

GENERAL MATTERS

1929 was the year of the infamous prickly pear plague. The properties at Deebing Creek and Hampstead reserve were overrun with prickly pear. To combat the prickly pear peril the government had set up the Prickly Pear Commission and the workers on the mission were required to eradicate this new pest.

Mr Donald Davidson was one of the characters at the mission. He had been brought to Purga some time prior to the involvement of the Salvation Army. He and his family were removed from Western Queensland. He had employment out west and apparently was removed because the police suspected that he had been a fence "for sheep stealers". He was very resentful at the fact that he and his family had been removed on the basis of suspicion only. Upon his arrival in Ipswich he promptly went to see a Solicitor about the legality of his removal. He was described as an intelligent half-caste with very fine instincts. Interestingly, the Salvation Army 'War Cry' also described him as a remarkable convert. From being a drunk, gambler and thief within a very short time of arriving at the mission he was converted. It is recorded that he never again drank intoxicants or gambled. It was said that there were many things lacking in him but he was definitely a transformed man.

In late 1929, Mr Donald Davidson was allowed to leave the mission for a 6 month trial. He had been offered a piece of land at Rocklea where he could live for 10 years. He intended to grow vegetables. Mr Davidson eventually lived out his years in a small Aboriginal community in Loamside on the southerly outskirts of Ipswich. His home was subsequently removed to make way for road building expansion.

Some of his children include Aunty Janie Arnold who was born in Western Queensland, Aunty Doreen Thompson and Uncle Donald Davidson who were both born on the mission. It would seem that Mr Davidson never took particularly kindly to the regime of the mission but he somewhat begrudgingly conformed to the expectations imposed upon him.

Compared to other missions and settlements in Queensland, both Deebing Creek and Purga were said to be quite liberal. It has been said that people were free to come and go as they pleased. This was certainly the case prior to the commencement of the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of Sale of Opium Act of 1897, but there were still definite controls imposed upon the people at Purga. The Act still dictated that the people sent out to employment situations had to be under agreement.

Records indicate that the Salvation Army at one point was not complying with this requirement, perhaps believing that it was time to give greater powers of choice and degrees of freedom to Aboriginal people, but they were officially reprimanded when it was found that agreements were not being signed. They were being told in no uncertain terms that no person was to go to any employment situation without the appropriate agreement being signed. The greater freedom was in the fact that the residents could be employed off the Mission and could secure the employment themselves. It was still subject to an agreement under the Act.

There were still definite restrictions about the issuing of passes to be away from the mission.

At one time Stanley Bell (who was the brother of Neville Bonner's Grandfather, Roger Bell), Harry Ward and Reg Daylight wanted to go to Cherbourg for Christmas but they were not allowed to go. Their application for the pass was refused and a letter was sent to them. The reply provides a clear insight into the strict policy of the time: "We do not intend to let you go from Purga as we know the reason you are so anxious to get away. You must remain, and obey the instructions given to you by the Superintendent". Curious as we may be, no one besides Messrs Bell, Ward and Daylight and perhaps the author of the memorandum have any way of finding out why they would want to go to Cherbourg for Christmas.

There is correspondence during this time period indicating matter of factly that the intention was to train the children to become "servants in white folks homes" and that they needed a proper upbringing to teach them appropriate standards especially "in respect of night attire and also fruit and vegetables". Regardless of intellectual prowess all the women were expected to be efficient in cleaning, scrubbing, sewing and darning but it was specifically indicated that the milking of cows was not to be performed by females when there were males to do the job.

The facilities in the boys' dormitories were fairly spartan. They slept in the clothes they had worn during the day and there were no beds. They slept on a blanket which had been laid out on the floor, perhaps old government rations. They were given one blanket to cover themselves. The boys' dormitory had open doors and wooden shutters.