



dear Roderick and Dody's country is as good.<sup>132</sup> His mother and siblings were often in his thoughts. He wrote home to Mount Gambier regularly and imagined their responses to his exploits.

If the dear ones at home saw me clambering up over the great rocks to the top with the Theodolite on my shoulder I dare say they would open their eyes a little.<sup>33</sup>

Catherine and her sisters were proud of their young brother, rising in the government service as a professional man. His devotion to them and their mother and his religious earnestness were endearing. Some of his letters home, Catherine edited for publication in one of the local newspapers. In his report of his first meeting with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, his mention of the 'scale of humanity' evoked no particular comment from Catherine, nor from the editor - it was seen as common-sense:

From all that we have seen from the natives as yet, they seem to be amicably inclined. While at anchor the ship was visited by two half-grown boys, who drew up to the side of the vessel in a small canoe, and in a complete state of nudity....They were very apt at picking up words of English...On the whole if I were to judge of their intellectual endowments by the very little I have seen of them, I should say they would rank a little higher in the scale of humanity than the aborigines I have formerly come in contact with.<sup>34</sup>

In his diary in late May he noted that 'blacks' attacked the head survey camp, two men were speared and the Aboriginal attackers were fired upon. When one of the men, Bennett died, Alick thought of his family receiving the news and noted 'Who knows but my dear Mothers and sisters may be the next bereaved of a son and brother.'<sup>35</sup> He reported on the feeling among the survey party about this incident,

every one of us would like to volunteer out to hunt the poor wretches and teach them at least one lesson not to be soon forgotten their attack was so murderous and inexcusable there is little pity for them.(sic)<sup>36</sup>

Service in the Northern Territory survey expedition provided Alick with an opportunity to increase his earnings and to improve his social position. He often calculated his earnings and savings<sup>37</sup> and thought of how he would spend the money, his sisters' education and the donation of a '7th part to the cause of God' were popular themes. He ruminated,

I have been occupied with a pet scheme all day of how best to apply the money I shall have on hand on getting back, I think I can start a home for the dear ones it will be about the best use.<sup>38</sup>

Later, he joined the partnership of his brothers Roderick and Dody and their pastoral venture in the North West. His savings were to pay off their debts. Thus Alick, who never went to the North West, was still a financial partner. But this was to be short-lived as he was drowned with the wreck of the *Gothenberg* in 1875, when he was returning from another tour of duty in the Northern Territory. Catherine treasured his two diaries, (whence the quotations above are taken) for the rest of her life. Reading over these diaries and reflecting on his young earnestness and his enthusiasms must have been very poignant. Thus he had written of giving up shaving, thinking that he would return home later - 'not the beardless boy but the bearded man.'<sup>39</sup> In July 1869 he recorded the 'naming' of a 'fine River' as the McKay River. With a boyish pride he mentioned it a few more times in his diary.

8 July Just fancy shifted Camp again today on to the McKay which is one of the finest rivers in the N.T. Nobody seems to fancy it being called after me.<sup>40</sup>

His death came hard upon the heels of another, for in 1873, another brother, John Mackay, a school-teacher, died from a wasting illness at his home in Penshurst, in Western Victoria.

Henceforth we can concentrate on the remaining brothers, Roderick, Dody and Donald and their venture in the North West. In January 1865 the 'Omeo' was loading sheep at Portland for the Nichol Bay territory in Western Australia. The expedition to the North West was lead by J. N. McLeod, from a powerful pastoral family, but was particularly attractive to other men of lesser capital.

We learn that the Denison Plains settlement enterprise is being looked upon with great favour by many of the enterprising young men of the Mosquito Plains [Naracoorte] district, and that it is possible that a large party will be organised there to push their fortunes on those extensive plains that lie south of the sources of the Glenelg and Victoria rivers.<sup>41</sup>

Roderick was one of those who decided to 'push his fortune' in the Denison Plains company. He was not satisfied with the modest competence he could earn as an overseer for others in the South East. He was determined to be rich. The West Australian government was eager to encourage economic development and the taking up of Aboriginal land in this distant region and the company's prospectus set out attractive conditions.<sup>42</sup>



Convinced that he could become wealthy there, Roderick made three attempts to take up land in the North West. He was joined by Dody, in 1869.<sup>43</sup> An initial venture on the Maitland River was destroyed in 1872 when a disastrous 'willy willy' swept away 1,400 of their flock of 2,000 sheep. They pressed on, as one commentator put it, 'with the perseverance for which their countrymen are proverbial' and in 1872 successfully established Mundabullangana, near present day Roeburne and Port Hedland. They selected over one million acres, with a frontage of thirty miles along the Yule River. The plains of the Kariara people were of 'rich chocolate soil, covered with various succulent grasses and fattening shrubs, with a large proportion of soft spinifex' the latter providing feed through the dry seasons.<sup>44</sup> By the year 1879, they ran 18,000 sheep, 'all shepherded by the aborigines'.<sup>45</sup> Donald Mackay, who had a family of five children, was not prospering in the South East and in 1876 he came north to join his brothers. His family stayed behind but in 1879 they all went to Western Australia. Two sons of this family, Sam and Jack, were ultimately to become the owners of the stations.

In later years the family was to spread out and to take up more land - at one time holding Mallina, Croydon and Sherlock stations and also the Roy Hill station, further inland near Nullagine.<sup>46</sup> Mundabullangana was not only built upon Aboriginal land but was based upon Aboriginal labour. In 1889 during the shearing season,

35 able-bodied natives were employed shearing, with one white man, and two Chinamen shear-sharpening...The shearing is done quite as well as by average white men, and the sheep get better treatment...About 1200 sheep are shorn daily...In addition to the shearers, a great many old men and boys are employed making up wool and pressing.<sup>47</sup>

In 1893 there were reported to be 125 Aboriginal people on Munda,

All shearing is done by the native labour. Also all teamstering both with horses & bullock teams. Through a great part of the year a large number of these natives are constantly employed in water-drawing. Several young fellows are occupied on the schooner 'Myra'. Others are often on the road droving from this to an inland Station. The greater part of the fencing has been put up by native labour indeed the bulk of the improvements have been made by their aid. The women assist their men at whatever work they are engaged upon.<sup>48</sup>

Aboriginal women with children worked carting water from the river for the garden and troughs. They worked in the homestead and also with the stock. A photograph taken at shearing in 1898 shows a huge mob of sheep in front of the substantial shearing shed and four women standing up on the railings directing sheep into the races leading into the shed. In addition some people were stationed out on the run drawing water from the 27 wells for the sheep out in the paddocks.<sup>49</sup> These people were given food rations and clothes.<sup>50</sup>

The Mackay brothers were also involved in the pearling industry and in the early years had boats working off the coast in the season. Settlers would capture Aboriginal people from further inland and force them to work on their stations and pearling boats. The Mackay brothers were very involved in this slave trade.<sup>51</sup> Dody Mackay had a string of pearling boats and in the early 1870s hired 'depraved and vicious' men as hunters to capture Aboriginal people.<sup>52</sup> When they did not need the people they had enslaved, the pearlers left them on off-shore islands as prisoners and without adequate food and water, until they needed them again. Dody Mackay was found illegally detaining Aboriginal people on De Lambre island in 1874.<sup>53</sup>

Pearling was extremely lucrative. The cost to the lives of the Aboriginal men was not considered. They were forced to dive to great depths, with little rest periods and to endure the cruelty of their masters,. Deaths in pearling were common and could also affect the white overlords. In 1883, Roderick Mackay was lost at sea when a cyclone destroyed his pearling lugger, *Ariel*.

Like many of these settler men of the North, Roderick first concentrated upon building up his wealth. Only in 1876, when he was 40, did he marry the young 22 year old Emily Manning. They had four children, but their family life was short lived. One of the very few family letters extant was written by Emily MacKay to her sister in law, Catherine Martin, in 1882. The letter written on notepaper bearing the crest of the Mackay family signalled how the family had prospered from the colonial venture and their further aspirations.

Writing only a few months before Roderick's death and some months after an extended family visit to South Australia and Victoria<sup>54</sup>, she tells of family doings on the station and especially of her children and their bachelor uncle Dody.



Dody was much interested in the children when we returned, they and he were always playing and teasing each other, now however, his interest is all intent solely on the baby probably because he is a boy and therefore *so much more worthy of regard*, he was sitting in the rocking chair the other evening hushing the little fellow off to sleep to the lullaby of a Galic (sic) song. (emphasis in original)<sup>55</sup>

The cruel exploitation of the Aboriginal people in the North West was exposed by the Rev. John Gribble in 1885-7 and by Colonel Angelo, the British government resident at Roeburne, who was sending his protests to colonial officials in London. The latter wrote of a 'disguised but unquestionable system of slavery', 'a system of organized slavery'.<sup>56</sup> Gribble's claims caused great anger amongst the squatters and they ultimately discredited and ostracised the brave and outspoken clergyman.

Further north, serious allegations were made that 'three members of the Legislature and local justices of peace working in collusion and under the protection of the Inspector of Pearl Fisheries' were conniving to evade the regulations that required Aboriginal workers sign on freely to work the season on the the pearling boats.<sup>57</sup> Rather, Aboriginal people were captured in the interior and forced to work and punished if they did not get enough pearl shell. 'Bob' alias Weribine gave evidence to the government resident,

I have never been signed to anybody. I have never made an agreement with any one to serve as a diver. I have dived on board the "Mira" McKay's boat. I have never signed.

He described working for Sam Mackay and the punishment for failing to bring up enough pearl shells:

Sam McKay is a bad master. He many times sent me up the rigging, and never feed 'em. I had one time five shells in my hand and he sent me up the rigging because I had not got more. He kept me there the whole day and give me nothing to eat...Sam McKay himself beat me many a time with the rope because I did not get enough shell...McKay beat all the other divers and they all run away.<sup>58</sup>

Divers who failed to bring up shells, were not allowed back into the boat and their hands were battered as they grasped the gunwales.<sup>59</sup>

In Catherine Martin's best known novel, *An Australian Girl*, the heroine Stella is given a 'magnificent pearl brooch' by her suitor, Ted, a pastoralist with an

interest in a pearling boat off the Western Australian coast. The brooch was rows of 'soft and lustrous', 'exquisite pear-shaped pearls'. Perhaps the Mackay women were also given pearls from the North West, pearls that cost the lives of Aboriginal divers.<sup>60</sup>

'Bob' had also worked as a shearer on the Mackay station and reported on his poor rations:

he has given me no clothes, no blankets- no sugar but has fed me with rice and grease (fat) mixed with it. no tea no wages. Not one penny.

He had seen McKay beat two women:

They were watering some sheep and did not give them enough water. Sam McKay beat them with a whip cutting them with a lash, across the back, making a mark like a cut of a knife. The blood was running over.<sup>61</sup>

Early in 1887, the police at Roeburne took more statements from Mackay employees who repeated allegations of cruel treatment. Thus 'Bobey' gave evidence. A man known as 'Sambo' said

he does always flog us with a whip he bete me some time ago and nearly killed me he bete my woman also.<sup>62</sup>

Police went out to the station to bring in some witnesses relating to these allegations. Jones, alias Wibey reported that after he had an altercation with a 'Chinaman', Donald Mackay had ridden up to him 'flourishing his whip', telling him to clear out or he would kill him and jabbing him in the side of the head with his whip handle. As Jones walked away, Donald Mackay struck him on the head from behind with the butt end of his whip handle, making 'the skin [stand] out for about one inch in length and his hair all matted with blood and the right side of his face all swelled up.'<sup>63</sup>

A girl 'Jemima' had whip marks on her body: she claimed 'Sam Mackay had done it beating her'. 'Sambo' also had marks on his back from a flogging by Donald Mackay. Mackay had also beaten a woman, Gipsy, with a whip. The constable reported that Dody, Roderick (junior) and Donald Mackay all rode at him carrying whip handles. Dody Mackay's whip was apparently loaded. Not surprisingly the Aboriginal people were frightened to testify against the Mackays and witnesses had to be brought in on a warrant.

The sergeant informed his Commissioner:



Since taking statements from the natives, I have laid information against Samuel Mackay for assault, Samuel Gardner for assault Donald McDonald (ie Dody) McKay for assault & three informations against Donald MacKay alias "Bunga"<sup>64</sup> for assaults. There are several other cases against the persons on this Station which will be processed with as soon as the native witnesses can be found and the pearling boats return.<sup>65</sup>

These matters were heard in the Roeburne local court. It seems that only Donald MacKay was found guilty. Charged with 'having beaten with a whip a male aboriginal known as "Webby" [he] was fined 1s. and ordered to pay costs to the amount of £4.19s' <sup>66</sup> It is difficult to ascertain what happened in the other cases, but as the local magistrates were squatters and pearlers themselves, it is unlikely that it went very far. Farquhar MacRae JP and his brother Alec MacRae MP were powerful figures and related to the Mackays. Isabelle Mackay had married Alec MacRae. There was an understanding in the area that the Mackays dominated the Pilbara along with the MacRaes. These big station owners were largely above the law.<sup>67</sup>

Around the time the police party were riding out for the Aboriginal witnesses, Catherine Martin wrote to her brother: 'My darling Dody', she wrote as she made arrangements to buy a 'football and other things' from Wigg's, the Adelaide retailer and send them to the West. Presumably Dody had asked Catherine to buy toys for his nieces and nephews. Dody had sent £20 to Catherine and had increased their mother's allowance to £180 per annum. She wrote of her gratitude on behalf of her sisters, Flora Bethune and Maggie Lorking, neither of whom had married well, 'I am glad dear you are sending a little help for Flora & Maggie.'<sup>68</sup>

In 1896 Dody was elected a Member of the WA Legislative Council, to defend the interests of the northern pastoralists. He attacked claims that the Aboriginal people of the north were being treated in 'a cruel and inhuman manner', as a 'a despicable perversion of the truth'.<sup>69</sup> Upon his election his sister, Mary, had written him a congratulatory letter.

My dear brother,

I want to congratulate you on being returned to the Upper House of Parliament. May God give you the needed wisdom to make good laws.<sup>70</sup>

It might be thought that this was a rather surprising letter for a stalwart of the W.C.T.U. to write to a hardened and hard-drinking squatter, but about six weeks later she wrote again, to his young wife, asking for 'a paper with some parliamentary news one little scrap about Dody will greatly please my foolish old fancy, you will think it is vanity, but - I am sure you are as pleased as anyone.'<sup>71</sup> Clearly Mary took great delight in the elevation of her brother.

Su Jane Hunt found that 'Cohabitation was a characteristic of the northern frontier.'<sup>72</sup> In 1885, the Reverend Gribble found it was 'quite the order of things in this [Carnarvon] district for white men to do as they pleased with the black women and girls.'<sup>73</sup> We don't know if this older generation of Mackay men fathered children with Aboriginal women but both Roderick and Dody were unmarried for many years. Dody only married in 1893 after he had left the North. Donald Mackay was similarly alone for his first three years in the north. But Jack Mackay, owner of Roy Hill station and the son of Donald Mackay, fathered a child with a Kariara woman named Maggie.<sup>74</sup> Their child, born c 1890s, was named Alick, named perhaps for Jack's uncle Alick, who drowned in the wreck of the *Gothenburg* in 1875. Other Aboriginal people in the North West claim their descent from Sam Mackay's son Keith. Thus when Catherine Martin wrote of her mother thinking of Aboriginal people as kin she was right - they were in fact her kin. She thought of them as 'lowly and destitute kinsfolk' and having lost their land to the Mackays and other such families, the Aboriginal people were poor.

Sam Mackay was one of the last of the powerful Mackays in the North West. He was the oldest male grandchild of the Mackay family. He must have been doted upon by his aunts and grandmother during his youth in the South East. He grew to be an arrogant, but charming, man. Mean and cruel, he also knew the worth of the grand gesture. When Daisy Bates, who was seeking funds to assist Radcliffe Brown's anthropological research expedition in the North West in 1910 bailed him up pointing out that he had made his money at the expense of the Aboriginal people, he promptly made her a cheque for £2,000.<sup>75</sup> He loved to live in a lordly style. Like a number of the northern pastoralists he had a team of Aboriginal players on his station so that he and his fellow squatters could play



polo against them. The Mackay men loved racing and bred many horses, including the winner of the Perth Cup in 1882. Sam's horses competed in the local Roeburne races, where they might have Aboriginal jockeys, as was the case in June 1887 when the MacKay brothers' horse 'Little Dick', 'ridden by a native' won the Selling Race.<sup>76</sup>

He was a great womaniser and when he tired of his wife, he got R.T. Robinson, the private investigator, to set her up for adultery and divorced her, promptly marrying the young English showgirl, 'Fanny Dango'.<sup>77</sup> They set up home in a grand style in Victoria. But Sam missed something of the North West and he bought two young Aboriginal men from the North West to work on Melville Park, his new Victorian property. A magazine feature on his pastoral properties in 1910 includes a photograph which includes an Aboriginal man at Melville Park. He is just identified as 'Rod - A Western Australian Aborigine' <sup>78</sup>

### **Did the sisters know?**

The lives of the brothers and sisters were clearly intertwined. While they may not have known the full details of the activities of their brothers and nephews, the sisters must have known the broad outlines. Settlers themselves, they shared the profits and prestige of land-taking. They supported their brothers in their ventures. Surviving evidence suggest that the sisters sought to influence their brothers' behaviour, but only in regard to marital problems and perhaps to their excessive drinking.<sup>79</sup>

Only Catherine visited the North-West. It appears that she went there late in 1894 or early in 1895 when returning from extended travels in Europe. The stories she later wrote drawing on this visit do not confront the cruelty and greed which made her brothers wealthy. There is more of a focus on the 'exotic' environment, of the Malay and Chinese workers and of drunken squatters slipping off to Singapore to dry out. Aboriginal workers are represented briefly and then only from the vantage-point of the squatters:

Beyond the woolshed glowed the cooking fires of the blacks, some twenty of them camped together, and making a great volume of various sounds, in which shrill laughter, snatches of a corroboree chant, and loud altercation could be distinguished. <sup>80</sup>

After this re-union with her remaining two brothers and their families she does not represent their callousness and venality although through her earlier writing

it is evident that she knew quite a lot about the violence and cruelty of life on the frontier.

There incidents and cameo sketches involving Aboriginal people might be read as a muted protest against dominant attitudes towards Aboriginal people. *The Silent Sea* (1892) is partly set in the outback area of South Australia, described as 'regions red with black men's blood and stained with white men's crimes.'<sup>81</sup> The hypocrisy of white men's attitudes to Aboriginal women is exposed. A pastoralist, aptly named Mr White, has a daughter, Kooroona with, Jeanie a woman of Aboriginal descent. When he decides to marry a white woman and to become 'respectable', he tells Jeanie to 'clear off' and to leave their daughter behind. When the women run away together to avoid being separated, White pursues them regarding Kooroona as his property. Murray, another character sees the situation from Jeanie's side:

He was well acquainted with the poor half-caste (sic) who has faced the perils of the woods (sic) rather than submit to separation from her only child. As he recalled her, with her timid eyes and shy, kindly ways, cut off from her own people, avoided by others, her health ruined, meek and submissive always to this tyrant, who talked of her more heartlessly than he would of one of his sheep or cattle, he felt half choked with disgusted anger.<sup>82</sup>

When Murray asks him why he won't marry Jeanie, he responds. "What do you take me for? Do you think I'd disgrace myself by marrying a woman who is a one-third a black lubra?"(sic) Murray's reply involves a comparison between black and white women. "She's a jolly sight too good for you. She hasn't a vice more than any honest white woman, except humility."<sup>83</sup> In the description of Kooroona and her mother, they emerge as ill-used but distinguished by their ethical qualities, in particular their intense devotion to one another.

Similarly in *An Australian Girl* (1890), we hear the story of Caloona, her relationship with Thompson, a white rural worker and of their son. On his death bed Thompson is haunted by his memories and regrets relating to Caloona and the child telling the heroine, Stella, the sad story of how Caloona left taking the boy, after Thompson thrashed the child, 'worse, I know, nor I should have'. Here it is the white man, the supposedly 'civilized' one of the couple, who savagely beats his child. Thompson never saw them again and is remorseful and haunted



by these events, "'What became of them, an' where are they now? that's what I says to myself over an' over agin'". He believes he sees the boy's face at the window as he lies dying. Ultimately a missionary tells him of the fate of Caloona and the boy in a way that emphasises the common humanity of settlers and Aboriginal people. He says, "'They are buried in one grave in the mission church-yard at Mandurang. Not far from them my own wife and only daughter lie buried.'"<sup>84</sup> Stella's gloomy reflection upon this story, 'the world is full of desolate women and fugitive children' underlines the sense of a shared humanity.

However, in her final work, published years after she went North, she seems to be trying to set the record straight or perhaps to challenge dominant views of the frontier. In *The Incredible Journey* (1923), Aboriginal characters move to become the central characters. The story is set amongst the Arunta people of northern South Australia. While they are involved with life on the stations, some retain traditional beliefs and practices. Iliapa, a young woman is the central character. Her son Alibaka is taken from her as a result of collusion between two forces - a bad white man and an Aboriginal man avenging the failure of Iliapa's family to honour its promise to give her to him in marriage.

Iliapa is already in a difficult situation as her husband Nabulka has had to go into hiding to escape from the clutches of corrupt policemen. She decides to make a great trek across a harsh stretch of country in order to regain her son. On this journey she is accompanied by another Aboriginal woman, Polde, depicted as a good-hearted comic. After numerous difficulties, they are able to confront Simon, who has taken Alibaka away to work as a jockey. With assistance from some 'good white people' they are able to get Alibaka away from Simon and the policeman, who had colluded with him. The reader comes to identify and sympathise with Iliapa in her quest to find her son. The intense love of the mother for her child and her struggle against injustice serves to bring the reader to sympathise with her.

At times Martin tries to represent an Aboriginal view of white people. The notion that the values of white Australia are inherently superior is challenged. Nabulka, a stock man declares:

'I can ride, muster cattle, and look after sheep; I can help to dig wells and clean out tanks, and put up fences. But after a time I am tired of the

white man and his ways, saying always to-day what must be done tomorrow, or when the next moon comes. When I get tired I want to go Bush - to hunt and fish and snare birds, to lie down when I want to, and get up when I wish.<sup>185</sup>

When Nabulka is wrongly accused of a murder, Erungara observes, 'Many times the evil that the white man does is put upon the black man'.<sup>86</sup> Polde and Iliapa are equally aware of the power differentials between black and white in Australia. When they are about to confront Simon, Iliapa is wary of doing this in the wrong circumstances. She says:

'Keep still, Polde,...we are only two black women. I have often heard my father say that many of the white people have been wicked and cruel to the blacks, and there has been no one to stand up for them and to say: "You must not do this." Black women and girls and boys have been stolen away, and when black men have gone to get them back, they have been shot down like wild dogs.'<sup>87</sup>

In this unusual work, different, even opposed, ideas jostle uncomfortably against each other. Discourses of progress are mixed with description of the theft upon which Australia is based. In the Introduction Martin wrote of Batman's purchase of the site of Melbourne,

Nothing in *opera bouffe* can be richer in comedy than this treaty, with wierd hieroglyphics standing for the signature of Jagajaga, Cooloolock and Bugbarie, neither side to the bargain understanding a word the other spoke.

When the South Australian colony was proclaimed, 'Not even the customary string of beads seem to have changed hands on this occasion.'<sup>88</sup>

While the notion of the 'dying race', a powerful discourse at the time is introduced, a future for Aboriginal people is also envisaged: they can aspire to become faithful retainers on pastoral stations. Aboriginal people making this transition are represented as more 'advanced', moving from a more collective to an individual mentality.

But this work, with its limitations, can be seen as beginning the re-appraisal of the colonial experience. 'The Incredible Journey' does point an accusing finger at the Europeans and even at the author's own family. Interestingly she refers to the landtaking colonists acting 'in the spirit of the Highlander, who, when



charged with taking a cow not his own, mentioned that he did not steal the animal but took her in the sight of all men as his own.<sup>89</sup> The kidnapping and murder of Aboriginal people, as carried out in the North West by her male kin must have informed this work. Her nephew Sam, can be read in Simon who takes Alibaka away to be a jockey. Sam Mackay certainly had participated in the capturing of Aboriginal workers. His Aboriginal jockey in Roeburne in 1887 may well have been forced from kin and country.<sup>90</sup> The two Aboriginal men whom Sam Mackay cruelly took far away from their land to his Victorian property may have been in her mind as she wrote and revised this work.

Martin cites her mother as the inspiration for the book. As we have seen her mother Janet was complicit in the exploitation of Aboriginal people. But as a symbol of saintly motherhood she can be equated with Iliapa, the Aboriginal mother, who demonstrated her saintliness through her love for her son and her determination to recover him.

This equation of Iliapa and the white mother suggests that finally one of the Mackays, Catherine Martin, began to have a glimmering of the humanity of Aboriginal people and could speak of the great wrongs colonists like her own family had done them.

<sup>1</sup>P. Grimshaw et al: *Creating a Nation* (McPhee Gribble), Melbourne 1994 p1

<sup>2</sup>Pearson, Noel 'Mabo and the Humanities Shifting Frontiers' in D. Schreuder (ed) *The Humanities and a Creative Nation* Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 1998) p. 53

<sup>3</sup>Ann Curthoys 'Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology' in M. Williams (ed) *Imaginary Homelands* (University of Queensland Press) Brisbane, 1999 Special Issue of *Journal of Australian Studies* no. 61. pp. 1-18.

<sup>4</sup>A Curthoys, 'Entangled Histories: conflict and ambivalence in non-Aboriginal Australia' in Geoffrey Gray and Christine Winter (eds) *The Resurgence of Racism Howard, Hanson and the Race Debate* Monash Publications in History no 24 1997 Dept of History Monash University, Victoria pp. 122-123

<sup>5</sup>Curthoys, 'Entangled Histories' p. 117

<sup>6</sup>Huggins, Jackie. "'Firing on the Mind'", *Aboriginal Women Domestic Servants in the Interwar Years* *Hecate*. Vol. 13 (2), 1987/8. pp.5-23

<sup>7</sup>Grimshaw et al: *Creating* p. 115

<sup>8</sup>Curthoys, 'Expulsion' p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>See also Ernestine Hill in M. Lake, *Getting Equal the history of Australian feminism* Allen and Unwin, 1999, Sydney p.121

<sup>10</sup>Healy, J. J. *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, University of Queensland Press, 1978 p.229

<sup>11</sup>A brief family tree is set out here. Samuel (d. 1856) and his wife Janet (d. 1891) emigrated from Skye. Their children. were Peter, d c1855, Roderick d. 1883, Donald d 1901, John 1873, Donald MacDonald (Dody) d. 1904, Flora (Mrs Bethune) d. 1912, Mary d. 1920, Margaret (Mrs Lorking) 1919, Catherine (Mrs Martin) d. 1937, Alick d. 1875.

Donald's children were Isabelle, Sam, Jack, Roderick, Catherine. Jack Mackay had one child Alick with a Kariara woman. Maggie. Sam Mackay had three children Keith, Peter and Elsie.

- <sup>12</sup> Forrest, K, K, *The Challenge and the Chance The Colonisation and Settlement of North West Australia 1861-1914* Hesperian Press, Perth, 1996 p. 316 I am grateful to Dr Mark Chambers of the Pilbara Land Council for sharing this reference and his research with me.
- <sup>13</sup> Mitchell. Library. Records of the Highland and Island Emigration Society Ref.A3077, 163
- <sup>14</sup> Archibald Geikie quoted in Eric Richards, 'The Highland Scots in South Australia' *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* no. 4 1978 p.p. 46-47.
- <sup>15</sup> Curthoys, 'Expulsion' pp. 3-5 .
- <sup>16</sup> Pearson, 'Mabo' p. 54
- <sup>17</sup> Diary Alick Mackay, 5 August 1871 Held in private collection, Adelaide
- <sup>18</sup> F.W. B. Kimberley, *History of Western Australia* , F. W. Niven, Perth, 1897 p.44
- <sup>19</sup> *Mount Gambier Standard* 28 July, 1868: p. 3
- <sup>20</sup> *Mount Gambier Standard* 25 August, 1868 p. 2
- <sup>21</sup> *Border Watch* 24 October 1868 p.2c see also *Mount Gambier Standard* 25 August 1868 p.2f and 23 October 1868 p.2e.
- <sup>22</sup> Judith Murdoch and Heather Parker, *History of Naracoorte* (Naracoorte Chamber of Commerce), 1963 p.11
- <sup>23</sup> Personal communication late Miss Jean Cook and obit. *Border Watch* 20 April 1912 p. 2
- <sup>24</sup> Little is known of Maggie who married another teacher, Walter Harry Lorking in 1881.
- <sup>25</sup> Obit Mary Mackay *Border Watch* 13 February 1920
- <sup>26</sup> See, *Border Watch* 11 August 1866 and 31 July 1867 *Mount Gambier Standard* 2nd August 1867
- <sup>27</sup> Mrs James Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: a sketch of their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language*, Adelaide, 1880 p. iii
- <sup>28</sup> Catherine Martin, *Incredible Journey* (Pandora Press), London 1987 p. 12
- <sup>29</sup> Michael Ackland, *That Shining Band A Study of Australian Colonial Verse Tradition* (University of Queensland Press), Brisbane 1994 pp. 95 and 105-111.
- <sup>30</sup> 'The Moated Grange' *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail* 24 February 1887 p. 38
- <sup>31</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 19 January 1869
- <sup>32</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 13 May 1869
- <sup>33</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 14 July 1869
- <sup>34</sup> 'The Northern Territory' *Mount Gambier Standard* 30 April 1869 p.2e, Diary Alick Mackay 6 February 1869, also 'A Letter from the Northern Territory' *Mount Gambier Standard* 23 November 1869 p.4ab.
- <sup>35</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 30 May 1869
- <sup>36</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 31 May 1869. Goyder did not allow any reprisals, Margaret Goyder Kerr, *The Surveyors The Story of the Founding of Darwin* Rigby, Adelaide , 1971 pp. 146-7
- <sup>37</sup> See 1, 3, 5, 8, 10 May and 27 June 1869 Diary Alick Mackay
- <sup>38</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 12 February 1870
- <sup>39</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 10 July 1869
- <sup>40</sup> Diary Alick Mackay 8 July 1869
- <sup>41</sup> *Border Watch* 28 January 1865 p. 2c
- <sup>42</sup> See *North Western Australia: Its Soil, Climate and Capacity for Pastoral Enterprise with Map* (Robert Mackay Glasgow Book Warehouse) Melbourne, 1864 p. 18 Held in Battye Library, Western Australia
- <sup>43</sup> Jennie Hardie, *Nor'Westers of the Pilbara Breed* (Port Hedland Shire) 1981, p. 38
- <sup>44</sup> 'Bucolic', 'A North West Station' *Western Australian* 6 December 1889.p.3
- <sup>45</sup> R. L. Mackay 'Early pastoralists in North-West Western Australia' *Royal Western Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* v. III (Early Days New Series) vol. 7 1945 p. 21
- <sup>46</sup> Hardie, *Nor'Westers* p. 39.
- <sup>47</sup> 'Bucolic', 'A North West Station' *Western Australian* 6 December 1889 p.3
- <sup>48</sup> W.A. Aboriginal Protection Board No 995 Acc. 495 Report from travelling inspector, 14/6/1893
- <sup>49</sup> A series of photographs taken at Mundabullangana in 1898 also shows housemaids, women and children transporting river water in barrels drawn by donkeys and drawing water from a well. Battye Library 3000P-3019P.
- <sup>50</sup> W.A. Aboriginal Protection Board No 995 Acc. 495 Report from travelling inspector, 14/6/1893
- <sup>51</sup> Su-Jane Hunt, "'The Gribble Affair'" B. A. Honours thesis Murdoch University, 1978 pp. 36-39
- <sup>52</sup> Forrest, *The Challenge*. pp.165-175 chap 13
- <sup>53</sup> Forrest, *The Challenge* p. 170
- <sup>54</sup> Roderick and his family, accompanied by servants, returned to the West on the steamer 'Macedon', from one of their periodic visits to the Eastern colonies. Roderick brought with him 'two splendid



- thoroughbred geldings and a filly', which he had procured at auction at the 'celebrated Bundoora Park herd' near Melbourne. *The Inquirer and Commercial News* 1 March 1882, pp. 2 & 3)
- <sup>55</sup> Letter Emily MacKay to Catherine Martin, Yule River, 16 August 1882
- <sup>56</sup> See Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts* (Allen and Unwin), Sydney 1998 p. 160
- <sup>57</sup> Forrest: *The Challenge* p. 192
- <sup>58</sup> W.A. Colonial Secretary's Office Confidential Series, Acc 1172, number C42/1886
- <sup>59</sup> S. A. Museum 'California Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition 1952-4' N. B. Tindale notebook p. 279
- <sup>60</sup> *An Australian Girl* vol.1 pp. 147-9
- <sup>61</sup> W.A. Colonial Secretary's Office Confidential Series, Acc 1172, number C42/1886
- <sup>62</sup> Within Report Constable Pollett, Roeburne Police station 1887 in Hunt, 'Gribble' Appendix 1 p. 41
- <sup>63</sup>
- <sup>64</sup> The older Donald MacKay was known as 'Bunga', a name said to be given him by Aboriginal people describing his large stomach.
- <sup>65</sup> W.A. Police Department Roeburne Police Station Acc.363/ Items 48-54. 27 March 1887
- <sup>66</sup> *Inquirer and Commercial News* 15 June 1887
- <sup>67</sup> Forrest *The Challenge* p. 196 Alec MacRae was involved in the 'Flying Foam' massacre in 1868. See T.J. Gara 'The Flying Foam Massacre: An Incident on the North-west frontier, Western Australia' in M. Smith (ed) *Archaeology at ANZAAS* (WA Museum) Perth 1983 pp. 86-94
- <sup>68</sup> Letter Catherine Martin, Hackney Adelaide 18 February 1887 to Dody Mackay Held at Fremantle Public Library
- <sup>69</sup> Debates Western Australian Legislative Council. 15 October 1896 p. 1047
- <sup>70</sup> Letter, Mary Mackay, [Mount Gambier] 2 September 1896 to Dody Mackay, Perth. Held at Fremantle Public Library
- <sup>71</sup> Letter Mary Mackay, [Mount Gambier] 28 October 1896 to Lottie Mackay, Perth. Held at Fremantle Public Library
- <sup>72</sup> Hunt, 'Gribble' p. 44
- <sup>73</sup> Quoted Reynolds, *Whispering* p. 143
- <sup>74</sup> S. A. Museum 'California Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition 1952-4 Genealogies of Australian Aborigines' II 1953 p. 72
- <sup>75</sup> E. Hill, *Kabbarli A Personal Memoir of Daisy Bates* (Angus and Robertson) Sydney, 1973 pp. 104-105. Sam Mackay handed 'Sir Edward Wittenoom a cheque for £1,000 to be used as Sir Edward Wittenoom thinks best for the purpose of ameliorating the condition of the aborigines'. *The Hedland Advocate* 2 July 1901.
- <sup>76</sup> *Inquirer and Commercial News* 22 June 1887 p. 3.
- <sup>77</sup> Private communication with the late Mrs. Florence Anderson, nee Mackay Perth 1993, See 'A Nor'West Squatter Obtains a Divorce' *Pilbara Goldfield News* Friday 19 August 1910, 'Approaching Marriage' *Pilbara Goldfield News* Friday 23 October 1910.
- <sup>78</sup> Information from Dr. Mark Chambers, Pilbara Land Council and also see photograph in 'Mundaballangana and Melville Park The Properties of Mr S. P. Mackay' 'The Pastoral Homes of Australia' vol. 1 (Victoria) Published by Pastoralists' Review, Melbourne, Sydney and London, 1910 Section 38 pp. 423-442.
- <sup>79</sup> Alick commented, 'I feel very much cut up at my sisters' conduct in refusing Donald's visit to them at Christmas.' Diary Alick Mackay 20 December 1871
- <sup>80</sup> By the Author of 'An Australian Girl', 'The Silent Sea.' etc: 'At A Crisis' *The Adelaide Observer*, 5 May 1900 p. 38
- <sup>81</sup> Mrs Alick MacLeod (C. Martin), *The Silent Sea*, (R. Bentley) London 1892 vol. 2: 49-50
- <sup>82</sup> *The Silent Sea*, vol.1: p. 133-4
- <sup>83</sup> *The Silent Sea*, vol.1 p. 134
- <sup>84</sup> *An Australian Girl*, vol.1: p. 262.
- <sup>85</sup> *The Incredible Journey*, 63
- <sup>86</sup> *The Incredible Journey*, 53
- <sup>87</sup> *The Incredible Journey*, 260
- <sup>88</sup> *The Incredible Journey*, p. 2
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>90</sup> In 1893 Sam Mackay explained the presence of 25 people from the inland areas denying 'having bought down any natives by force.' WA Aboriginal Protection Board No 995 Acc. 495 Report from travelling inspector, C. M. Straker 14/6/1893.

# Mundabullangana and Melville Park

Western Australia.

Victoria.

The Properties of Mr. S. P. Mackay.

MUNDABULLANGANA Station, in Western Australia, lies about 80 miles to the east of Roeburne, on the coast, and 50 miles from Port Hedland, where a railway, which will tap a considerable area of back country, is now being constructed. When first selected by Messrs. Donald McDonald Mackay and Roderick Mackay (the uncles of Mr. Samuel Peter Mackay, the present owner), it consisted of over 1,000,000 acres. In 1890 Roderick Mackay was drowned, and



Betsy Burke with Pistol Foal.

Cross Keys with Caiman Foal.

Reproach.

BLOOD MARES AND FOALS AT MELVILLE PARK.

about a year later the surviving proprietor took into partnership his other brother (whose name was also Donald), and the latter's sons. Some years later the present owner and his father bought out the interests of the other partners.



### ***The Pastoral Homes of Australia.***

Mr. S. P. Mackay is really a self-made man and won the money which enabled him to start in squatting enterprises by pearling. It was after being successfully engaged at that occupation for some years that he was able, together with his father and brothers, to buy into Mundabullangana. He became the sole owner in 1903, when on the death of his parent he purchased the remaining interests.



THE LATE MR. DONALD MACKAY.

many years of hard pioneering life. However, it was planned and carried through with untiring energy, and the property is now one of the most valuable in Western Australia.

The present area of Mundabullangana is about 400,000 acres. Some 50,000 sheep are shorn annually on the station, whilst 250 head of cattle, and a similar number of horses, are grazed all the year round. The run is plentifully watered by means of wells, which draw on a copious underground supply that has never been known to fail. The pastures consist of natural grasses, of which soft spinifex is the most abundant. The country is gently undulating, and intersected with long sand ridges. It is lightly timbered on the flats with gum trees.

The Mackay family immigrated to Victoria in 1852. They came from Benmore, Portree, in the Isle of Skye, where they had long been known. After spending about twenty years in the eastern States, the Mackays resolved to strike out into what was then an almost untried squatting venture in Western Australia. They went far up into the back country, where huge areas could be obtained, and operations conducted on the largest scale. The enterprise was a risky one, and involved



Photo by Lafayette.

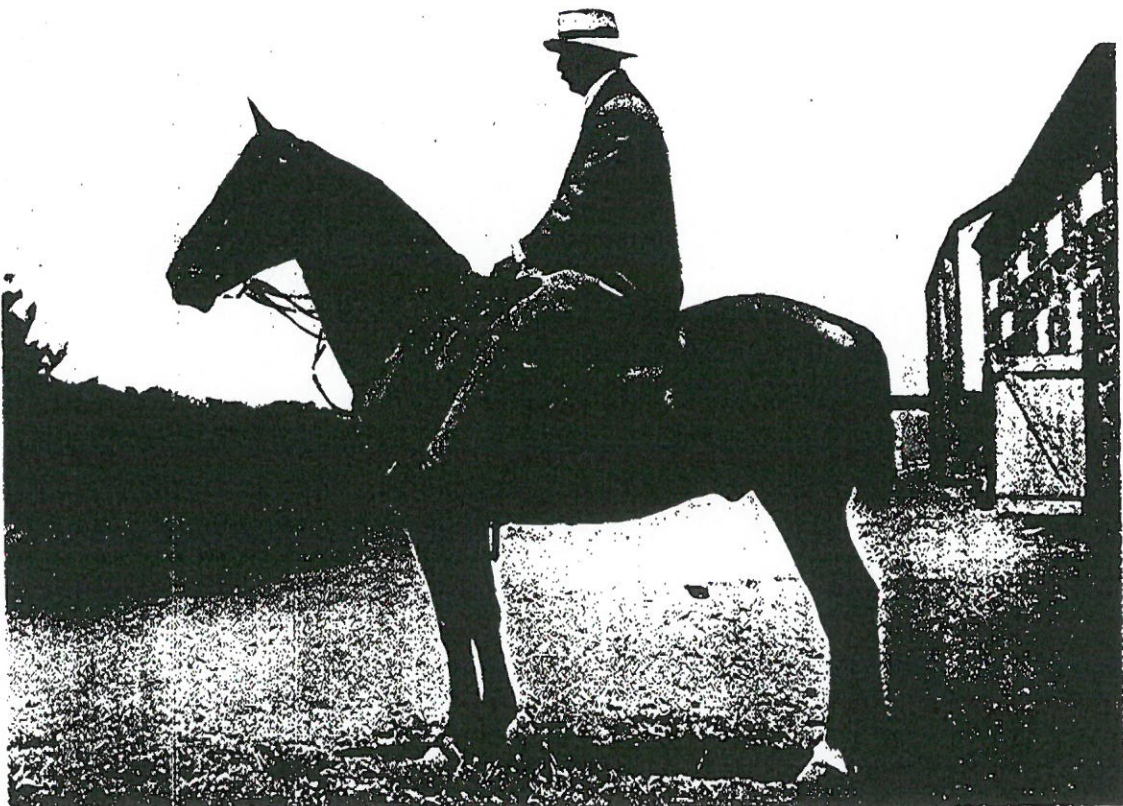
MR. S. P. MACKAY.

The homestead and other improvements on Mundabullangana are planned on elaborate and substantial lines. The house is of solid masonry, and is surrounded by a 10-ft. concrete verandah. The



**Mundabullangana, Western Australia.****The Stock.**

Mundabullangana is usually regarded as being one of the best stocked properties in the north-west of Western Australia. The sheep have been bred consistently from the large-framed South Australian Merinos. For some years drafts of rams have been purchased from Mr. Alick J. Murray, of Mount Crawford, South Australia. From the very first, Murray rams were used, but in the foundation blood there was also a dash of the Canowie strain. Besides being of large robust frame, the Mundabullangana sheep are evenly covered with valuable fleeces of long bright wool. The staple



BURRAH SAHIN.

*Black horse - Burrah Sahin's*

is sound and true, and there is an absence of kemp, both among the lambs and the grown sheep. The result has been good prices for the clip and a steady demand for the wethers, which fatten readily.

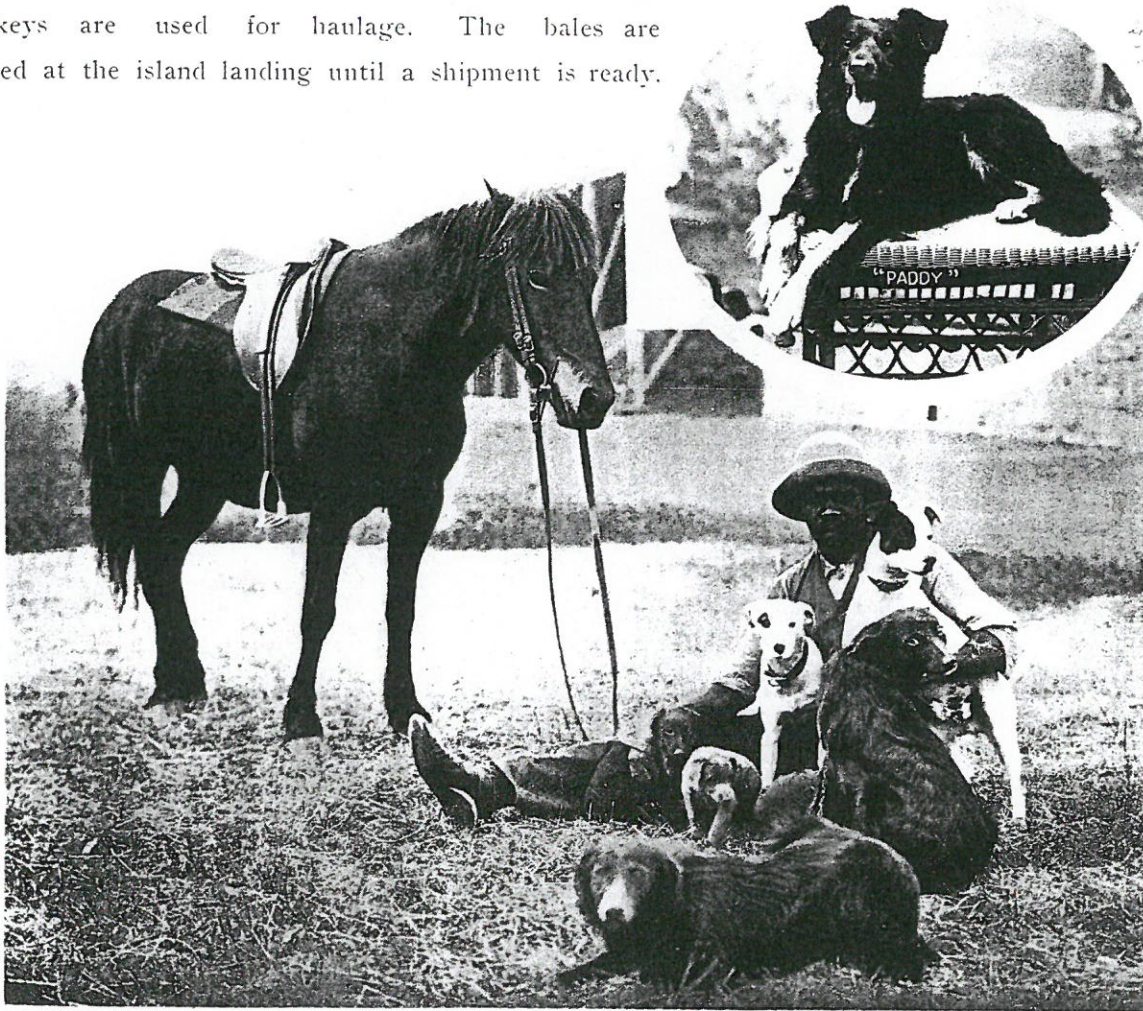
A good deal of the station work is done with donkeys, which prove hardy, and well able to withstand back country conditions, beside being capable of performing a great quantity of work. Mr. Mackay imported Don Quixote and Bandolero, two Spanish jacks, at a cost of £240 each, direct from Spain.



***Mundabullangana, Western Australia.***

rooms are large and comfortable, and water is laid on throughout the building, and about the grounds. The living accommodation is of a kind not often found on back country stations in Western Australia. The men's quarters, stables, outbuildings generally, and the woolshed (with space for twenty-two shearers), are fully up to the standard of the most highly improved properties in even the longest settled parts of the Commonwealth. At shearing time the wool is carted direct to the coast at Forrestier's Island, ten miles away.

Donkeys are used for haulage. The bales are stacked at the island landing until a shipment is ready.



ROD—A WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINE—AND THE DOGS.

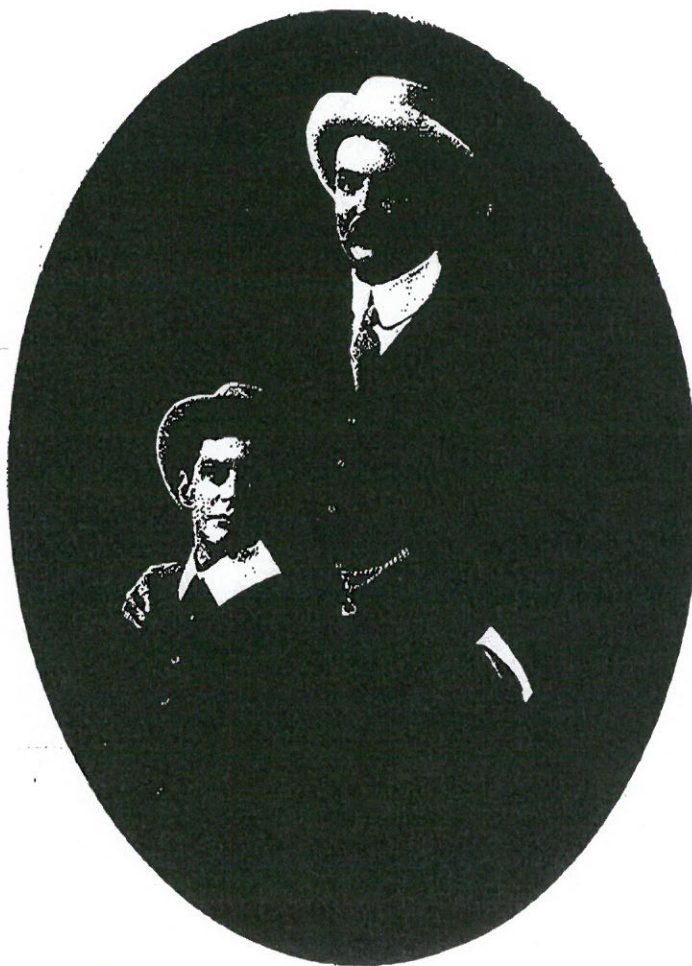
In the immediate future there will probably be a rapid development in the locality. A railway is now being built from Port Hedland to Marble Bar, a distance of 114 miles, and a lot of new country will consequently be opened up. Mundabullangana is already connected with Port Hedland by telephone.



### ***The Pastoral Homes of Australia.***

#### **Mr. Mackay's Horses.**

Though he now has his headquarters in Victoria, the name of Mr. S. P. Mackay will linger long in the memory of the racing men of Western Australia as a true lover of horses and an enterprising and capable horseowner. When he took charge of the station, he had a very valuable foundation to work on. The stud was founded by the late Mr. Roderick Mackay, who



*Photo by Lafayette*

MR. S. P. MACKAY AND KEITH.

was considered to be one of the best horse judges in Western Australia. The first stallion used was Sir James Ferguson, by Talk o' the Hill, a horse very well known in his day, and bred in 1872 by Mr. William Gerrard, of South Australia. Sir James Ferguson's dam was Apparition, by South Australian. There were other famous horses at Mundabullangana in the early days, among them being the mare Meranda, by The Premier. When mated with Sir James Ferguson, Meranda threw Shadow, a very notable mare. Wandering Willie was bred on the station, being by Two-of-Hearts



***Mundabullangana, W.A., and Melville Park, Vic.***

The stallion now being used at Mundabullangana is Rhubarb, by Persimmon from Jersey Lily, Le Var having been sold after some years' service. Rhubarb is an imported horse, and he ran second in the Perth Cup. He also has some English races to his credit. Rhubarb promises to exercise a very potent influence on the blood stock of Western Australia, as besides having what is now the most favoured blood of England in his veins, he is a horse of great symmetry and power.

**Melville Park.**

Mr. Mackay was certainly very fortunate in the home he selected in Victoria. Melville Park lies in the most picturesque part of the Berwick district, and comprises 817 acres of rich grazing land.



KISMET—CHAMPION SINGLE BUGGY HORSE.

The property is only a mile from the railway station, and less than an hour's motor run from Melbourne. The house is built on the top of a hill, from which green meadows fall away on all sides. The windows look out on an expanse of fine country, with timbered hills further off. The property was bought in 1905, and with subsequent improvement has cost about £40 per acre. The house was built by the present owner, and is a delightful building of two stories, with many of the most modern conveniences. It is sewered, water is laid on everywhere, and a plant on the establishment generates



## SPOTLIGHT ON PERTH CUP:

# Mundabullangana's rural link with the Cup

BY LISA RENTESSIS

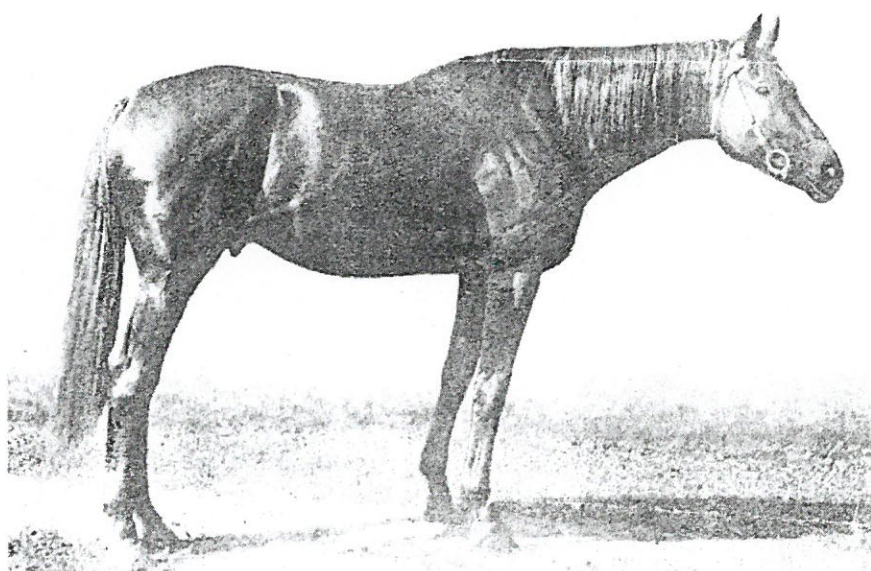
TO many patrons attending this year's 90th running of the \$100,000 Perth Cup, the names of Mundabullangana and Wandering Willie sound more like the names of two nomadic Aborigines rather than names that have a significant and nostalgic link with the famous Perth Cup.

Mundabullangana is a sheep station some 80 miles east of Roebourne and 50 miles from Port Hedland on the north-west coast of Western Australia. The station was established in the 1870's by Messrs Donald McDonald Mackay and Roderick Mackay and consisted of one million acres. By 1909 it was one of the most valuable properties in WA carrying some 50,000 head of sheep and 250 cattle — the property also carried around 250 horses.

Mr Roderick Mackay was principally responsible for the establishment of the thoroughbred horse stud on the property and he was regarded at the time as one of the finest judges of horse flesh in WA and without question this opinion was validated by some of the exceptional gallopers bred on Mundabullangana. The first stallion to stand on the property was Sir James Ferguson, by Talk O'The Hill (a son of the Derby winner Wild Dayrell and grandson of the great foundation mare Pocahontas). Talk O'The Hill was originally imported to Australia by Mr William Gerrard of South Australia. He was a very good sire getting many notable winners including the VRC Oaks winner Gaslight, a half sister to the 1900 Melbourne Cup winner — Clean Sweep.

Mr Mackay drowned in 1890 and his nephew Samuel Peter Mackay went into the station partnership. Samuel Mackay was a colorful personality in WA. He was a self-made man who had made his money pearling. In 1903 he became the sole owner of Mundabullangana and along with the station, he also inherited the foundation bloodstock. He was a true horse lover and his name will be remembered by some of the old timers involved in racing. The broodmare Miranda by The Premier\* one of the foundation mares at the station mated to Sir James Ferguson threw the notable mare Shadow and she in turn threw the grand old campaigner Wandering Willie (when she was mated to Two-of-Hearts).

Wandering Willie is undoubtedly one of the legends of Perth Cup history but unfortunately for Samuel Mackay he did not carry the Mackay colors. He was sold to Messrs South and Co and had his first recorded start in the Perth Cup of 1890 in



*Wandering Willie*

which he carried 7 st 12 lb to victory as a 4-y-o.

1890 was only the third running of the Perth Cup which today is the most important race conducted by the WATC, the race was formerly known as the Metropolitan Handicap. The following day Wandering Willie was entered in the Railway Stakes which he won and later in the year he won the three mile Queen's Plate which was the first important race established by the WATC in April, 1893. That season, Wandering Willie raced eight times for seven wins and one second.

The following year once again Wandering Willie lined up in the Perth Cup carrying 10 st 3 lb and then carried the colors of the outstanding owner-trainer of the day — G.A. Towton (who trained six Perth Cup winners). At this attempt the old horse finished third. However, Wandering Willie was far from finished, incidentally this old horse was mixing stud duties with racing and in 1893 his best son (Willie) was foaled, 1892 was Wandering Willie's biggest year he was allotted 10 st 5 lb in the Perth Cup, (the same weight the great Carbine carried to victory in the 1890 Melbourne cup) and he duly won the race and carved himself a place in WA turf history. His record still stands as the highest winning weight carrier in the history of the race. He stepped out again in 1893, 1894 and

1895 and won five more minor races during this period. He had approximately 36 starts on the racecourse for 18 wins and these included two Perth Cups, two Queen's Plates and the Railway Stakes. He started in four Perth Cups winning two, placing second in 1891 and fourth (with 10 st 8 lb) in 1894. He was a great galloper of his time.

Mundabullangana and Sam Mackay are synonymous with many great horses on the WA Turf, probably the best being the champion mare Betsy Bourke who won the prestigious WATC Karrakatta Plate, All Aged Stakes and the Railway Stakes for Mr Mackay. She was a daughter of Mr Mackay's Stallion Le Var (1893 Perth Cup and champion galloper of his day) from the studs own mare Laura. Other notable horses owned by Sam Mackay were Loch Shiel, Flora Mac, Fifeness, Soultline, Mazarin and Scotland. Not all these horses were bred at Mundabullangana.

Sam Mackay later moved to Victoria where he established the lovely Melville Park, now known as Eddington the present home of Lady Casey wife of the late Governor General of Australia.

Wandering Willie had two brothers Lord Byron and Will-o'-the-Wisp that both won the Railway stakes but they never matched the record of the gallant Wandering Willie.



The Aborigines Act, 1905.

(Section 9.)

RECOGNISANCE.

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS that I, Samuel Peter Mackay, of Mundabullangana

hereby bind myself to the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the payment to him of the sum of Twenty five pounds

Sealed with my seal this 18<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1906.

WHEREAS the above-named Samuel Peter Mackay

has applied to the Chief Protector of Aborigines for authority to remove Peter Willie <sup>two</sup> ~~an~~ ~~aboriginal~~ ~~or~~ male half-caste

\*Strike out words which do not apply.

under the age of sixteen years, ~~or a female half-caste~~ from Mundabullangana Station wa to Berwick Victoria

Now the above-written obligation is conditioned to be void in case the above bounden Samuel Peter Mackay on or before

the 18<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1906, returns

the said Peter Willie to the place

from which he is to be removed, and defrays the expense of such return, or else to stand in full force and virtue.

Signed, sealed, and delivered by the above-

named

Samuel Peter Mackay Sam. Mackay

in the presence of

[1300/06.]

Witness Witness Witness Witness Witness



## MUNDABULLANGANA PEOPLE



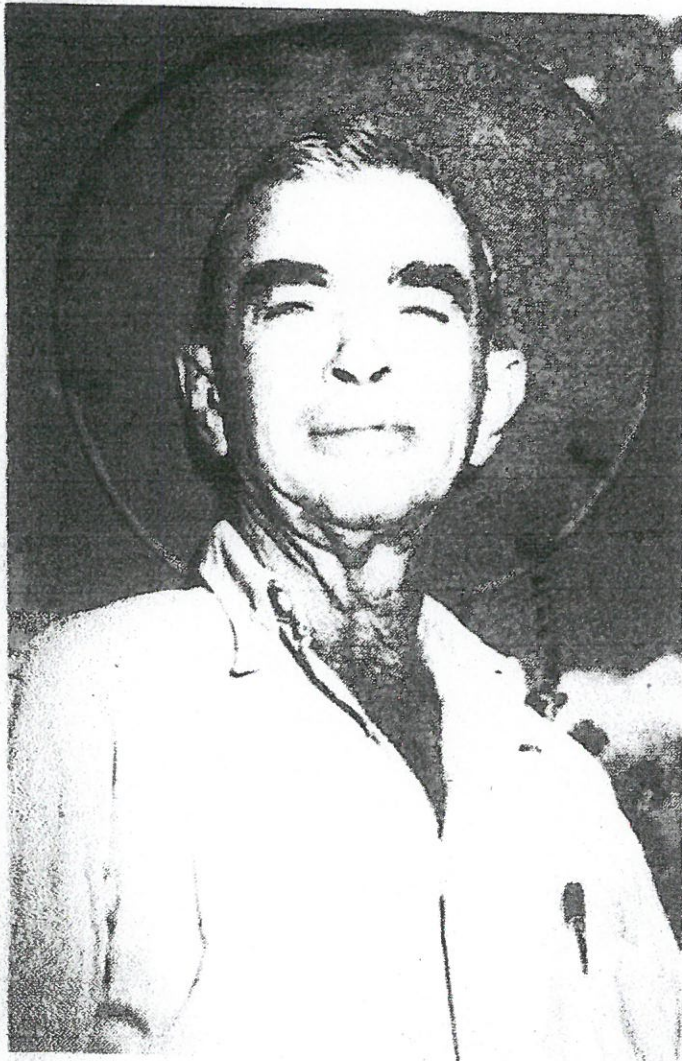
138 Donald McKay, M.P., was a founder of Mundabullangana



139 Sam McKay and son, Keith, who was killed in plane crash



140 S.P. McKay, sold Munda after son Keith's death



W.A. Newspapers

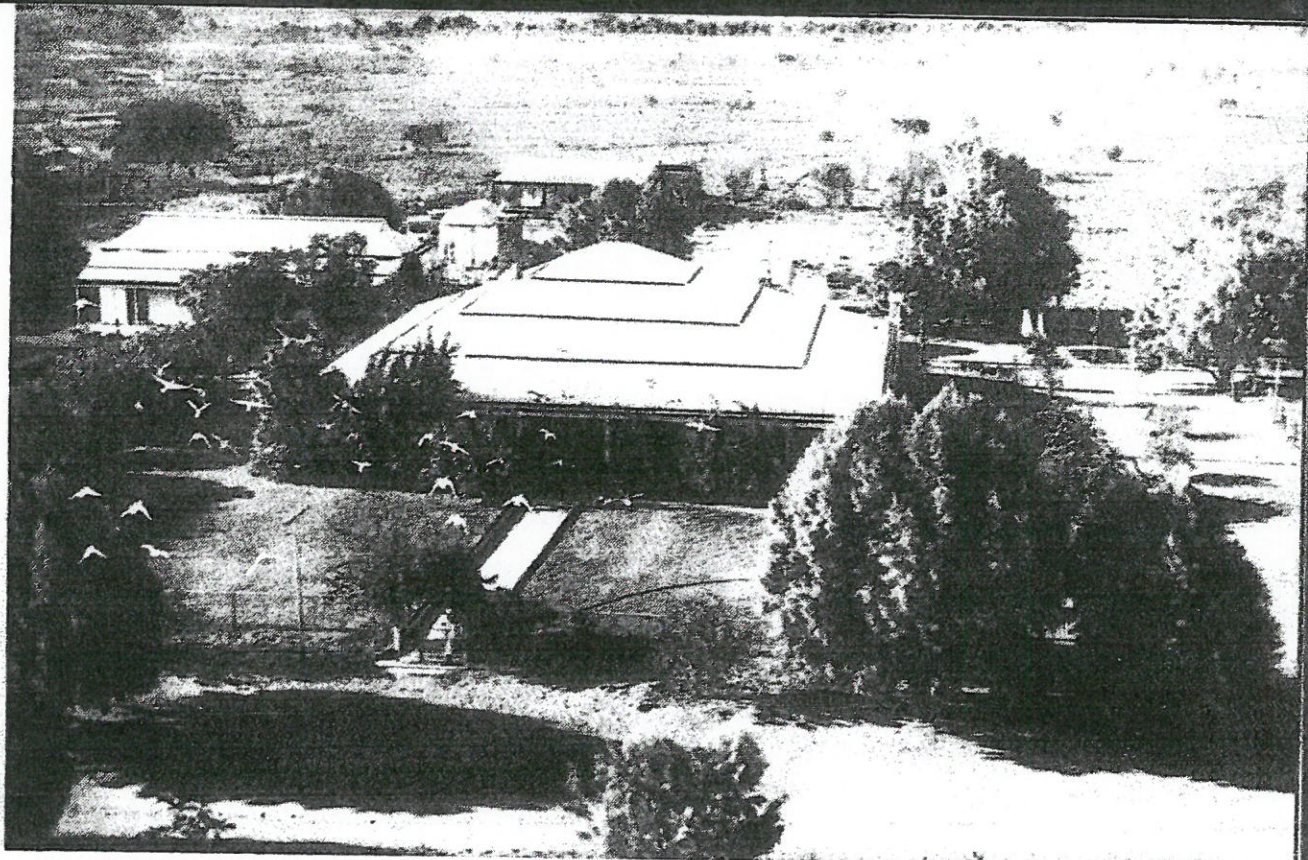
141 Rob Lukis, who managed Mundabullangana for more than 30 years for various owners



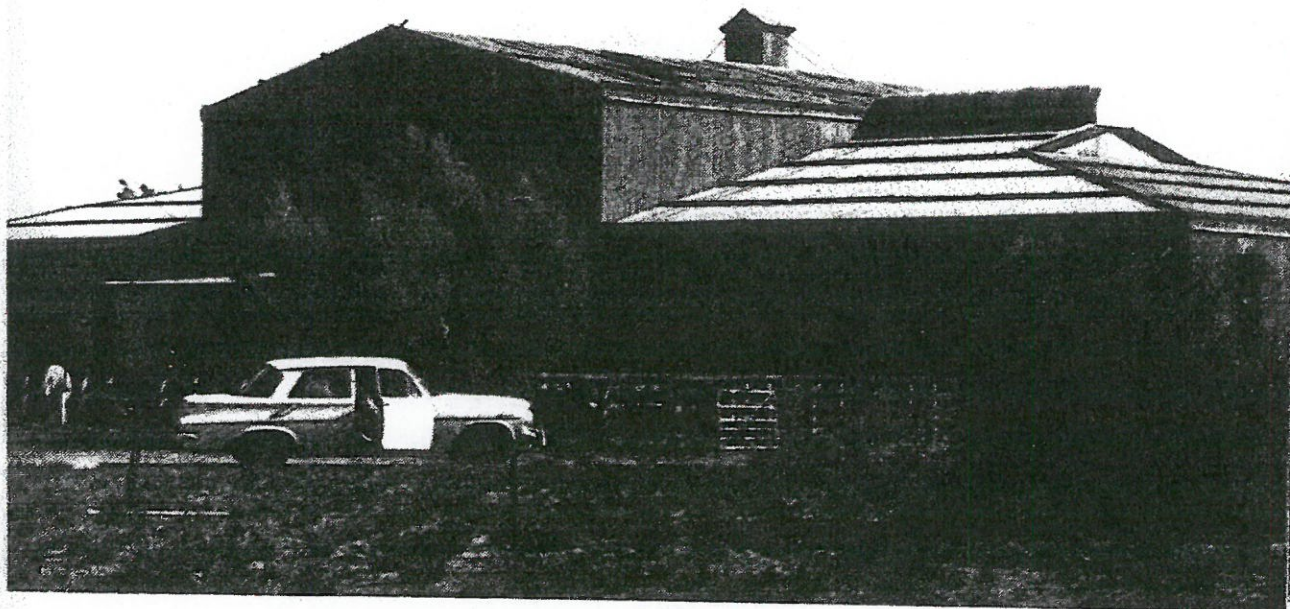
W.A. Newspapers

142 Ah Tie, blacksmith, windmill man, gardener at Mundabullangana for more than 70 years





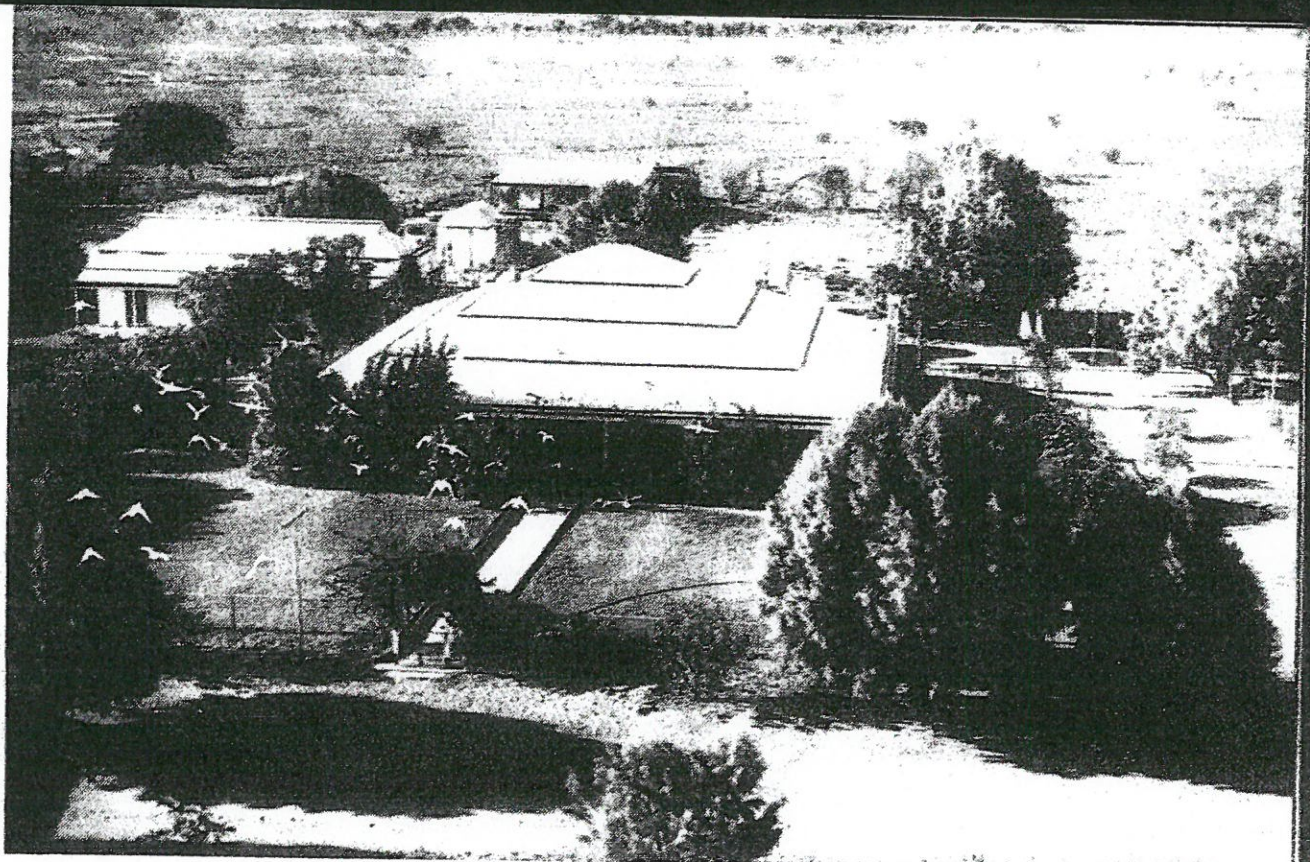
87 Another view of the homestead at Mundabullangana which was founded in 1872 by two McKay brothers after many hardships. It is now owned by I.R. McTaggart & Sons



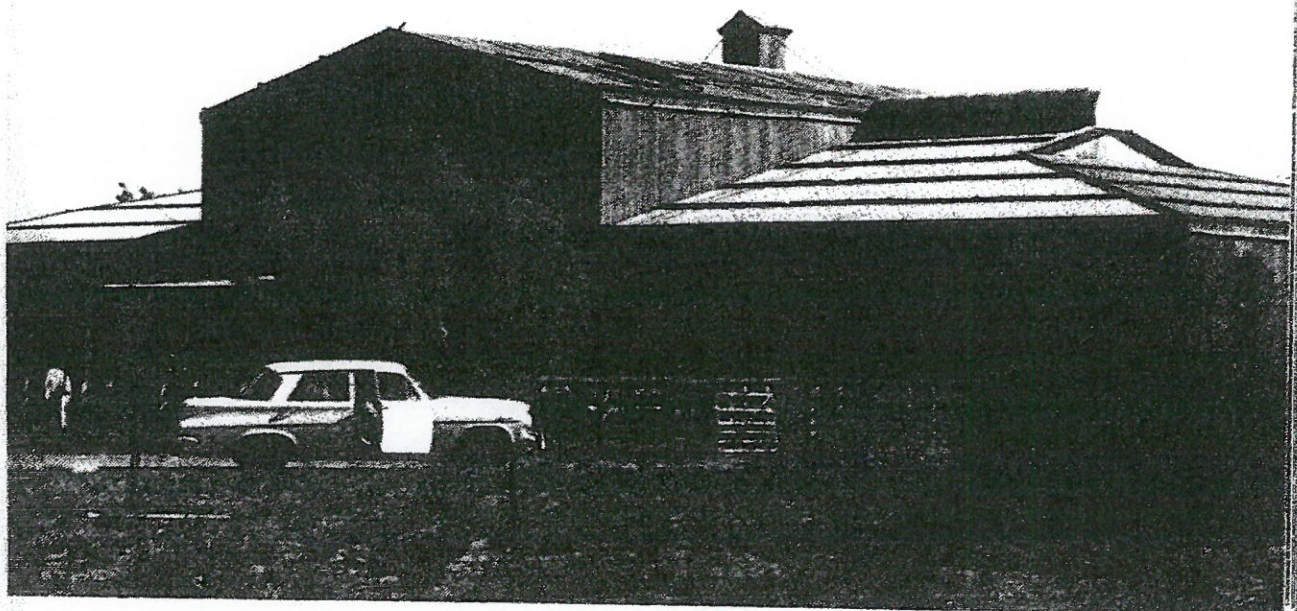
88 One of the few two-storey woolsheds in Australia was built at Mundabullangana in 1927, when 35,000 sheep were shorn in the 14-stand shed by a team of 35 men







87 Another view of the homestead at Mundabullangana which was founded in 1872 by two McKay brothers after many hardships. It is now owned by I.R. McTaggart & Sons



88 One of the few two-storey woolsheds in Australia was built at Mundabullangana in 1927, when 35,000 sheep were shorn in the 14-stand shed by a team of 35 men



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## Detailed information on Tropical Hibiscus 'Fanny Dango' (Hibiscus rosa-sinensis)

**Family:** Malvaceae (mal-VAY-see-ee) (Info)

**Genus:** *Hibiscus* (hi-BIS-kus) (Info)

**Species:** *rosa-sinensis* (RO-suh se-NEN-sis) (Info)

**Cultivar:** Fanny Dango

### Category:

Perennials

Tropicals/Tender Perennials

### Height:

6-8 ft. (1.8-2.4 m)

8-10 ft. (2.4-3 m)

### Spacing:

36-48 in. (90-120 cm)

### Hardiness:

USDA Zone 9a: to -6.6° C (20° F)

USDA Zone 9b: to -3.8° C (25° F)

USDA Zone 10a: to -1.1° C (30° F)

USDA Zone 10b: to 1.7° C (35° F)

### Sun Exposure:

Full Sun

### Danger:

Unknown - Tell us

### Bloom Color:

Unknown - Tell us

### Bloom Time:

Blooms all year

### Foliage:

Evergreen

Smooth-Textured



Flat 226 "Westlea",  
437 Stirling Highway,  
Claremont, 6010,  
11/9/79

Dear Mrs Hardie,

I am Shirley Thomas' Mother and the elder daughter of the late Donald MacDonald Mackay, who was called Dodie by his family.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity of reading a copy of the History of Mundabullangana Station and S.P. MacKay's Victorian property. I know nothing of the latter but do know a part about Munda is false. I daresay that the Pastoral Company published it in all good faith from information that may have been given by S.P. MacKay.

Sam was my cousin, the eldest child of Donald MacKay, who was my Father's eldest brother.

The real history of Munda was given in the extract from "History of West Australia" compiled by W.B. Kimberly, that Shirley sent you.

The early settlers of our family were never in Victoria but in Narracoote and Mt. Gambia in South Australia.

The lease of Munda was taken out by my Father and his elder brother Roderick. It was agreed that Roderick look after the stock while my Father went into the pearling business to earn money for the establishment and improvement of Munda. Roderick was married and his wife and children lived on the station.

It was in 1880 that Roderick was drowned in a willy-willy while endeavouring to go to my Father, who was reported to be very ill aboard his pearling lugger.

Roderick's widow and children came down South and my Father paid her for Roderick's share of Munda.

Donald MacKay and his wife and five children, Sam (S.P. MacKay), Rod, Jack, Katie and Isabel were living in South Australia and about this time Aunt Marion died, so as Uncle Donald hadn't been very successful, my Father brought him and his children over to live at Munda.

As stated in Kimberly's book my Father's enterprises, both station and pearling were flourishing by the time the Donald MacKays arrived from South Australia, and they had nothing to do with the establishment or financing of either. Uncle Donald had no money to invest but my Father took him in as a full partner and when the children were old enough, he paid for

the boys to be sent South as boarders to High School (now Hale) and the girls to a private boarding school in Perth.

On a holiday down South my Father met and fell in love with my Mother and they were married in 1893. He then decided to leave the station in the hands of Uncle Donald and the boys, although still keeping his share of Munda. By this time the pearling business had become unprofitable. When Sam returned from school he was made the book-keeper of the station.

My Father bought property extensively round the Fremantle district and had a hundred square acres in what is now Nedlands and Dalkeith, extending from Stirling Highway to Gallop's Farm. He then went into Parliament as a Member of the Legislative Council for the Northern Province in 1896 and was still a Member at the time of his death in 1904.

During this period there was a very bad drought up North and owing to ill health Uncle Donald came down South and died in Fremantle in 1900 leaving Sam in charge of Munda. Sam kept sending reports of heavy stock losses and as stocks seemed low, my Father decided to relinquish his share of the partnership at a very low figure to Sam in 1903.

It was later discovered that Sam had been in cahoots with a neighbour and had been driving thousands of sheep over to his property and reporting to Father that they had died owing to the drought.

I hope you have not found this screed too tedious but I was so indignant when I read the second page of the record you sent down that I told Shirley I would write to you, giving you the facts, as you love Munda and are so interested in its history.

Both Shirley and I are looking forward to meeting you one day.

With best wishes,  
Yours sincerely,

*John Donaldson*