EBENEZER - A NEW SONG

Cultural interaction in the Wimmera, with particular reference to the Ebenezer Mission Station 1842 -1886

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This thesis is my own work containing, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material published or written by another person except as referred to in the text.

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ABBREVIATION

Victorian Public Records Office...............................................................V.P.R.O.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies...........................................A.I.A.S.

Australian Archives..............................................................................A.A.

Victorian Parliamentary Papers..........................................................V.P.P.

Board of Protection for the Aborigines...............................................B.P.A.
INTRODUCTION

Within a period of fifty years, the Aborigines of the Wimmera witnessed the initial European exploration into their territory in the late 1830s, witnessed and participated in first contacts with the Europeans in the early 1840s, saw the establishment of Ebenezer Mission Station at the beginning of 1859, entered into the spiritual successes of the mission in the 1860s, and in the late 1870s became instrumental in the mission’s change of emphasis to a more secular approach. This thesis will explore the process of European and Aboriginal cultural interaction in terms of individual human experience; focusing at the cultural boundary between the two groups from 1842 to 1886.

Although my main focal point will be the Ebenezer Mission Station, which was established in 1859 and closed down in 1903, I will be placing the subject within a wider context of time and space. The origin of Ebenezer is related to the attitudes and experiences of a number of squatters who settled in the Wimmera in the early 1840s, and who became influential in the establishment of the mission. It is important to look at the process of individual European/Aboriginal interaction in those early years, because it helps us to understand the change in attitudes that occurred on both sides of the cultural boundary. The patterns of change fall into three distinct periods. Firstly, the early 1840s to the late 1850s, characterized by physical confrontation, not only between European and Aboriginal, but also amongst Europeans. Secondly, from the late 1850s to the late 1870s, when the missionaries sought the spiritual conversion of the Aborigines, and thirdly, the late 1870s to the late 1880s, which saw the Aborigines turning to advantage, the secular skills taught them by the missionaries throughout those early years.
Aldo Massola in Aboriginal Mission Stations in Victoria, briefly described the day-to-day activities of the Ebenezer mission station. The source material however - some of which Massola did not use - lends itself to a more in depth study of individual human experience in contact situations. As well, the individual squatters, Aborigines and missionaries, whose lives were interwoven with the history of Ebenezer throughout these three periods, offers rich source material from which changes in individuals and attitudes of mind can be observed.

Two historical methods have been of significant help in writing this thesis. Marc Bloch’s method of ‘mentalities’ has helped me to understand the general mentalities of the period under study. Bloch believed that men’s ideas, beliefs and fears were just as important as his material, economic, and political needs. Bloch’s Feudal Society and Strange Defeat, give interesting insights into people’s belief systems and attitudes. The second historical method was E. P. Thompson’s analysis of the moral economy of the English crowd in eighteenth century England. Thompson looked behind the general term of ‘crowd’ and analysed the underlying individual motives and grievances. This thesis will look behind the collective terms, squatter, missionary and Aborigine, and examine the motives, beliefs and changing attitudes of a number of principal individuals to achieve a greater insight into the historical process of cultural interaction in the Wimmera.
CHAPTER ONE: FIRST ENCOUNTERS

In the province of the mind, what one believes to be true is true or becomes true, within certain limits to be found experientially and experimentally. These limits are further beliefs to be transcended. In the mind there are no limits.

(John C. Lilly, M.D.)

Horatio Cockburn Ellerman, the leading patron of the Ebenezer Mission Station, had at one time taken part in punitive expeditions against the Wotjobaluk ‘Nation’. In 1842, Ellerman was a raw youth of sixteen years of age when he went ‘up country’ with another sixteen year old - James Monckton Darlot. Samuel Carter recalls how his father Charles had accompanied Ellerman and Darlot inland, leaving them at Longerenong, a run just west of present-day Horsham, and finally settling at North Brighton, the adjoining run in a westerly direction. The group’s first experience of contact with the Aborigines happened in August 1842. After searching for a crossing over the Wimmera River, they saw two Aborigines on the other side. Samuel, a young boy at the time, recalls how the Aborigines did not at first see them, ‘but when they did, they picked up their spears, evidently intending to throw them’. It was young Ellerman who wanted to act first and ask questions later. Samuel states how

Mr Ellerman pointed his gun at them and one black got behind the other. He wished to fire, as his gun was only loaded with small shot; but we would not let him, thinking it was best to try and get on friendly terms with the natives.

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1 A.W. Howitt used the term, ‘nation’ to describe tribes, which seemed to recognize some relationship amongst themselves. He identified the Wotjobaluk as the principal tribe of the Wotjo nation and included the Jaːdwa to the south.

The above incident is an example of the diversity of action, ranging from thoughtful to impulsive in the face of cultural confrontation. Both the Aborigines and Ellerman reacted in the face of danger, while Charles Carter, a man with family responsibilities, obviously thought through the consequences of rash action; realising that their small group would need help, not hindrance from the Aborigines in such a remote district. There were many such complex cultural interactions in the Wimmera. In some instances, friendships were forged between Aborigine and European right from the outset, while in other contact situations aggression was seen as the only option for survival. There were however, points of tension in most European/Aboriginal interaction, which more often than not saw a deterioration in relationships. It was only after the tensions and anxieties of culture contact had subsided that some Aborigines and Europeans developed a measure of understanding for each other’s ways. It must be stressed however, that there is no evidence of a pattern, which shows friendly, then aggressive, then once again friendly relations between the two groups. Both amicable and aggressive behaviour were to continue between the settlers and the Aborigines throughout the period under study, in one form or another. W. Kerley stated in his thesis on race relations in the Portland-Warrnambool District, that the history of contact between the races was not a sequential development over time. He looked for a ‘variety of situations occurring together in a particular locality’, and believed that Aborigines in different areas of Victoria reacted in a variety of ways to European invasion of their territory.\(^3\) Frontier contacts in the Wimmera were also varied and complex. The complexity of human interaction and experience in the Wimmera calls into question assertions like M. F.

Christie’s, that there was ‘a deliberate attempt on the part of the pastoralist to exterminate...’ the Aborigines of Victoria.\textsuperscript{4} As well, Christie’s statement does not further our understanding of human behaviour, or the historical process involved. It is only by looking at specific actions and reactions of individuals, that we can tease out human emotions and motives, and perhaps achieve a better understanding of race-relations.

When Ellerman, Carter and Darlot went into the Wimmera in 1842, the Aborigines were still present in large numbers. As Peter Corriss points out, the Wimmera was settled later than the Western and Port Phillip Districts, and because settlement was ‘less intensive’, the Aborigines were ‘less rapidly dispersed’.\textsuperscript{5} Therefore in numerical terms, the Aborigines were in a much stronger position than the small groups of Europeans invading the district in the first two years of settlement. Furthermore, the Europeans had to cope with cultural contact in unfamiliar territory, and had at times to rely heavily on Aboriginal help in finding their way through alien territory. A prospective squatter could either tread cautiously and seek help from the Aborigines, or like Ellerman risk being killed by taking an aggressive stance. Taking a stance was an important aspect of race-relations, and adopting a stance of bravery in the face of danger could at times overcome the element of fear. Fear was the most significant factor operating in the minds of men during those early years of settlement. Never being fully confident that one could predict the behaviour of one’s contact, would no doubt cause both the squatter and the Aborigine to be constantly on guard.

\textsuperscript{4} M. F. Christie, \textit{Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86}, p.1.
\textsuperscript{5} P. Corriss, \textit{Aborigines and Europeans in Western Victoria}, p. 25.
It was through the cautious behaviour of Charles Carter that he; Darlot and Ellerman were given ‘a great deal of information’ by the first two Aborigines they confronted. The Aborigines also showed the group where they could ford the river and ‘get pine logs to build a house’.  

Carter’s gratitude to the Aborigines for their assistance did not however deter him from building a ‘fortified’ hut in case of Aboriginal aggression. As Carter stated, ‘there was no police protection in those days’ therefore the ‘squatters had to protect themselves’. Carter believed that it ‘was never safe to move from the house without a double-barrelled gun, as the natives might sneak up on you at any moment’.  

James Maxell Clow, one of the first Europeans to settle in the Lake Hindmarsh area, must have also adopted a more cautious approach in making Aboriginal contacts. Some of the Aborigines from the Lake Hindmarsh tribe helped Clow to drive his stock into the area and on the journey found water for them. Clow commented that

‘it obtained for us a friendly reception from the aborigines of this isolated tract...[and]...For months afterwards it existed, until the overseer, one night about eleven o’clock, fired at what he supposed to be a wild dog rushing the sheep in the yard, but which unfortunately turned out to be a blackfellow.’

The tenuousness of frontier relations would have promoted a state of anxiety in the squatters and the Aborigines, thus neither group could relax their guard.

One confrontation between black and white is worth recording in depth, because it demonstrates the complexities involved in human emotions and interaction.

Robert William von Stieglitz, who at some stage occupied territory at Lake

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Hindmarsh, tells how he had tracked down a ‘large number’ of Aborigines who, he said, had stolen his brother’s sheep. He stated that

as they did not run off quickly, I fired a charge of shot at one I knew to be a stranger. To my horror he fell, but rose and made off. As he was about 90 yards off, I knew I could not have hurt him much, but at first feared I had in mistake fired the barrel loaded with ball. They all then made off, dropping their spears as we pushed them close, our object being to frighten them, as nothing but fear has any effect. As one got to the side of the river, which was almost hidden by scrub, he turned round and raised his spear to throw at me. I was about 40 yards from him, and knew, if I hesitated, he would probably spear me; so I put on extra steam and, with gun raised, rushed him, when he disappeared in a moment. They have the power of becoming invisible even in grass not 1 foot high.

Stieglitz collected the weapons that the Aborigines had dropped, and a week later one of the group returned and managed to regain the weapons. Stieglitz continues..

I picked up a small pistol (we always had arms ready loaded) and pursued the man, who was so loaded as to be unable to run fast. When he saw me he stopped and showed fight. He threw down all the weapons he had, except a sort of club in shape like an L, a very dangerous weapon at close quarters and much surer than my little pistol, which was only the length of my finger. I knew there would be more danger in turning than in rushing on, so, trusting to my own strength and the general timidity of the blacks, I ran at him as fast as I could, when he dropped his weapon and ran off.9

The incident reveals not only the fear of combat in both men, and the fear of losing the advantage, but also horror on Stieglitz’s part that he might actually have killed a man. Stieglitz also feared that his pistol would fail to fire, and showed fear at the

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capabilities of Aboriginal weapons. As well, the Aborigine’s adeptness in the bush gave him the advantage of taking cover, leaving Stieglitz in view, and vulnerable.

However, in spite of the ever-present element of fear of Aboriginal aggression, the voracious propensity of the Europeans to accumulate as much land as possible, overcame any tendencies towards restraint. In his pursuit to acquire land, he contended with Aborigine and European alike. New arrivals into the Wimmera would often claim parts of earlier settlers runs, which sometimes led to court battles. As well, the opportunity of making large profits on land was another incentive to proceed against all odds. For example, in 1842 the Decameron run was sold to James Allan Cameron for £1,500, who later sold it to Charles Williamson for £30,000.\textsuperscript{10} It was the Wimmera area, which produced Australia’s first millionaire - William J. T. Clarke. Clarke was said to have been ‘shrewd in speculations in land, and ruthless in its acquisition.’\textsuperscript{11} Thus the European belief in progress and accumulation was one of the main driving forces in relentless pursuit of land.

As more intense settlement occurred, squatters became more assertive in their approach to any sign of Aboriginal aggression, and in 1844 at the peak of the European invasion into the Wimmera, physical conflicts flared up between the two groups. But despite the rise in aggressive behaviour emanating from both sides of the cultural boundary, an outright state of war did not exist. During the winters of 1844-5, while some Aborigines increased their attacks on stock, there were others who maintained amicable relations with squatters and were reported working on a number of runs. Retaliatory action by squatters to sheep stealing, or other forms of aggression,

\textsuperscript{11} ibid., p. 277.
usually involved small groups of squatters banding together to track down the
offenders. Squatters were reacting to specific incidents, rather than participating in a
general strategy of extermination. One such group involved Ellerman, Darlot, Mills
and McPherson. They tracked a number of Aborigines for two days in pursuit of
Messrs. Brodie and Cruikshank’s sheep and found them in a ‘gum scrub’ near Mr
Baillie’s station at Polkemet. The Aborigines had killed ten sheep and carried the
carcasses away ‘breaking the legs of those left behind alive’. This says Taylor ‘was
their usual plan to prevent the sheep straying, and at the same time annoy the
settlers’.\textsuperscript{12} Breaking the legs of sheep, if it was intended to annoy the settlers, had the
desired effect.

On the 20 May 1845, twelve squatters signed a memorial addressed to Charles
La Trobe, asking for police protection, because of a spate of Aboriginal attacks on
their sheep. Darlot, Taylor, McPherson and the Wilson brothers were five of the
twelve who signed the petition probably because they were at the time, managers and
not owners of their runs. The squatters claimed that Messrs. Baillie, Hamilton, Brodie
and Cruikshank had lost 1,500 sheep and lambs and Mr Patterson had lost forty sheep.
Furthermore, the squatters, claimed that because of the nature of the country, they
were prevented from recovering the sheep, because the Aborigines drove them into
the ‘almost impenetrable scrub, termed by the Natives “Mallee”’.\textsuperscript{13} The Mallee Scrub
and Mount Arapile were ideal terrain for Aborigines with stolen sheep.\textsuperscript{14} Aborigines
used their intimate knowledge of the land to effect, and often outwitted the squatters.

\textsuperscript{12} T. F. Bride (ed.), \textit{Letters from Victorian Pioneers}, p.309.
\textsuperscript{13} Memorial to Charles La Trobe, 20 May 1845, Superintendent’s inward
correspondence, Series 18, 1839-1851, Public Records Office, Laverton.
\textsuperscript{14} T. F. Bride (ed.), \textit{Letters from Victorian Pioneers}, p. 320.
Carter recalls how the Aborigines used to steal sheep from D. C. Simpson of ‘Glenisla’ firing the country after them to avoid their tracks being seen.\textsuperscript{15}

Aboriginal aggressions challenged the notion of European superiority, and the mode adopted by the Aborigines in maiming sheep must have shocked and outraged European sensibilities. From the European point of view ‘the sight of the poor suffering animal’s’ was ‘most heartrending’.\textsuperscript{16} And from the Aboriginal point of view, as one squatter sensitively put it

\begin{quote}
The diplomists of their tribes may even perhaps have pleaded justification - that their kangaroos and emus were driven away by the flocks and herds of the settlers - for reprisals upon an invading enemy, stimulating a sort of guerrilla warfare.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

‘A sort of guerrilla warfare’ was not playing the game by European rules of warfare. But the Aborigines also had to contend with a new type of warfare. Traditionally, Aborigines limited reprisals to suit the crime, therefore rumours of mass reprisals whether they be true or false, would have caused confusion in the Aboriginal camp, and as Henry Reynolds says ‘promoted caution’.\textsuperscript{18}

Threats to one’s life, whether it be imagined or not would lead men to maintain the advantage over their opponent. Thus it was in 1844, Ellerman strived to maintain the advantage over Jim Crow, an Aboriginal who had threatened to take Ellerman’s life. According to Peter Bennett, a Native Police sergeant, Jim Crow had attacked Ellerman’s dray in February 1844. Jim Crow was said to have taken a bag of sugar, and ‘threatened the bullock driver to take his life if he told his master who had

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{15} S. Carter, \textit{Reminiscences of the Early Days of the Wimmera}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{16} Memorial to La Trobe, 20 May 1845, V.P.R.O., Series 19, 1839-1851.
\textsuperscript{17} T. F. Bride (ed.), \textit{Letters from Victorian Pioneers}, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{18} H. Reynolds, \textit{The Other Side of the Frontier}, p. 60.
\end{quote}
taken the sugar’. A warrant says Bennett was issued for Jim Crow’s arrest, but was never executed. On the 17th October 1844, Ellerman applied for a further warrant for Jim Crow’s arrest, because says the Crown Prosecutor James Croke, Ellerman was under ‘a nervous apprehension of his life having been threatened by Jim Crow’. The Native Police had responded to the squatters’ reports of Aboriginal aggression in the area and arrived in the Wimmera on 12th of October. It had been reported that Brodie and Cruikshank’s shepherd had been attacked, and that sheep had been stolen. But on investigation the police found it to be a ‘false report’. The sheep had not been stolen, but had in fact joined another flock. On the 17th of October, the police received reports that McPherson’s shepherd, and hut-keeper had been speared by Aborigines and a quantity of sheep stolen. Bennett stated that he

> Found the report in a great measure to be false, as the only aggression made was, that four blacks had thrown some spears at a shepherd and tried to get some sheep away but did not succeed, also Mr Ellerman had gone...for a party of Border Police.  

Ellerman was once again reacting impulsively in a threatening situation, but by 1844 the squatters had recourse to lawful means of pursuit and could engage the police to track down any would-be aggressors. Ellerman’s rash action in calling on the Border Police, suggests that he was dissatisfied with the way in which the Native Police were dealing with the incidents, and was determined to gain satisfaction at all costs. Although it does seem that Ellerman in this instance did have the foresight not to become personally involved in tracking down his adversary, which shows a slight change in his approach to the Aborigines.

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19 Superintendent’s inward correspondence, V.P.R.O. Series 18, 1839-1851.
The Border Police tracked down Charley, Jim Crow’s partner in crime, who, with other Aborigines ‘began immediately to throw their spears’, and in the process one of the troopers shot Charley. Sergeant Daplin then solicited the help of an Aborigine named Jacky Jacky to help track down Jim Crow, and later found Jim Crow alone. When asked to lay down his spear, Jim Crow defiantly stood his ground threatening to ‘throw at the first person who should attempt to take him’, and says Daplin, ‘he said he would Kill the B...w...f.’ Daplin then ordered his men to charge Jim Crow, but they refused, because they believed that one of them would be speared. It appears that Daplin had two options at this point, he could either charge Jim Crow himself, or retreat. His solution to the problem was simple - ‘I ordered the party to fire’ said Daplin ‘which they did, and trooper Sparrow shot him’. The solution may have been simple, but the reasoning was complex.

Daplin had waited three quarters of an hour for Jim Crow to lay down his spear, and he reasoned that they were thirty miles from any station and it was getting dark, as well, Daplin believed that the ‘lives of the party and their horses were in danger’. But the general belief that one would lose face if one showed weakness in the face of danger would have also influenced Daplin’s action. D. C. Cameron, a squatter involved in the incident touches on the underlying beliefs and fears operating in the minds of the squatters in the area, when, in his official statement he said that he firmly believed that it was the Aborigines

solemn determination to murder Mr Ellerman, that it is also their intention to murder all the settlers in this quarter, and carry off all the stock belonging to them, which plan they can easily accomplish on the fall of the Rivers and Creeks, and by calling to their assistance immense numbers of Natives, at the

20 Superintendent’s inward correspondence, V.P.R.O. Series 18, 1839-1851.
present down the River, which the settlers have never seen, nor known anything of - Besides the above statement made by themselves there is much to apprehend from them in future, in consequence of Mr Bennett not having captured ‘Jim Crow’ though conversing with him in company with others, and allowing him to escape..

Bennett had also allowed other Aborigines to threaten him without letting them know that ‘it was in his power to render their menaces abortive’. Cameron went on to say that until now they had lived on ‘amicable terms’ with the Aborigines, but the squatters had now ‘aggrieved them’ by accompanying the Police to the Aborigines mia mias to search for evidence of stolen sheep.\(^{21}\)

Cameron expresses a great deal of resentment against Bennett’s inability to settle the dispute in a manner, which would satisfy both the squatters and the Aborigines. Saving face and maintaining one’s dignity were obviously important to both black and white, and Cameron seems to recognize the importance of maintaining friendly relations with the Aborigines. If Bennett had captured Jim Crow and had not lost face by letting him escape, the matter may have ended on amicable terms for both sides. As it turned out Bennett lost the advantage, and the squatters were left with the guilt of Jim Crow and Charley’s death. The Aborigines threat that they could call on ‘immense’ numbers of other Aborigines suggests that they were losing the power of numbers. There may have been a growing realisation on the part of the Aborigines that they were gradually being outnumbered, and the only stance of aggression that they could resort to was to threaten the squatters with rumours of ‘unseen’ numbers of what was known in those days as ‘wild blacks’. Thus taking a ‘stance’ was still a successful method of overcoming fear. The squatters were still vulnerable to bluff either from the threat of numbers or lone Aborigines like Jim Crow.

\(^{21}\) Superintendent’s inward correspondence, V.P.R.O. Series 18, 1839-1851
By the end of 1845, incidents of Aboriginal aggression had subsided, and G. A. Robinson, the Chief Protector of the Aborigines, reported that he was glad to find that a disposition for employing the natives was becoming more general among the settlers and a better tone of feeling was apparent.22

There had always been a need to employ Aborigines on the stations, because of the scarcity and high cost of labour in the Wimmera, but it does appear that once the general fear of aggression had diminished, both the Aborigine and the squatter could afford to relax their guard and come to terms with each other’s ways. Edward Bell expressed the uncertainty in race-relations when he commented ‘Whether it was fear or a better acquaintance with us which worked upon them, it is difficult to say’ because the Aborigines ‘commenced to come about, and offer to strip bark and make themselves useful.’23

In most accounts on race-relations, the squatters nearly always refer to the diminishing numbers of Aborigines, almost unconsciously linking the subsidence of frontier aggression with the decline in Aboriginal numbers. Death by violence and disease had, as in other parts of Australia, taken their toll on the Aborigines of the Wimmera, thus with the increase of European settlement in the district, the settlers now had the security of numbers. As well, they had the opportunity of securing a fourteen-year lease over their runs, which would have added to their sense of well-being. With the threats from both sides of the cultural boundary lessening in intensity, emotions, which made men, react rather than act - such as feelings of fear, anger and

insecurity - also declined. By the late 1840s, squatters like, Darlot, Carter, Ellerman, and the Wilson brothers, would have felt more secure on their stations, and could now afford to adopt a more paternalistic approach to the Aborigines. In 1859, the above men were influential in establishing and supporting the Ebenezer Mission Station. A view that squatters were predisposed to exterminate the Aborigines, does not allow us to understand what drives men to take an aggressive stance, nor does it reveal the complexities of human experience, and the life process which can sometimes change prevailing attitudes.

Ellerman, who was to become the leading patron of Ebenezer, was said to have devoted his life to church work ‘as an act of thanksgiving’ for the recovery of his neighbour McPherson, whom Ellerman had accidentally wounded while out on a punitive expedition in the late 1840s. In 1846, Ellerman occupied the country of Kupan-Kupan-barap, and incorporated it into the Antwerp station, named after Ellerman’s birthplace in Belgium. It is reported that Ellerman took part in a punitive expedition at Antwerp, known to the Aborigines as Banu Bonyit. In the fracas that ensued, an Aboriginal woman was killed, leaving a small boy clinging to the neck of the dead woman. Ellerman ‘appropriated the child and brought him to his home; and from about this time his attitude to the Aborigines underwent a change for the better’. With the advance of “civilization” into the Wimmera, Ellerman had had the luxury of distancing himself from Jim Crow and Charley’s death, leaving the Border Police to bear the responsibility. But in the last incident involving the near-fatal accident of McPherson, Ellerman had to bear the full impact of personal involvement.

and it does seem that both the above incidents did have a profound effect on Ellerman. Ellerman’s devotion to church life and his involvement with the young Aboriginal boy were instrumental to the successful establishment of Ebenezer Mission Station.
CHAPTER TWO: SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE

Custom is a collective dream, the Law
A lion chained and set to keep the door
But if the lion roars or I should wake
The door flies wide: in glides a mighty snake.
Crushed in those folds I plead to sleep again
And dream once more, but plead in vain

(A. D. Hope)

The ‘collective dream, the Law’ - or the cultural belief system of the Wotjobaluk ‘Nation’ came under threat in 1859 from the Moravian Missionaries at Ebenezer. The elders of the tribe resisted the missionaries’ approaches and sought to retain control over the young men of the tribe. Reverend F. W. Spieseke described the situation as ‘a fight, or struggle between light and darkness’. An earlier attempt by the Moravians, to convert the Aborigines in the North of Victoria failed. However, the second mission was more successful, in that the Moravians managed to break through the cultural belief system of the Wotjobaluks. With the practical support of a number of Europeans, the missionaries managed to secure an ideal site for the mission. Horatio Cockburn Ellerman played a principal role in the process, which led to the establishment of the mission, and to it being publicly acclaimed a success. But if one is to measure success by the effective influence of one group upon the other, the Aborigines of the Wimmera also had an effective influence on the missionaries.

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1 A. W. Howitt used the term ‘nation’ to describe tribes, which seemed to recognize some relationship amongst themselves. He identified the Wotjobaluk as the principal tribe of the Wotjo nation and included the Ja : dwa to the south

In 1850, Reverend F. W. Spieseke and the Reverend Mr Treager established their first mission at Lake Boga - just north of Kerang in Victoria. The failure of the mission was attributed to the bad influence of the Europeans on the Aborigines during the gold rush era, the lack of support from neighbouring squatters, and the rumours that the missionaries ‘intended to trap and destroy the blacks’. Those were the public reasons for failure. However, the Aborigines were not attracted to Christianity, as the missionaries declared ‘Their object in coming to us...is only to obtain food’, and when telling them of ‘a Saviour’s love’, the Aborigines turn the conversation to food, tobacco and goods. ‘If you will give us tobacco’, said the Aborigines, ‘you are good; otherwise you may go’. The Moravians went on to say

Those blacks who assist in our work, take great interest in our Sundays and Festivals, but only, I am sorry to say, because on those days they get their food without having to work for it.

In 1856, Treager and Spieseke abandoned the mission ‘without obtaining in a single instance the object of their labours - that of winning souls to Christ’. In 1858, Spieseke returned to Australia, accompanied by the Reverend F. A. Hagenauer, and once more attempted to convert the Aborigines - choosing a site near Lake Hindmarsh in the Wimmera as a more favourable spot. It was Ellerman, who helped the two missionaries to choose the site for the mission.

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3 Missionary Success among the Aborigines, Melbourne, 1860, p. 3.
4 Moravian Mission, First Paper, p. 3.
5 Notes on the Moravian Mission to Australia, copied from the Moravians’ Notes and Journals, 1879, pp.18-19
6 ibid., p.19.
7 ibid., p.23.
By 1858, Ellerman was a married man of thirty-two, and a devout Christian. George Everard recalls how he met Ellerman in 1857 while ‘up country’ looking for work. Ellerman invited Everard to breakfast at the station and

after a good meal - he was required to accompany his host into the parlour, and then for about an hour to listen to a lot of extempore prays and sermonette.\(^8\)

Thus, by 1858 when the Moravians arrived in Ellerman’s district, Ellerman was no longer the young ‘hot-head’ of the early days, but was now a mature man, with family responsibilities. Moreover, his attitude towards the Aborigines was now one of sympathy.

Spieseke, who was to remain in charge of Ebenezer until 1876 - Hagenauer left Ebenezer in 1862 to establish Ramahyuck station in Gippsland - would also have changed. Spieseke now had the benefit of experience on this, his second mission to Australia. Like Ellerman, he too had been a young man when he first encountered the Aborigines of Victoria. But the difference was, that Spieseke had gone into their world to learn, and not just to teach. On his first trip, he and Treager made a valiant attempt to learn the Aboriginal dialects in the Lake Boga area. They had collected about ‘twelve hundred words’ from the Aborigines. Their motive in learning the Aboriginal dialects was of course to translate the Scriptures.\(^9\) But the very act of learning a foreign language involves the student in another cultural world, and would no doubt add a different level of awareness to the participant’s world-view. The two missionaries had found the Aboriginal languages, more interesting than ‘any other European tongue’ and had never thought that the language ‘had been so rich..\(^{10}\)

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\(^8\) K. L. Chappel Notes on West Wimmera: 1845-1885, p. 7.
\(^9\) Argus, 2 July 1851, p. 2.
\(^{10}\) ibid.
Spieseke retained his interest in the Aboriginal languages. During his second missionary endeavour, he commented

> The great variety of dialects, and even languages, to be found amongst them is a puzzle to me.\(^1\)

Spieseke had entered further into the Aboriginal world on his first missionary trip. He had become ‘gradually familiar’ with one ‘particular’ Aborigine, and in the process, had learnt ‘some of their superstitious creeds’.\(^2\) So by the time Spieseke met up with Ellerman in the Wimmera in the late 1850s, both men had been influenced by the Aborigines, and perhaps because of their earlier experiences, had developed a better understanding towards them.

> The Moravians spoke highly of Ellerman, and lived with the Ellerman family for a number of months, while waiting for the government to make a decision on their land application. The missionaries reported how the Ellerman’s

> had always interested themselves greatly in the Aborigines, and were keenly desirous of assisting the Missionaries to the utmost of their power.\(^3\)

In choosing a suitable site for the mission, Ellerman had taken the missionaries to a number of sites; finally convincing them to settle near Lake Hindmarsh. Ellerman believed that the site was the

> one best suited, both on account of the number of blacks still remaining about here, and the distance from public-houses and

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2. Argus, 2 July 1851, p. 2.
3. Moravian Notes, p. 29.
the township...[which]...had kept them free from the vice of drunkenness...[and]...this neighbourhood too being blest with many God-fearing people, whose prayers and sympathies would considerably strengthen the hands of God’s servants.14

The missionaries had reason to be grateful to Ellerman and his neighbours in securing land for the mission station. It is interesting to note at this point that some of Ellerman’s neighbours were ‘the same who originally took up the country’, and like Ellerman, had now changed their attitudes towards the Aborigines.15

Governor Barkly found that his ministers were reluctant to grant land for an Aboriginal station. The missionaries had asked for twenty square miles, and Sir Henry suggested that a much smaller area ‘could be obtained voluntarily from the surrounding squatters’.16 So accordingly, he took advantage of the visit to town of Mr Ellerman, and convened a meeting involving Ellerman, Hagenauer, Spieseke and the Reverend S. L. Chase. It was decided at the meeting that ‘a square mile on each of the four Conterminous Runs near Mt Zero should be applied for..’.17 The government finally granted ‘about 260 acres’, and it was Ellerman who added to this, and induced ‘two neighbouring settlers’ to do the same.18 Significantly, Ellerman’s donation of land was to become instrumental in making the mission a success.

The Aboriginal name for the area of land donated by Ellerman, which became the site of the Ebenezer mission station, was Banu Bonvit, and happened to be a favourite Aboriginal corroboree ground. Ellerman must have witnessed their large

14 H. C. Ellerman to Peter La Trobe, 2 Dec 1859. Moravian Mission in Australia Correspondence, A.I.A.S., M.F. 163-188.
15 Moravian Missions, First Paper, p. 4.
16 Sir Henry Barkly to Peter La Trobe, 2 Feb 1859, A.I.A.S., M.F. 163-188.
17 Ibid.
18 Moravian Notes, p. 31.
gatherings, and was aware that the Aborigines were frequently attracted to the area. But whether he understood the significance of their meetings remains doubtful. During the missionaries first year of residency at Banu Bonyit, they observed with a great deal of frustration, the movements of the Aborigines. As Ellerman noted

This roaming propensity clings to him, even when abundance of food and the comforts of a home are inducements and thus it is, that while a few weeks or months may witness a large number at the Station they soon depart, carrying their worldly goods on their backs.\textsuperscript{19}

Throughout that first year however, there were several youths who had been attracted to the mission, staying for longer periods than the rest.

The mission was named Ebenezer (meaning - stones of peace) and the mission school opened on 17\textsuperscript{th} January 1859, in a hut donated by Ellerman. A youth by the name of Bony was the missionaries’ first pupil, and on the following day, he was joined by two other youths Tallyho and Corny. Jacky Jacky and Brown also attended the station on and off. But it was Bony’s brother Pepper, who played the most significant role in establishing the mission as a success in the eyes of the public, by becoming the missionaries’ first convert. The conversion of Pepper, was said to have ‘excited deep interest in the Colony’,\textsuperscript{20} and Pepper was seen as a ‘most valuable agent in the mission field’.\textsuperscript{21}

Why the Aboriginal elders allowed the young men to remain at Ebenezer is uncertain, but it does appear that they were allowed to stay. Objections by the elders

\textsuperscript{19} Ellerman to Peter La Trobe, 2 Dec 1859, A.I.A.S., M.F. 163-188.
\textsuperscript{20} Moravian Notes, p. 51.
were raised, only after Hagenauer in Sept 1859, refused to allow another young man to seek refuge at the mission. The youth had fled from his tribe on the South West boundary of Victoria. Hagenauer’s refusal, ‘gave great offence to the blacks’, and during the night Tallyho, Pepper and Bony were ‘compelled to leave their hut,... and all the clothing they possessed had been divided amongst the people’.  

Hagenauer invited the Aborigines to church the following day, and was faced with the retort ‘Pray, tomorrow’, he saw the incident as a ‘revolution’, and fearful that the Aborigines ‘might go on to do further mischief’, he retired to his hut to pray. Hagenauer was the ‘only white man’ there at the time, so one can imagine his relief when Ellerman unexpectedly paid a visit to the station. Ellerman usually stayed at home on Sunday afternoon with his family, but having ‘no rest in his spirit, and feeling a strong impulse to visit the Mission Station’, he arrived to find the Aborigines in a most excited state, their bodies painted red and white, as when prepared for battle; and to all his reasoning with them, they only replied “No more prayer.” He could prevail nothing; but being a man greatly respected and even feared by the blacks, he ventured to bid Pepper and the boys go with him back to their hut, where he immediately united with them in prayer..

To ‘hear the voice of prayer in the boys’ hut, and to recognise the well-known voice of his friend’, gave Hagenauer ‘unspeakable joy’. The following day, Hagenauer had the satisfaction of refusing rations to the Aborigines when they applied for work; saying ‘Rations tomorrow’. Thus it was Ellerman, who, by taking a ‘stance’ with the

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22 Moravian Missions, First Paper, p.8.
23 ibid.
24 ibid.
25 ibid., p. 9.
Aborigines over the issue, managed to restore order for Hagenauer. Taking a ‘stance’ it seems, was still important in race-relations.

By November 1859 the majority of the Aborigines had once more left the station, and the missionaries noted that

after months of apparently fruitless effort they had still to question, “what impression our labours have thus made upon these minds we are utterly unable to tell.” ...they seemed to have no idea of renouncing their roaming life or their heathen practices.  

Even young Pepper, who had been seen as a promising Candidate for conversion, was ‘detected in gross misconduct’. Pepper was more than likely caught taking part in traditional Aboriginal ceremonies - seen by the missionaries as ‘heathen practices’.

However, the breakthrough by the missionaries into the Aboriginal ‘collective dream’, occurred on the 15 January 1860, a year after their arrival in the Wimmera, prompting Spieseke to declare

It was to me like a dream, and yet it was reality.

Spieseke had shown the young Aborigines thirty large Bible-pictures; noting how the pictures of ‘the deluge, and the Saviour in his agony in Gethsemane, were particular objects of attraction’. Afterwards, he ‘spoke at some length of our Saviour’s wrestling in the garden for us’. A few days later Pepper approached Spieseke and said that he wanted to speak to him about his ‘state’, saying

O, I do not know how I feel, I have wept for my sins...I have thought, and have thought - I have thought about how our Saviour that night went into the garden, and prayed there till

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26 Moravian Notes, pp. 31, 38.
27 ibid., p. 38.
28 Missionary Success among the Aborigines, Melbourne, 1860, p. 5.
the sweat came down from him like drops of blood, and that for me.

Spieseke ‘spoke with him, prayed with him, wept, shook hands and parted’, seeing the incident as a ‘dream’.

How I felt and how I spent that night I cannot tell...[said Spieseke]...I was afraid at the thought, how this tender plant of Divine grace is exposed to so much than can hinder the growth thereof, how old customs, flesh, the still wicked heart, the world, and what therein is – how all this will strive to get the upper hand, and check this plant in its first bud, and springing up. I was afraid. I wanted to go after him, and speak more to him, but I did not, and gave him over in my humble prayer into the careful hand of the Heavenly Gardener.29

Pepper’s attraction to Christianity may be seen in terms of a young man breaking away from the restraints of traditional life, and choosing perhaps, a less rigorous form of initiation into manhood.30 But there were possibly other factors at work in Pepper’s conversion.

The young Aborigines may have seen attractive similarities between their own traditional belief system and the Christian belief system. In 1904, A. W. Howitt recorded an Aboriginal ‘deluge’ myth in the Wimmera, which left ‘one man and two or three women’ alive.31 As well, the Moravians had also recorded an Aboriginal ‘deluge’ myth, in which ‘two brothers and one woman had escaped’.32 The Moravians, and in particular Spieseke, had recorded a number of Aboriginal myths which bore

29 Missionary Success among the Aborigines, Melbourne, 1860, pp. 4-5.
30 Hagenauer witnessed an initiation ceremony in the Wimmera in 1859, and noted the Aboriginal custom of knocking out the two front teeth of youths during the process of initiation. Hagenauer Papers, ‘Notes of a Missionary Journey to North Queensland, 1885’, p. 31.
32 Moravian Notes, p. 54.
similarities to many biblical stories. They had found that ‘the most striking among their vague traditions’ as they called them, was ‘the theory of a Trinity of Divine Beings, The Father, the Son and His Brother’. It may be, that the myths were of Christian origin, passed on by word of mouth from other areas, and adapted into the Aboriginal mythology of the Wimmera Aborigines. However, it is not the origins of myths which should excite our curiosity, but their use. The very act of interpreting another’s cultural belief system would in essence change the structure of the belief. New myths would be internalized by the Aborigines and adapted to suit their own cultural world-view. To the Aborigine, the story of the ‘deluge’ may have meant something quite different from the traditional Christian interpretation. But it is the connecting of two belief systems, which is important in human interactions. Pepper may have connected the image of Jesus sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane with traditional Aboriginal bloodletting rituals. Blood is seen as symbolically sacred in many religions, as it is in a number of the Aboriginal religions. The Moravians emphasized the sacredness of Christ’s blood in the Christian religion; teaching the Aborigines how Christ shed his blood and died for mankind. One of the hymns the missionaries taught the Aborigines was

Jesus is our highest good; He has saved us by his blood.. But the young Aborigines at Ebenezer did not fully share in the Christian ‘dreaming’ until Hagenauer told them about the dream experience of a young

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33 Moravian Notes, p. 54.
35 Moravian Missions, First Paper, p. 11.
36 J. Campbell, Myths to Live By, p. 12.
Aboriginal boy named Willie Wimmera. The history of Willie Wimmera - which recorded Willie’s dream - was published in England in a small booklet, from the notes of the Reverend S. L. Chase. Willie Wimmera’s story was to become, as Hagenauer stated ‘a mysterious beginning to a mission’.

Willie was the small boy taken from his dead mother by Ellerman at Banu Bonyit in 1846. The history of Willie tells how he went on a dray-ride to Melbourne sometime after his mother’s death, became lost, and finally ended up in the care of Chase. Finding Willie in Melbourne was seen as ‘the providence of God’, as he was ‘brought from the desert wilderness within the reach of Christian instruction’. Chase, who was about to make a return journey to England, wondered

- could this child be entirely separated from old associates, and brought to England to receive a Christian education, he might, by God’s blessing, hereafter return to Australia to teach his poor benighted people.

On the 1 April 1851, Willie set sail on a six months’ sea-trip to England with his new guardian. Willie was converted to Christianity, but died in London on 10 May 1852.

But that was not the end of the story, because Peter La Trobe, of the Moravian Board in London, gave a copy of Willie’s history to Hagenauer just before he and Spieseke embarked on their mission to Victoria in 1858

- thinking it would interest and perhaps encourage him - but little dreaming of how much interest it would by and bye become.

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37 Moravian Notes, p. 34.
38 A Short Memoir of William Wimmera, an Australian Boy, Cambridge, 1853, p. 12.
39 Moravian Notes, p. 32.
Willie’s history however, created much more than an ‘interest’ at Ebenezer, is caused a ‘sensation’.  

On 2 May 1860 the first anniversary of the mission, Hagenauer recalls how he sat in his room with Tallyho, Pepper, Mark and Corny reading

a chapter with Pepper, and after that...[he said]...I took William Wimmera’s history, and went over the dreams and pictures. The sensation among the boys I cannot describe. They exclaimed ‘Jim Crow’s’ mother was killed here at your place.’ Then they showed me the spot, about twenty or thirty yards from our hut, where the lubra was shot down, whilst crouching with other lubras and children amongst the thick scrub...

Hagenauer added

How secretly and how wonderfully the hand of Providence has overruled all things in our Mission work, in connection with the Australian boy, who longed to have these people to whom he belonged partakers of the grace of the Gospel. Nothing could have been further from our thought than to have settled down on our present site. We indeed tried to obtain other localities, but what was pure accident as regards man, brings us at last to settle down on ground made affecting by interesting connection with a child who was the first fruits unto God of this region.

On the evening of that day, one of the Missionaries it was reported, ‘planted a walnut tree, not many yards from his house’ on the spot where Willie’s mother had been shot.

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41 There are two ‘Jim Crows’ mentioned in this thesis, they are not however the same person. Jim Crow was a popular name among the Aborigines.

42 Moravian Missions, Second Paper, pp. 4-5.
There is another version of the above incident, which implicates Ellerman in the mystery. It states that Hagenauer captured the youths’ attention when he read out the words

“My country is the Wimmera, my master is Mr Ellerman and my mother was shot by a white man” - they all sprang up in great excitement, and one of them explained, “That was Jim Crow. I was with him when his mother fell dead, upon the ground. We were sitting with our mothers under those pine-trees, when the white man’s bullet killed his mother, and down there near the corner of the garden, is the place where she was buried. His old Father Dowler is outside in the Camp; that (pointing to one of the group) is his younger brother and we are all of us related to him.”

However, Ellerman is not mentioned in the published version of Willie’s history, from which Hagenauer said he read, but whatever the truth the effect was ‘sensational’. One can imagine a myth in the making as those four young boys sat listening intently to a man of a different race, from a different land, tell the fascinating story of Willie - a boy from their own area, who had not only travelled across the seas to another ‘world’, but who had also become part of the white man’s story-telling.

Considering the significance that dreams play in the Aboriginal world, it may not have been the co-incidental occurrences surrounding Willie’s history which captured the attention of the young Aborigines, but the re-telling of Willie’s dream experience. Willie had told his dream to a Mrs K., a friend of the Rev. Mr Chase. Mrs K. recalled Willie’s dream in a letter to Chase’s sister, and it was later recorded in the history of Willie. It was noted in Willie’s history, that on the voyage to England he had developed a fascination for the pictures of angels in Pilgrim’s Progress, lent to him by Chase. Willie had also taken a great interest in a young baby on the ship, and

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43 Moravian Notes, p. 34.
compared it to the angels in the book. His interest in pictures, led him to preferring the bible to children’s stories, which in turn led Willie to ‘manifesting a great interest in divine things’. Willie, it seems, ‘never wearied of talking of heaven, the angels, God, and the dear Saviour’. He told Mrs K. that he had seen angels like the ones in Pilgrim’s Progress. When asked where?, he stated

In heaven, I dream of heaven, I go there. I come to gate, great gate, angels - great, many angels come out to see me, - take me in..

After he had described to Mrs K. how the angels flew and what beautiful faces they had, he exclaimed ‘I see Jesus.’ Mrs K. asked how he knew it was Jesus, and she recalled ‘He looked almost surprised that I should ask.’

Glory, he said, waving his hand round his head, Oh great glory, light, light, glory...Jesus glory shine on me.

Willie also saw a house in heaven and when asked if the angels lived in it, Willie replied ‘No...they follow Jesus.’ He went on to declare that he saw hell. Mrs K. said ‘how dreadful’ it must have been, and asked him ‘how come you to see hell, when you were in heaven?’ Willie replied

Angels take me there, see hell, great fire, shocking devils! All red!

Mrs K. ‘shuddered’ at Willie’s description of hell, but Willie confidently declared that he wasn’t frightened because the angels took care of him.

In return Mrs K. told Willie how she had had a similar dream to his, where she had knelt at Christ’s feet. Willie retorted ‘it was ver beautiful...but your dream down here, this earth, my dream heaven!’ The two dream experiences strikingly reveal the difference between the Aboriginal ‘dreaming’ and the European attitude towards
dreams. Willie was there! He experienced heaven, while Mrs K. could only exclaim
‘Oh, how happy shall we be when we really go to heaven, when all this comes true.’
Mrs K. had to wait for her ‘dreaming’ to come true in a future life, while Willie it
seems, experienced heaven in the present. Aboriginal ‘Dreaming’ is experienced as
past, present and future or as ‘Everywhen’, so it is understandable that Pepper and
his friends would have been sensationally affected by Willie’s ‘dream’.

Three months after being told the story of Willie Wimmera and his dream,
‘one of that little group entered by Holy Baptism into Christ’s Church’, and Pepper,
baptised Nathaniel, ‘became in his Cousin Willie Wimmera’s stead - Christian
Evangelist to his heathen countrymen’. But more significantly, the ‘light’, the
religious ‘knowledge’, previously the privilege of the Aboriginal elders and the
initiated, now became a privilege of the young, and perhaps uninitiated. Spieseke
reported the Pepper’s ‘awakening’ had ‘stirred up’ many of the young Aborigines
who now ‘wish for the knowledge’. The missionaries noted that ‘many are waiting of
the great light in their hearts’, and that several of the young men had said ‘Oh, I wish
I could fell and know it as Pepper does, But I am stupid.’ It was the young men at
Ebenezer who, because of their attraction to the Christian religion, opened up the way
for further incursions into the Aboriginal belief system, by the missionaries.

44 A Short Memoir of William Wimmera, an Australian Boy, Cambridge, 1853,
46 Moravian Notes, p. 34.
The missionaries reported how

the Gospel had told only on the younger natives; the old seemed careless and the women seemed the most callous of all.\textsuperscript{48}

Old Billy had protested against the missionaries’ teachings, saying ‘Let us eat and drink and never mind these things.’\textsuperscript{49} On one occasion, the elders had fought for control over the young men, demanding that they leave the mission station and attend a corroboree. Spieseke saw the ‘quarrel’ as ‘a fight or struggle between light and darkness’.\textsuperscript{50} Old Bony, the father of young Bony and Tallyho was seen as the ringleader. A fight ensued and a young man named Brown stood up to the elders and

in a spirit of that of Peter, took his waddie, and used it like Peter when taking the sword and cutting of the ear of Malchus.\textsuperscript{51}

After much deliberation, it was decided that ‘some go, but come back soon’. The struggle between the young and old, led Spieseke to state that ‘A work of the Holy Spirit...[had]...begun among them.’\textsuperscript{52} It was however, the threat of death, which gained entry for the missionaries, into the hearts of the adult Aborigines.

In the early years of the mission, when the Aboriginal mortality rate was high, the missionaries worked with a sense of urgency, endeavouring to arouse the light of Christianity in the Aborigines before they died. For some of the Aborigines, the attraction of a heavenly life after death was the key into their belief system. The

\textsuperscript{48} Moravian Notes, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{49} Moravian Missions, Third Paper, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{50} Moravian Missions, First Paper, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{51} ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} ibid.
young men had for some time tried to convince the elders of the value of Christianity. But the old men it was stated would ‘not believe it’.  
Young Pepper managed to break through Old Man Paton’s resistance, when he told him ‘how Christ died for him’. Old Paton was known to be dying, and he exclaimed ‘That is just what I want.’ Spieseke believed that ‘a beam of light from above had penetrated the dark heart..’ of Paton. One wonders if Old Man Paton had taken the offer literally, and jumped at the opportunity to avoid death. The missionaries found it ‘impossible to give Paton the like amount of careful instruction antecedent to baptism...nor was it deemed necessary’. Paton was baptised on the 23 March 1862, and died on the 6 April 1862. The missionaries did not however baptise candidates unless they were quite confident that the ‘light’ had penetrated their soul. Therefore, a testing period was seen as essential. It was noted by the missionaries that

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Certain young men during the past year have been candidates for baptism, but they...[had]...not given sufficient evidence of faith in Christ to justify the administration of that ordinance.
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Old Man Dowler, Willie Wimmera’s father, had been deeply moved by his own child’s ‘removal to heaven’, said the missionaries, but Dowler, unlike Paton, did not give ‘sufficient evidence of faith’ even on his death bed. Spieseke did not baptise

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53 Moravian Missions, Third Paper, p. 6
54 ibid., pp. 6-7
55 Moravian Missions, Second Paper, p. 9. Like Willie Wimmera, the Aborigines at Ebenezer were greatly interested in the bible stories of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ, and they ‘relished’ the awakening of Lazarus’, each of those stories deal with individuals rising from the dead.
56 Moravian Missions, Third Paper, p. 7.
Dowler, but there is no evidence to suggest that Spieseke passed judgement on Dowler, in fact Spieseke seemed to have a great deal of respect for the old man. On the death of Dowler Spieseke said

I never shall forget our meeting when all the blacks were sitting and kneeling around the corpse of old Dowler. The Lord was with us; you could feel it and see it among the natives. Dowler must have been accounted a great man amongst them in past times, and they are all mourning for him still.58

Success in gaining converts to Christianity was won said the Moravians ‘by patient persevering labour, and by very gradual degrees - the Aborigines being literally sought for one by one’.59 By 1863, out of an attendance at Ebenezer, which varied between thirty and one hundred Aborigines there was one Communicant, three baptised converts and one candidate for baptism, and by 1866 the number of communicants had risen to eleven.60

Yet said the Moravians

It must not be supposed that the missionaries work was unchequered by trials and disappointments, on the contrary there were many and great anxieties, sometimes on account of serious backslidings among the converts.61

At the end of 1868, Spieseke reported he was making ‘quiet progress’,62 but still reported ‘misconduct’ among the congregation. However, in September 1873, just after the death of Phillip Pepper, Nathaniel’s brother, illness struck the Ebenezer

58 Moravian Missions, Second Paper, pp. 9-10
59 Moravian Notes, p. 57.
60 ibid., p. 55.
61 ibid., p. 56
62 ibid., p. 61
community, and several people died, including one of Spieseke’s children. Spieseke reported that

Some of those who have hitherto been quite indifferent, are now asking diligently after the way of salvation...[and that]...Many of the native residents seemed to recognize in this time of trial a warning from almighty God not to neglect the salvation offered to them.\(^63\)

It is interesting to note though, that the Aborigines may have connected both the Christian ‘warning from almighty God’, with their own belief in an evil spirit called ‘\textit{Ntgatga}, and who they dread much.’. They told Spieseke that \textit{Ntgatga} was

what white fellows call devil. They said that they always thought about him, that he would come and carry the blacks away in a sort of sack or bag\(^64\)

and as the promise of salvation was offered to them by Christianity, saw it as an alternative to their own belief system, which stressed collective rather than personal survival after death.

The missionaries at Ebenezer did make successful incursions into the Aboriginal belief system, by converting a number of Aborigines to Christianity. However, success was not only on the side of the missionaries. Spieseke had been attracted to the Aboriginal culture, demonstrating in his approach, a great deal of curiosity and wonderment. It was noted that

As time went on the Moravian Missionaries...gained greater insight into the ways and customs of this strange people; and

\(^63\) Moravian Notes, pp. 63-64.

here and there, in the course of their journals, they mention discoveries which seem to point to more order, so to speak, existing among them that there had been at first supposed. 65

In 1867, at the annual meeting of the Victorian Association in Aid of the Moravian Missions, one can detect beneath the themes of paternalism, a sensitive understanding of the Aboriginal culture by Spieseke. He recalled how he had had

A conversation with a doctor newly arrived from England. He told me that he had made the blacks a study; he had been trying to find out whether they have different blood to the whites, but that he found no difference. 66

After taking the opportunity to enlighten the audience about the Aborigines’ social life and traditions, and asking for donations to the mission, Spieseke pleaded that the few remaining aborigines ‘be treated like human beings’. 67 His final comment was

You erect treasury houses to shore up treasure. Now all this is well. These resources were not meant, in my opinion, to remain undeveloped. But let the aboriginal have a decent share. 68

It is interesting to note, that Spieseke destroyed all his official papers just prior to his death. One wonders if perhaps Spieseke had stepped too far over the cultural boundary, destroying all evidence of his sympathies with Aborigines of the Wimmera.

On 24 June 1877, the Reverend F. W. Spieseke died, after carrying ‘the chief burden of responsibility in the outpost settlement for nineteen years’. 69 If one adds the

65 Moravian Notes, p. 54.
66 Moravian Missions, Sixth Paper, p. 8.
67 ibid., p. 16.
68 ibid., p. 17.
six years of his first mission to the above figure Spieseke had spent twenty-five years of his life with the Aborigines. Spieseke, like Old Dowler was shown the same amount of affection on his death. His death was the occasion of ‘deep sorrow among the blacks, the Aborigines weeping around his death-bed’. And on that same day ‘they determined among themselves to provide his coffin’.

70 The men walked to Dimboola - a distance of twelve miles - ‘to buy a coffin for their beloved teacher, whose death at the age of 56 had bereft them all of a friend’. 71 Spieseke’s death marked the end of an era. At the beginning of the mission in 1859, Ellerman said in a letter to Peter La Trobe that many people believed ‘that “No good can ever be done with the blacks”, forgetting, or not knowing that the grace of God is able to change their habits, as well as their hearts...’. 72 Spieseke’s work not only affected the Aborigines hearts, but also taught them new habits. It was these newly acquired habits, which had a significant impact on the affairs of the mission in the coming years.

70 Moravian Notes, p. 76.
72 Ellerman to Peter La Trobe, 2 Dec 1859, A.I.A.S., M.F. 163-188.
CHAPTER THREE: SECULAR INSURGENCE

All savage races had been found destitute of the great principle that guided civilized man, - the desire of accumulation. They had no idea of providing for the future, but lived only for today... This was a great difficulty in the way of aboriginal social progress.

(Rev. Mr Morrison)¹

At a public meeting held in Melbourne on 2 July 1851, for the purpose of aiding the Moravian mission to the Aborigines of Australia, the Reverend Mr Morrison said he believed that the Moravians had the ability to bring about ‘an altered state of mind in the savage’, because they made them understand ‘that they had a soul, recognised a futurity’ and had on missions in other parts of the world ‘communicated to them the full value of eternal life.’²

There is no doubt that by the 1870s the Aborigines at Ebenezer did display ‘an altered state of mind’, but it would be erroneous to link this change in attitude to the spiritual teachings of the Moravians. Under Spieseke’s tutelage, the Aborigines had acquired secular skills in dealing with European institutions, and had been set on a course towards self-reliance ‘Sinners...[said Ellerman]...have not only been brought to Jesus - but like-wise been trained to think and act for themselves.’³

Spieseke, with Ellerman’s help, had always fought to retain the independence of the mission. But to become independent of government aid, and ‘place the

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¹ Argus, 12 July 1851, p. 4.
² Ibid.
³ H. Ellerman to Reverend L. Reichel, 26 Dec 1872. Moravian Mission in Australia Correspondence, A.I.A.S., M.F. 163-188, (provided by Bain Attwood, La Trobe University.).
Aborigines above pauperism’, the mission station had to become self-supporting.\textsuperscript{4} The land at the station was of poor quality and not fit for cultivation, but was adequate for grazing sheep. However, to make sheep farming into a profitable enterprise, the missionaries needed more land. By the 1870s, the land surrounding the mission had changed hands, and Ellerman - who incidentally was now a Presbyterian minister - no longer held sway over the neighbouring settlers, who were now averse to giving land to the station. Therefore, Spieseke and Ellerman had no recourse but to the government. They involved the Aborigines in the political process in the fight for land, by encouraging them to petition the government. Thus Spieseke and Ellerman did train the Aborigines to think and act for themselves in the white man’s world.

In 1860 the Aborigines at Ebenezer signed a petition to the government requesting an extension to the Reserve, and as a consequence of that application a further 1,688 acres were granted on the 10 March 1871, bringing the total acreage to 3,608. But the amount fell far short of the amount promised by the government in 1870. So in March 1872, Spieseke sent another petition from the Aborigines, requesting that the government’s promise of 1870, to grant sufficient land on which to graze 3,000 sheep,\textsuperscript{5} be fulfilled. Spieseke had convinced the people of Dimboola and Horsham to sign the petition, bringing the total signatures up to 198.\textsuperscript{6} On the 18 June 1875, the Aborigines sent a further petition to the government, reminding them once again of their 1870 promise. In reply to their petition the Secretary of Lands, A. D.

\textsuperscript{4} Reverend F. W. Spieseke to Reverend L. Reichel, 11 March 1872, A.I.A.S., M.F.163-188.

\textsuperscript{5} Memorandum quoting Mr Skene’s letter to Mr Macredie, 12 July 1875. Correspondence relating to various Aboriginal Stations, Australian Archives (Brighton), B313/100.

\textsuperscript{6} Spieseke to Reichel, 11 March 1872, A.I.A.S., M.F. 163-188.
Skene, stated that the Central Aboriginal Board were adverse to any enlargement of the area. The trustees of the station, one of who was Ellerman, dismissed Skene’s rejection and the Board’s involvement, and called for a review, ‘by disinterested persons’, to the latest land application made by the Aborigines in July 1875. Spieseke continuously fought the land issue, not only because he believed the Aborigines should become independent of government aid, but also because he believed that the Aborigines could never become absorbed into the European community. He stated that

They will ever have to take a dependent inferior position, and this makes them dissatisfied. They are happy amongst their own race.

and in 1877, just prior to his death, Spieseke made a final impassioned plea to the government to honour their promise of 1870. He told the Royal Commission on Aborigines held in 1877

It has always been our plan, and the wish of the people, instead of living so close together, they should have their homes more separated along the river.

Thus, by the 1870s there was a marked change in attitude on the part of some of the Aborigines at Ebenezer, and Spieseke had encouraged a few of them to settle down in European-styled huts.

7 Memorandum quoting Mr Skene’s letter to Mr Macredie, 12 July 1875. Correspondence relating to various Aboriginal Stations, Australian Archives (Brighton), B313/100.


9 ibid.
But their petition for more land declared Ellerman

    Clashed with the interests of wealthy Station Owners, who threw every obstacle in the way and succeeded in frustrating numerous signed petitions in favour of such extensions.\(^\text{10}\)

He believed that some members of the Aboriginal Board had

    a wish to remove from Ebenezer Station all young Children and locate them in some other part of the Colony - And the Board for the Protection of Aborigines...[had]...intimated this wish to the Board of Land and Works who made it a pretext for not granting the Extension of Land.\(^\text{11}\)

Ellerman believed that such a scheme would ‘never’ be carried out, stating that

    Those who talk of doing so know little of the establishment they wish to reduce, and of the character of the residents.\(^\text{12}\)

The ‘character of the residents’ by the late 1870s, when the Reverend Carl Wilhelm Kramer took over control of the mission station was in a word - irrepressible.

Kramer, an authoritarian by nature, had no desire to encourage any independent action by the Aborigines. Unlike Spieseke, he was not in favour of the Aborigines finding work off the station. His policy on the Aborigines was one of control and containment. But Spieseke had already given the Aborigines at Ebenezer the opportunity to use the skills they had acquired; finding work as shearers and harvesters on the nearby runs. Spieseke had no choice in the matter. The facts were, that the station could not provide enough work to keep all the able-bodied men in constant employment. As well, the Moravians did not have the money to pay the Aborigines an adequate return for their labour. The Aborigines, having learnt the

\(^\text{10}\) Ellerman to Reichel, 26 Dec 1872, A.I.A.S., M.F.163-188.

\(^\text{11}\) ibid.

\(^\text{12}\) ibid.
European ways of progress and materialism challenged Kramer’s policy of control and containment. The Aborigines ignored Kramer’s policy, and sometimes Kramer himself.

In teaching the Aborigines the skills of reading and writing, the Moravians original intention was to enable the Aborigines to understand the Scriptures. However, much to the annoyance of Kramer, the Aborigines often used these skills to go over his head with their grievances; writing directly to Captain Page, the Secretary of the Aboriginal Board. By involving the Aborigines in petitioning for land, Spieseke had made them aware of the mechanisms of the white bureaucracy, which the Aborigines now used to the fullest.

Spieseke had not put a stop to the ‘roaming habits’ of the Aborigines. In fact, by allowing them freedom of movement, they had formed new ‘dreaming tracks’ between the Aboriginal Reserves. But now it was a matter of using the railway tracks instead of the spiritual walking tracks of the past. There was a constant stream of letters to Captain Page from the Aborigines requesting railway passes at government expense. And if they were not granted, the Aborigines took their leave anyway, defying Kramer’s authority to grant them a leave of absence. Thomas Livingstone had been denied a railway pass to the Aboriginal reserve at Lake Condah, so he ‘made away Southwards’ after going for a medical examination at the hospital in Horsham.¹³ John Sutton also managed to go where he pleased, eluding the troopers in his determination to visit his friends and family at Condah.¹⁴ Robert Nichol had

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¹³ Reverend C. W. Kramer to Captain Page, 5 Feb 1882, A.A. B313/99
¹⁴ Kramer to Page, 12 Dec 1882, A.A. B313/98
challenged Kramer’s authority in his desire to visit his friends at Framlingham Reserve, and says Kramer

having sufficient money for the journey and a horse and spring-cart, he acted independently and left in spite of our remonstrances.\footnote{Kramer to Page, 1 Nov 1882, A.A. B313/98}

It was not just the men who demonstrated a desire to retain freedom of movement. There are just as many instances of the women at Ebenezer taking a leave of absence without permission, and by comparison, there are more letters of request for railway passes by the women, than there are from the men. Perhaps it was because of the example to adult Aborigines that three youths left the station without seeking permission either from the Aboriginal community or from Kramer.

According to Kramer, a young 17-year-old girl called Jessie - a recent arrival from the Coranderrk Reserve - ‘induced’ 16-year-old Rebecca, and one of Kramer’s ‘best boys’ Archie, a 22-year-old, to abscond with her. Kramer requested an ‘Order in Council’\footnote{An Act to provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria, Act 349, 11 Nov 1869, which gave the Governor the power to make regulations and orders under the Act. One purpose was ‘For prescribing the place where any Aboriginal or any tribe of Aborigines shall reside.’} from the Aboriginal Board to bring the fugitives back, under police control. Kramer saw the world outside the confines of the mission station as one, which contained all the very worst vices known unto man, and therefore, he believed that young people, especially young girls, should be restrained from mixing with outsiders. The Aborigines, in this instance, supported Kramer ‘believing that all 3 should be brought back’.\footnote{Kramer to Page, 17 Jan 1881, A.A. B313/97.} Kramer had called Jessie’s action a ‘vicious course’, but an extract from a letter sent by Rebecca to an Aboriginal woman at Ebenezer throws into
relief Kramer’s dark suspicions. Far from setting forth on a path of immorality, the young people obviously saw the escapade as an opportunity to defiantly challenge the authority of the missionaries. The letter also suggests that the run-a-ways did not expect to succeed in their attempt at freedom. The letter was postmarked in South Australia, and in reference to their whereabouts Rebecca stated

And we are going away from here to another place and how did Mr Bogisch\(^{18}\) feel when we went away. When we came away from there we took our time in walking we was thinking you fellows would catch up to us and did the people talk about us and don’t tell nobody where you get this letter from...\(^{19}\)

Rebecca remained in South Australia, but Jessie and Archie were finally brought back, ‘expressing regret’ and a wish to get married. Kramer too, believed ‘they ought to get married’. Under the circumstances what other option did the good Christian gentleman have?\(^{20}\)

Kramer had a unique way of overcoming and rationalizing any outburst of insubordination at the station. As in Jessie’s case, the ‘trouble-makers’ were nearly always new arrivals at the station. But in one particular instance, Kramer’s rationalization for his inability to control certain individuals, took on a new meaning. A man named Mooney refused to do any work on the station, telling Kramer that ‘he did not come here to do any work’. Kramer’s response was that he thought Mooney was ‘a little wrong in his head’.\(^{21}\) But in this instance, it was not just Kramer’s

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\(^{18}\) Mr Bogisch is the Reverend Paul Bogisch, a schoolteacher at the mission station.

\(^{19}\) An extract from Rebecca’s letter, quoted by Kramer in a letter to Page on 23 March 1881, A.A. B313/97.

\(^{20}\) Kramer to Page, 2 May 1881, A.A. B313/97.

\(^{21}\) Kramer to Page, 1 July 1879, A.A. B313/95.
authority, which was brought into question. The Aborigines were in fact questioning the need for missionary control over the station and seeking alternative management, preferably secular. Kramer records the challenge by Mooney and a Mrs Briggs in a letter to Captain Page saying

"...I believe there is another despatch to you on the road for he...[Mooney]...told me this morning very significantly, next week I should see What? I do not know. Our people were not a little amused when he told me in their presence that he had been told I was managing this station for the German Government, a thing that ought not to be. Another thing that causes him much perplexity is that we call this place a Mission Station and not a Government Station on which point also Mrs Briggs is much exercized in her mind. You will have to settle a great deal...[and, he added]...I am glad you do not take any notice of Mrs Briggs’s application for this, that and the other thing."  

Mooney’s incisive challenge to missionary authority after all those years of missionary endeavour is significant, in that it marked a change in attitude towards the station and its management. Unlike Spieseke, a man who had earned the love and respect of the Aborigines, Kramer’s indignant, moral, self-righteous tone was out of kilter with the family principles of love and care laid down by Spieseke. As well, Kramer had not taken that step towards understanding the Aboriginal world by learning their languages. In contrast to Spieseke, Kramer ‘knew nothing of their languages’. Therefore Kramer’s ‘foreignness’ came under question; foreignness not just in nationality, but as well in spiritual leadership. Spieseke had always cultivated in the Aborigines at Ebenezer, the notion that the mission station was their ‘home’ and that it belonged to them. Kramer on the other hand, took an authoritarian stance,

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22 Kramer to Page, 1 July 1879, A.A. B313/95.
and arrogantly adopted a policy of control and restraint. It is quite natural then, that Kramer the man and Kramer the missionary would be challenged by Aborigines who had experienced a quite different mode of existence under the paternalistic hand of Spieseke.

Encouraged by Spieseke, the Aborigines had now developed notions of private property and individualism, which Kramer tried to restrain. A letter to Captain Page from an Aboriginal woman named Rose Kennedy highlights this change in attitude by the Aborigines. Rose had left the station for a couple of years, and she was quite resigned to the fact, that others would use her house on the station while she was away. But on her return, Kramer had insisted that the house was now for the sole use of the present occupant. He told Rose that the house did not belong to her ‘but belonged to the government’. Rose wrote to Page, saying

Please would you kindly inform me how stands the affair about that house that was left to me by my Aunt and Uncle that are both dead. I was told it was mine, and the house was given over to me by a written will, Mr Spieseke write out the will, witnessed and signed by Miss Amelia Gregory and myself before my Aunt die. The house was built by my Uncle when the first Missionaries were here. When the house was built and finished, the Missionaries made them understand that the house was their own and when they die it was to be for their children.  

The Aborigines now used the system to the fullest, and played one authority against the other; forcing Kramer to defend his position to the Board.

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24 Rose Kennedy to Page, 4 Aug 1884, A.A. B313/100
In response to Rose’s letter to the Board, Kramer declared to Page

I have no end of trouble and annoyance owing to the fact that some of these huts are claimed by the blacks as their property which they can do with what they like. Take for instance the case of Albert Comb. He had a hut, which at a trifling outlay could have been made very comfortable. Fancy my surprise when one morning I found his hut minus the roof and on making enquiries was told by Albert that he wanted the bark to make a mia mia for his wife who was ill at the time. On being remonstrated with he became abusive and told me that it was his own hut and that he could do as he liked with it.25

While the Aborigines acknowledged government authority over the mission station, they clearly believed that they had proprietorial rights over their homes, and did not hesitate to question any threat to ‘their property’. However, when authority over their children was threatened, the Aborigines brought their traditional rights into play.

Much to the annoyance of Kramer, three Aboriginal males - Stewart, Combs and Cameron - wrote a letter of complaint to the Board saying that the school-teacher at the station, Mr Bogisch, had ‘horsewhipped’ some of the male children and had been ‘cruel’ to the girls, and stated

we are afraid to send our children to this School while this teacher his teaching here because he his so cruel to the boys and girls as well, because we seen it with our own eyes. Its only for this reason that we stepped out, we want another teacher a English teacher in his place... If this matter don’t looked in to. We don’t see the use of sending our children in this School. They get more flogging than learning. Its no use to have two gentlemen in this Station for they agree to well together so Please do try an put him off this station and put a English teacher in his Place..26
Traditionally, Aboriginal children were given a great deal of freedom, and it was only when they reached the stage of puberty that restraints were applied to their behaviour by the adult members of their group. From the Aboriginal point of view, Bogisch had been excessively harsh on the children. One of the boys who had been ‘flogged’ two years previously had recently died; prompting the Aborigines to take action. They had obviously connected the death of the boy to the past cruelty of Bogisch, as well as to his present behaviour. The Aborigines were also complaining of the ‘foreignness’ of Bogisch’s actions and Kramer’s support of Bogisch. Both Kramer and Bogisch were of German nationality, and both were of the Moravian Church, and it does appear from the previous reference to Mooney accusing Kramer of running the station for the German government, and the above letter drawing attention to the cliquishness of the two Germans, that the Aborigines felt threatened by an attitude which would have appeared alien to them. It is quite likely that they would have compared Kramer and Bogisch to Spieseke, and it is interesting to note that the Aborigines did not show prejudice towards Spieseke, even though he too was a German. The Aboriginal complaint was one of attitude rather than one of nationality.

Kramer in his usual inimitable style, dismissed and undercut the importance of the above complaint by stating to Page that the men who had signed the letter did not have children of school-age - completely ignoring the Aboriginal custom of adults taking responsibility for the group as a whole. It was not the dignity of the children that Kramer saw as important, but that his, and Bogisch’s dignity had been ruffled, saying to Page

27 Kramer to Page, 1 Oct 1879, A.A. B313/95.
I have often found, that the blacks would rather see us insulted than that discipline should be upheld.\footnote{Kramer to Page, 2 Oct 1879, A.A. B313/95.}

The boy Johnnie had received a flogging said Kramer as a just punishment for raising an axe against Mr Bogisch and pulling him down by the beard.\footnote{Kramer to Page, 1 Oct 1879, ibid.}

Kramer stated that after ‘reasoning’ with the Aborigines over the issue

they quite admitted that punishment of some sort was indispensable but were anxious that the children should not be beaten about the head and back or pulled by the ear...and Mr Bogisch promised them that, should a punishment become necessary in future, other parts of the body would be selected to inflict it on.\footnote{Kramer to Page, 1 Oct 1879, ibid.}

Therefore, it was not that the Aborigines objected to any form of discipline being applied as Kramer previously claimed, but that the crime did not fit the punishment.

In an earlier incident while Kramer was absent from the station, and most of the adult Aborigines had gone for ‘a change to Lake Hindmarsh for a week’, a young 16-year-old Aboriginal named Willie was found naked under the bed of a female assistant teacher at the station, Miss Mussen. Bogisch was in charge, and he wrote an outraged letter to the Board asking if Willie could be made ‘a warning example to others by sending him to some place of correction’. According to Bogisch, Miss Mussen retired for the evening,

locked the door and looked under her bed, as she always does, before going to bed, she saw that fellow with wild looking open eyes and undressed. Making a call to Mrs Kramer and me: “There is a black boy under my bed”, she rushed out and

\footnotetext[28]{Kramer to Page, 2 Oct 1879, A.A. B313/95.}
\footnotetext[29]{Kramer to Page, 1 Oct 1879, ibid.}
\footnotetext[30]{Kramer to Page, 1 Oct 1879, ibid.}
at the same time, the boy fled undressed leaving his trousers and a pocket-knife behind.\textsuperscript{31}

Bogisch saw it as a ‘narrow escape’ for Miss Mussen

if she was in bed and that boy appeared before her, she could have gone into fits and injured herself for life.\textsuperscript{32}

The surprising aspect of the incident is that the question of why Willie was under the bed naked was not raised. It was assumed that Willie’s intentions were immoral. As a boy of sixteen, Willie may have been directed to participate in traditional ceremonies at Lake Hindmarsh, and could have been hiding from his own people. Instead of questioning Willie, Bogisch locked the boy in Mrs Kramer’s ‘little store room’, which had only one small window a foot square. But Willie managed to escape from that confined space and fled to the lake. The incident may have been just as equally terrifying for Willie as it was for Miss Mussen, but Willie was in Bogisch’s eyes - guilty as charged, and punished accordingly. Willie however, must have mended his ways, because he is mentioned three years later as being one of Kramer’s favourites.

Kramer was charged with favouritism in a grievance petition brought against him in Nov 1882 by a number of Aborigines at the station.

The petition brought into question many aspects of Kramer’s character, and as usual Kramer was forced to respond to the charges laid against him, because in this instance, the Aborigines had written directly to Sir William Anderson, the Vice Chairman of the Board. The petition had the names of twelve men listed as the complainants, and Kramer in his usual disparaging manner, questioned the validity of the signatures, especially that of Willie Edwards. Willie was one of Kramer’s

\footnotetext{31}{Reverend Paul Bogisch to the B.P.A., 21 Feb 1879, ibid.}
\footnotetext{32}{ibid.}
‘favourites’, and said Kramer, ‘was able to sign himself’. The Aborigines had accused Kramer of being ‘too hard’ and of giving more rations and other ‘things’ to his favourites. Kramer’s response to the charge was that he had tried his best to get other Aborigines to be his ‘favourites in the same sense’, but they had persistently refused to work. The few men who did most of the station-work ‘willingly and cheerfully’ were given 5/- per week by Kramer, and as well had ‘all their reasonable wants supplied’. Kramer makes the men out to be childish and obstinate, when in fact the issue of working for government rations was being raised as a serious matter by the men.

In an earlier grievance letter, Stewart and Cameron had asked Page for more supplies of rations, meat and clothing, saying

If you gave us more wages as you do at the other Stations We shall find ourselves in meat we heard that they get more of everything as Meat Hats Boots and Coats and Stockings...We don’t think its right for us to buy our sugar when we run short and if we don’t have any money we shall have to go without Rations till Ration day.

The men further complained that ‘game had been driven away’ from the area, and that at one time they only had to go a mile to ‘get plenty of every think such as Emu Kangaroo opossum and all kinds of game.’. They now had to travel twelve miles to hunt game and, when they ‘get there perhaps get none.’.

33 Kramer to Page, 21 Nov 1882, A.A. B313/98.
34 Petition of complaint from a number of Aborigines at Ebenezer to Sir William Anderson, Vice Chairman of the B.P.A., 11 Nov 1882, ibid.
35 Kramer to Page, 21 Nov 1882, ibid.
36 Stewart and Pelham Cameron to Page, 12 Jan 1881, A.A. B313/97.
37 ibid.
Kramer believed that an Aboriginal called Johnny Charles, who was on a leave of absence from the Coranderrk station, was at the bottom of the ‘mischief’, and had caused ‘dissatisfaction’ among the Aborigines at Ebenezer. Charles had had the audacity to argue with Kramer about keeping his dog chained up. Kramer declared that Charles had ‘coolly declared...that it was no use to talk to so headstrong a man as I was. An this in the hearing of a good number of our people.’ Because there was a constant movement between the Aboriginal reserves, comparisons were being made, and consciousness was being raised about conditions at the stations. Thus, men like Charles, who had obviously experienced a less restrictive mode of existence, were threatening Kramer’s authoritarian rule. Kramer believed that Charles’ ‘evil influence and bad example’ on the Aborigines at Ebenezer would be ‘irreparable’, and asked the Board to terminate Charles’ leave of absence ‘forthwith’.

There is another grievance evident in the two petitions and that is the concept of a fair days pay for a fair days work. As stated earlier, Kramer had tried to restrain the Aborigines from seeking work off the station. But because the station was not self-supporting, and therefore could not keep all the able-bodied men fully employed, Kramer had no option but to let the men seek employment elsewhere. As well, Kramer did not have sufficient funds to pay reasonable wages to the Aborigines. Ebenezer was seen by the government as a ‘cheap’ station to run, because the Moravians asked for very little extras, and were supported by their own church funds.

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38 Kramer to Page, 25 Jan 1881, A.S. B313/97.
39 ibid.
40 ibid.
in Saxony’. So by the early 1880s, a number of adults were living and working on nearby sheep-stations, and were using the station as a child-minding facility. In a letter to Kramer, asking after his children, Albert Coombs declared his gratitude saying ‘If you wasn’t there I would never go away’.  

Albert Coombs and Tom Livingstone were seen to be at the bottom of the ‘mischief’ in the petition to Sir Henry. As Kramer derisively put it, Coombs had not worked at the station for years but acts, on the contrary, most independently, going where and when he likes and returning when he likes. At present he earns 33/- per week at Mr Bosisto’s factory at Antwerp, while his two children are cared for here.

The Aborigines had complained that Kramer had refused rations to an Aboriginal called Joe, because he had refused to work in the hayfield. But Kramer’s reply to the charge was that Joe had assumed an air of importance and enquired, Mr Kramer what are you paying for this here job? I informed him that every one would have to work a day for nothing for using the horses all year round and the second day would get 1/- if they bound the hay. This did not suit him and he replied, “Then I won’t work.”

Kramer believed that ‘He that will not work, no more shall he eat’, choosing to ignore the fact that it was the emphasis on unfair payment of labour, and not the labour itself that the Aborigines were complaining about. The Aborigines had now learnt the value

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42 A. Coombs to Kramer, 26 Aug 1883, A.I.A.S., MF. 163-188.  
43 Kramer to Page, 21 Nov 1882, A.A. B313/98.  
44 ibid.
of a man’s labour, and were not willing to work for nothing, or as Kramer’s ‘favourites’ did, for 5/- per week.45

Another Aboriginal grievance, was that Kramer made them ‘go to prayer for Meat and rations..’ and stated that if they refused to attend the early morning prayer meeting Kramer ‘wont give either’.46 In response to the charge, Kramer referred to a Moravian tradition saying

I beg to explain that this Mission was established upon the family principle every member of it being expected to attend family worship in the morning...Moreover the teaching of the holy scripture by which we missionaries are directed is plain enough on this point, Pray and work.47

However, Kramer missed the point. Some of the Aborigines no longer related to the mission in family terms. And whereas in the early years of the mission the Aborigines went willingly to the morning prayer meeting, they now looked upon it as a form of blackmail. Spieseke had also emphasized the concept of ‘No Work - No Pay’, but by the 1880s the emphasis under Kramer’s rule was - ‘No Work - No Pay - No Pray - No Eat’.

Ironically the Aborigines, much to Kramer’s discomfort, had learnt the value of money, and to a certain extent had adapted to ‘the great principle that guided civilized man, - the desire of accumulation’. They even had the ‘impertinence’, said Kramer to question the ownership of the station’s horse and cart. As well, they questioned the legality of Kramer allowing a young German by the name of Edwin Geisaler to live on the station for a number of months, because they said

45 Kramer to Page, 21 Nov 1882, A.A. B313/98.
46 Petition Letter to Sir William, 11 Nov 1882, ibid.
47 Kramer to Page, 21 Nov 1882, ibid.
He doesn’t act as a Missionary at all. But acts like a squatter, he even sells sugar to sick people. Was he sent here to make money out of us?..\(^{48}\)

Kramer’s reply to the charge was to

> emphatically protest against any interference of the blacks. We will entertain whom we like and send away whom we like without consulting the blacks.\(^{49}\)

and went on to say that

> it is evident from the blacks own admission, “He acts like a squatter” that he did not eat the bread of idleness.\(^{50}\)

implying of course that the Aborigines did. Kramer’s attitude had become increasingly defensive in tone, and to the charge of selling groceries to the Aborigines, Kramer indignantly replied

> ..I in my position as missionary ought to be above being suspected of such meanness...and would indeed think it beneath my dignity to covet their pence’s.\(^{51}\)

By the mid 1880s the emphasis at the mission station was now on secular matters, and the Aborigines no longer saw the missionaries as spiritual leaders, but as money-grabbers, asking of the Board

> Isn’t he...[Kramer]...satisfied with what money he gets from the Board?\(^{52}\)

On the 13 August 1885, Kramer ordered an extra quantity of meat for the Aborigines, so that they could celebrate the 25\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary of the baptism of the first convert at the mission station - Nathaniel Pepper. He had also given the Aborigines ‘a

\(^{48}\) Petition Letter to Sir William, 11 Nov 1882, A.A. B313/98

\(^{49}\) Kramer to Page, 21 Nov 1882, A.A. B313/98.

\(^{50}\) ibid.

\(^{51}\) ibid.

\(^{52}\) Petition Letter to Sir William, ibid.
little more meat to encourage them to work well’. He was however, disappointed, because six families left the station to work on the Border railway, they were says Kramer becoming ‘more and more unsettled’ at the station. On the 6th August 1886, Kramer offered the men ‘a small sum of money’ to ‘encourage the men in their work’. Kramer was adapting to the changing needs of the Aborigines, but was it seems, reluctantly dragging his feet. As Christian Olgilvie observed in 1877, that

> good as these missionaries are, they like having their little flock around them for the sake of the religious influence, and would not therefore be so likely to encourage the natives in going away from the station.

In trying to maintain the status quo and reacting to change rather than being in the forefront of change, Kramer and the mission station were fast becoming an anachronism. In 1877, Kramer resigned his position at Ebenezer, leaving the final disintegration of the mission in the hands of Bogisch.

53 Kramer to Page, 24 Aug 1885, A.A. B313/101
54 Kramer to Page, 6 April 1886, AA. B313/102
55 V.P.P., 1877 Royal Commission, 24 April 1877, p. 3, Q.51
CONCLUSION

Examining cultural interaction at an individual level, reveals a rich variety of human experience, and helps us to look beyond generalities, which may at times hinder our understanding of the intricate historical process involved. It is not sufficient for our understanding of cultural interaction in the Wimmera to say that squatters went inland with the ‘deliberate’ intention of exterminating the Aborigines, nor is it sufficient to build up a one dimensional picture of missionaries as destructive agents of the Aboriginal culture. Furthermore, these images do not do justice to the strength of Aboriginal participation in the process of cultural interaction, positioning them as victims rather than participants.

The Wotjobaluk Aborigines were in dynamic interaction with the Europeans from the beginning of European invasion into the Wimmera. As well, there were no firm lines of demarcation or any general preconceived strategy of cultural interaction. First encounters between the two groups were at times tentative and amicable, and at other times aggressive and destructive. Individuals like Ellerman often reacted without thoughtful consideration when confronted by Aborigines, while other squatters like Carter acted with caution, thinking through the consequences of rash behaviour. In the early years of settlement, Aborigines in the Wimmera were in a stronger position in numerical terms, and squatters regularly expressed their fear of large ‘mobs’ of Aborigines; prompting them to take precautions. Individual Aborigines also experienced fear when faced with small bands of Europeans armed, mounted and, ready for action. Fear and ignorance were significant factors in cultural interaction, and it was only when individuals overcame their fear that they could deal with contact situations at a more rational level. Individual squatters and Aborigines in
the Wimmera saw the advantage of cultivating friendly relations, because at times both European and Aborigine needed each other’s cooperation. Therefore man’s needs often overcame his fears and in many instances reciprocal relationships were established. When fear subsided in the Wimmera, the Europeans adopted a more paternalistic and sympathetic approach to the Aborigines, assisting in the establishment of the Moravian’s mission at Ebenezer.

The restraining forces of cultural belief systems did not altogether blind men from the attractive aspects of another’s culture. The Reverend F. W. Spieseke successfully attracted several young Aborigines to the Christian belief system, and was in turn attracted by theirs. As well, Spieseke demonstrated a curiosity for the Aboriginal languages and dialects, and in the process entered into their world. By contrast, individuals like the Reverend C. W. Kramer and Horatio Ellerman found it difficult to extricate themselves from their cultural web. However, as Dr John Lilly suggested, experience can change attitudes over a period of time, and belief systems can be transcended with effort. Therefore, even a man as set in his ways as Kramer surprisingly glimpsed a reality other than his own. Earlier in his missionary experience at Ebenezer, Kramer believed that the Aborigines in houses presented ‘a better appearance than those in the camps’, the ones in the camps seeming ‘very listless’.¹ Yet ten years later Kramer commented

The old people in their (to our notions, at least) most uncomfortable mia-mias appear to be the healthiest and hardiest after all.²

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Changing European and Aboriginal attitudes are evident throughout the period studied and it does seem that the Aborigines, like the ancient Greeks, were more open to integrating attractive elements of alien cultures into their own belief systems, and as well, adapting to changes within their environment. The Aborigines at Ebenezer not only learnt the European value in money terms of a man’s labour, but also learnt how to manipulate the European bureaucratic system to further their needs. Therefore, contrary to the general view that the Aborigines were the passive victims of European invasion, the Aborigines at Ebenezer demonstrated a spirited participation in the cultural interaction that took place in the Wimmera. The descendants of the Ebenezer mission station, are still actively participating in the continual process of cultural interaction, and like many other modern-day Aborigines, are still trying to break through the web of European preconceptions and prejudices.
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