

Again, reserves were not much use where settlers were accessible. When the first settlers arrived at Melbourne the word spread through the bush and the Aborigines from near and far flocked to the vicinity of the camp to begin the hanging-about and begging which ended only when the race had been virtually destroyed through disease, aggravated by the unhealthy *vagrant* (as opposed to *nomadic*) life. At the outset the Victorian natives had their tribal domains intact but the economic basis of the traditional life had instantly lost its appeal. The case of the magnetic attraction of Melbourne is the most spectacular instance but differs only in magnitude from what happened wherever whites settled.

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In 1807 Governor King prepared a Memorandum on the Natives for the guidance of Governor Bligh in which he observed that he had 'ever considered them the real Proprietors of the Soil' and had rejected a much discussed proposition that they should be enslaved.²³ In accordance with this sentiment King had encouraged a notorious hostile, known to the Hawkesbury settlers as Charley, in his desire to settle down to become the first Aboriginal farmer. The governor allowed Charley the use of, but not the title to, four acres of land which he cultivated with diligence and patience. But the Aborigines regularly plundered the ripened maize crops and in April 1805 Charley was unable to resist the temptation, or pressure, to join in raids in which several whites were murdered and grain destroyed. He was one of the six raiders killed by a pursuit party.²⁴

Apparently the first Aborigine to become a landowning farmer was culturally European, having been reared by a settler and grown to manhood in the white community, unable to speak the native tongue. By 1815 he had been given a farm and had settled down to cultivate it.²⁵

It was not until Governor Macquarie's term, that the first serious attempt was made to give 'wild' Aborigines a stake in their country by allotting them farms and teaching them how to work the soil.

In 1815 Macquarie opened his Native Institution at Parramatta as a boarding school for the purpose of rearing and educating an equal number of both sexes to be admitted in infancy, married among themselves at maturity and settled amidst whites as peasant proprietors.²⁶ Meanwhile he looked to the position of the then adults:

I have it Also in Contemplation to Allot a piece of Land in Port Jackson bordering on the Sea Shore for a few of the Adult Natives, Who have promised to Settle there and Cultivate the Ground. Such an Example Cannot, I think, fail of Inviting and Encouraging other Natives to Settle and Cultivate Lands, preferring the productive Effects of their own Labor and Industry to the Wild and precarious Pursuits of the Woods.²⁷

These expectations were over-sanguine and Macquarie has been ridiculed for them but no one had yet put the native to the test.

The settlement referred to was the first of three agricultural settlements that Macquarie attempted to form for the Aborigines during the period of his administration. The promised settlers were Cameraygal, of the Broken Bay tribe, which inhabited the area from the northern shores of the harbour to Broken Bay. By the time he was ready to launch the scheme the 'few adults' offering had come to number sixteen families.²⁸

Early on Tuesday, 31 January 1815 His Excellency, Mrs Macquarie and a large party of ladies and gentlemen proceeded by boat down the harbour to George's Head for the inauguration ceremonies with the assembled Aborigines. The governor, having previously consulted with the people as to their preference, installed the chosen man Boongaree, as Chief of the Broken Bay tribe, with a name plate suitably inscribed. The new settlers were presented with a full suit of slops each, a variety of useful articles and implements for farming, and a fishing boat named the *Boongaree*.²⁹

At about noon the Vice Regal party re-embarked 'having left the Natives with their Chief in possession of their newly assigned settlement, evidently much pleased with it, and the kindness they experienced on the occasion'.³⁰

George's Head was considered a suitable site for the settlement because it required little labour to clear it and the soil was, according to the *Sydney Gazette*, considered fertile. Beside this these people were of a coast tribe and therefore fishermen and George's Head was washed by some of the best fishing waters in the region of Port Jackson.³¹

Huts had been erected for the Aborigines³² and they soon made a little progress at clearing the land. Macquarie informed Lord Bathurst, in mid March, that with a little trifling assistance of clothes and provisions from the government from time to time they would doubtless become industrious and set the good example desired.³³

This expectation was not to be fulfilled. Sydney, with its drink, idling and handouts, was only six miles away and His Excellency had himself provided the means to travel there quickly. Compared with this, working for a living had but a short-lived appeal and the natives soon reverted to their old idling ways.³⁴ From the fact that a sow and pigs were bought out of the Police Fund for Boongaree in the December quarter of 1816³⁵ it appears that hope for the settlement had not been completely given up at that time.

Early in 1820 Macquarie made the first of his two unsuccessful attempts to recommence the experiment with Boongaree and his people. In describing the boating picnic for young Lachlan's sixth birthday, 28 March 1820, he noted that it was to

the beautiful little Bay on the south side of the Harbour, next to Woolloomooloo Bay, and which on this occasion I christened Elizabeth Bay in Honour of Mrs Macquarie, it having no particular distinguishing name before—and intending soon to establish some Native Settlers there.³⁶

Some sixty Aborigines were feasted on this day of celebration so that this may have marked the inauguration of the scheme.³⁷

The governor recovered the land from its owner, had several rude huts erected, land laid out in gardens and a convict on the government store assigned to assist in cultivation. But the Elizabeth Bay settlement was a fiasco. Soon the bark from the huts' roofs was taken the two miles to Sydney and sold for bread and drink and the rest of the huts used for firewood.³⁸

Nothing better illustrates Macquarie's tenacity of purpose than his response to these failures of his efforts for the betterment of the dark people. He continued trying almost to the moment of his departure for on Monday, 11 February 1822, the day before the now ex-governor embarked for England, the Macquaries travelled down the harbour with Governor Brisbane to George's Head to begin the second attempt to get Boongaree and his people to settle there, 'Barney Williams having put the Farm in very neat order for them, built good Huts for their residence and made a most excellent and romantic Road from the Landing Place to the Village'.³⁹ Brisbane promised to extend his good offices and protection to the venture and to give the tribe, now consisting of Boongaree and fifteen men and women, another fishing boat.⁴⁰ Nothing more was heard of this settlement.

The third settlement was at South Creek, a tributary of the Hawkesbury, about twelve miles out of Parramatta and seven from Windsor⁴¹—later to be known as Black Town. As early as May 1816 Macquarie contemplated settling natives at this place for on the 25th of that month his diary records the rewarding of Colebe, Tindall and Narragingy (Creek Jemmy) for services rendered in scouting for parties sent out after hostiles.

I also promised (Creek Jemmy) and his friend Colebe a grant of 30 acres of Land on the South Creek between them, as an additional reward for their fidelity to Government and their recent good conduct.⁴²

Creek Jemmy took the offered land and made some effort for a time.⁴³ As late as 1820 £7 was disbursed out of the Police Fund for a 'house' built for him⁴⁴ and in 1827 he still owned a herd bred from the cattle Macquarie had given him with the land.⁴⁵ But by this time Jemmy had given up the idea of work for the practice of employing a man to look after the cattle. He often asked Archdeacon Scott 'to Sell them for Money in order (to use his own Words) he may "Buy a long Coat and Cocked Hat, and be a Swell"'.⁴⁶

Early in the piece Creek Jemmy seems to have been joined by a few other 'settlers', including Colebe, although such behaviour was severely disapproved by most blacks.

Colebe was also granted thirty acres in the Bathurst district under a deed of grant dated 31 August 1819, which included the usual conditions concerning quit rent and cultivation.⁴⁷ It is virtually certain that Colebe forfeited his land by failing to col-