

INTRODUCTION

History is a matter of fact although it is often viewed as a matter of opinion. Perhaps the biggest challenge in writing a document of this nature is to place information before the reader in a completely dispassionate manner without allowing the personal views and interpretations of the writer to taint the facts.

Most of the research for this work involved perusal of veritable mountains of old government files at Queensland State Archives. One thing is for sure - bureaucracy was not a recent invention.

It has also been difficult given the perspective of most of the research material to get any satisfactory insights into what life was really like on the missions, from the point of view of the residents. This is particularly so in relation to life at Deebing Creek because it closed down in 1914 or thereabouts and was relocated to the land presently owned by the Purga Elders and Descendants Aboriginal Corporation at Purga. All persons who were residents at Deebing Creek Aboriginal Home have returned to the dreamtime taking their stories with them. The last survivor, Aunty Maybery Ford (nee Richards) born in Deebing Creek in 1914 passed away January 2001.

Many Aboriginal people who resided at Purga Mission are still alive and they all have their stories to tell. Hopefully this will be another chapter in reconciliation.

Aboriginal people having no written language as such were, and are, master storytellers. This was and perhaps still is a central theme in their family and community life.

Spoken stories reduced to black and white on paper lose their magic and for that reason there are only a small number of personal anecdotes in this work, for the purpose of adding some semblance of colour and perspective to what otherwise would be a very rudimentary sketch indeed.

In hind-sight, it would have been far preferable that rather than expecting Aboriginal people to assimilate into European society, some recognition had been given to the undoubted beauty and value of their spirituality, the integrity and wisdom of their traditions, and the appropriateness of their culture and lifestyle to Australian conditions. This would have allowed an integration of our cultures to occur utilising the best aspects of each and discarding the negative aspects, allowing a new culture to develop with European people as participants as well. Aboriginal people have much to teach non-Aboriginal people. As it was, Aboriginal people were expected to discard their own culture in favour of the dominant European culture.

This has been achieved with only limited success.

In these days when reconciliation is the catch-cry, there is still a way to extricate ourselves from this very tangled web we have woven. Perhaps the rather belated integration of the best aspects of the cultures is the only hope for harmony going into the third millennium, but that is entirely another story, one that is still in the course of being written.