ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, GOLD, AND TOURISM: THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVENESS FOR GOLDFIELDS TOURISM IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

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In the 1960s Australian historians were criticized for being the “high priests” of a cult of forgetfulness, for neglecting Aboriginal history, and for excluding a whole quadrant of the landscape from their research. In this article, the authors argue that the same criticisms may be leveled at the interpretation of goldfields history. Taking the Goldfields Tourism Region in western Victoria as their focus, the authors show the richness of the Aboriginal side of the goldfields story, and show that their exclusion from this story is not due to a lack of material. On the contrary, the barriers that exclude Aboriginal experiences from goldfields tourism are based on the perception and choice of tourism agencies and managers. The practice of history of the Sovereign Hill Museums Association in Ballarat serves as a case study for this article. The authors argue that the heritage industry has a responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal experiences are not excluded from their interpretation. Just as the writing of mainstream history had for many years dispossessed Aboriginal peoples and kept them out of sight, and out of mind, it is time for the historiography of gold to reappraise its ideology and find a balance that no longer excludes Aboriginal themes that have a legitimate place in goldfields history. There are several ways that Sovereign Hill may present indigenous perspectives as it interprets the history of gold mining in Ballarat and Victoria from 1850. More information can be made available, by such means as a series of publications ranging from books to Web pages and activity sheets for children. Interpretive displays focusing on the specificity of Aboriginal people and gold, centered around the themes reviewed in this article, could be constructed. Aboriginal guides could interpret this rich heritage for visitors to the museum. Aboriginal people were present on the Ballarat goldfields, and elsewhere, in many capacities, as Native Police, as miners, guides, and gold finders, as wives and sexual partners, as farmers and entrepreneurs trading cultural items and food, and as local residents going about their everyday lives, staging corroborees and other forms of interaction with other inhabitants. Many of these interactions could be “activated” by Aboriginal people; for example, there is scope for activation of the corroborees staged in Ballarat in the 1850s, of the Aboriginal encounter of the traveling musical troupe as witnessed by Antoine Fauchery, of the trade between Aboriginal people and miners, and of the critical role played by the Aboriginal Native Police in maintaining law and order in Ballarat and other goldfields in the early 1850s.

Aboriginal history; Goldfields; Victoria

Introduction

Throughout 2001, Victorian communities celebrated the sesquicentenary of the discovery of gold in Victoria by staging numerous events and celebrations. Events included festivals, plays, heritage trails, and reenactments (www.gold150.net). The absence of any celebrations with Aboriginal themes was evident, but not surprising given the Eurocentric and, more recently, Sinocentric focus of Victoria's goldfields heritage industry. The exclusion of Aboriginal themes from these particular public celebrations is not an aberration, for the authors contend that goldfields tourism, generally, excludes indigenous heritage from its celebration and representation of gold heritage. In this respect the exclusion of Aboriginal voices from the historical discourse of the Victorian goldfields in the 1850s is analogous to the exclusion of Aboriginal people from Australian historical writing until the late 1960s. The inattention to Aboriginal people within Australian history was explained to be a structural matter, a view from a window that had been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. Aboriginal people were not included because they were not in the eye of vision, but "out of sight" and "out of mind" (Clark, 1998).

There are four common perceptions about Aboriginal people and the goldfields (see <http://www.abc.net.au/ola/transcripts/tran6.htm>):

1. that most Aboriginal people were attached to pastoral stations, rather than townships;
2. that those few who were at mining settlements were on the periphery;
3. that those on the periphery were bewildered spectators; and
4. that Aboriginal experiences of the goldfields were primarily negative.

There is no doubting that for many Aboriginal people the goldfields were destructive and negative, and these unpleasant truths need to be articulated, but it is also the case that there are many positive aspects to this history that need to be brought out.

It is not possible in an article of this brevity to document exhaustively the extensive information available to the heritage industry. However, through a series of analyses of major subthemes the Aborigi-

nal side of goldfields history will be reviewed. The focus will be the 1850s. The article will show that Aboriginal people were not primarily living on pastoral stations, that they were not simply living on the fringes, and that they were certainly not "bewildered spectators." It shall clearly show that the exclusion of Aboriginal voices from the goldfields story is not due to a lack of material. On the contrary, the barriers that exclude Aboriginal experiences from goldfields historical writing are ideological, and based on misperception and choice.

The focus of this article will be the Sovereign Hill heritage theme park. Sovereign Hill—Victoria's most successful historical theme park—attracts over 500,000 visitors each year (Davidson & Spearritt, 2000, p. 265). Tourists are informed in promotional material that they will "experience life as it was in the 1850s. It's just like stepping back in time." It is claims such as this that take us to the core of the issue—the ways that Sovereign Hill practices history, and the extent to which tourism may be used as a vehicle for presenting an indigenous discourse.

The Practice of History at Sovereign Hill

The practice of history at Sovereign Hill has been the focus of several studies, including Davison (1988) and Evans (1991a, 1991b). Historical theme parks and outdoor museums are always open to the criticism that they sanitize the past. Davison (1988), for example, commented that Sovereign Hill's gold mining township was a "necessarily quieter, cleaner and more orderly" place than Ballarat would have been in the 1850s. He argued that the attraction exemplified "the antiquarian belief that by an authentically reconstructed environment we are enabled to re-enter the past" (p. 72). Evans (1991b, p. 142) has shown that historical projects such as Sovereign Hill may be criticized for selectively distorting the past and sentimentalizing history.

Evans, an ethnohistorian by training, became Curator at Sovereign Hill in 1986, and his publications survey the development of historical practice at Sovereign Hill. He has documented the evolution and maturation of the practice of history at the historical park. The impetus for the establishment of the Ballarat Historical Park Association, Sovereign Hill's parent body, in 1969, may be seen in its original statement of aims: "The primary object of the

Association is to provide for present and future generations a worthy reminder of the lives and work of men and women who, in so many fields of endeavour, pioneered and developed [Ballarat]" (Evans, 1991b, p. 143).

This early mythologizing phase intended to "recreate the Ballarat of the goldfields—as they believed it had been, and as the local community 'remembered' that historical period" (Evans, 1991b, p. 144). The mythology of Ballarat that informed this early phase included the Chinese, but as far as the Wathawurrung Aboriginal people went, the practice of history excluded them from the landscape.

Between 1975 and 1980, the presentation of history at Sovereign Hill transformed from a concern with re-creating "everyday life in early Ballarat" to an attempt "to tell the story of the ordinary man's [sic] quest for gold and the better life it would bring him in the 1850s paralleling the development of Ballarat during the first decade of its existence after gold was discovered here in 1851" (Ballarat Historical Park Association [BHPA], 1983).

The president of the Ballarat Historical Park Association in the 1982–1983 Annual Report, noted that:

Sovereign Hill shows Ballarat as it was at its most exciting time: a brand new township full of activity and enterprise. It was a city full of hope. Gold was the lure and the reward, and there were enough successes along with the many disappointments that people were drawn here from around the world. . . . It is our attempt at Sovereign Hill to show that first decade and try to give our visitors an understanding of what it was all about and the differences from life today. (Nicholson, in BHPA, 1983, p. 2)

Despite the words of the head teacher at Sovereign Hill employed in the Park's Education Services, that "an essential part of the whole programme was the total experience of life on the goldfields in the 1850s" (BHPA, 1983, p. 12), the Aboriginal experience of the goldfields was not a part of that program. The Park's Curator, an economic historian, confirmed that "Sovereign Hill have a moral responsibility to present as true and faithful a picture of the past as possible . . . we have an even greater responsibility to the past itself. We are conscious that we must all strive to remember and honour these obligations. The moment they are forgotten is the mo-

ment when Sovereign Hill has failed" (Davis, in BHPA, 1983, p. 23).

The past is re-created at Sovereign Hill through several instruments. Using the delineation of Lowenthal (1997), these instruments may be recognized as "duplication" and "reenactment." Sovereign Hill undertakes duplication in that it has consciously constructed facsimiles or copies of lost originals, buildings from early Ballarat, such as the Charlie Napier Hotel, the Chinese Proctor's Office, the Criterion Store, and St. Peter's School. Reenactment, or to use Sovereign Hill's preferred term "activation," reproduces past events. Actors repeat what was supposedly done in the past, and restored or replica houses are staffed with "replica people" or "human artifacts" (Lowenthal, 1997, p. 295). Lowenthal comments that in "the United States, re-enactments are a *sine qua non* of popular participation in history" (p. 295). Evans considers that visitors to Sovereign Hill can experience a more historically balanced appreciation of Ballarat's unique heritage because of these activations. He compares Sovereign Hill visitors to "anthropologists suddenly landed in the midst of an alien tribe, trying to find out, by watching what the natives do, what they mean by doing it," and contends "That is how history at Sovereign Hill becomes living history" (Evans, 1991a, p. 22).

Sovereign Hill is the sum of numerous parts: an activated outdoor museum of the 1851 to 1861 decade; a mining museum of the 1860 to 1916 period, and a formal gold museum that presents historical and contemporary displays on the Ballarat region. Added to these may be the educational and promotional services that complement the aims of the Association, which in 1990 were stated as follows:

These museums will emphasise the impact of the 1850s goldrush on Ballarat and Victoria, and the subsequent development of the town and its social and industrial history, together with the pre-history and geology of the district and the influence of gold on the history of mankind. (BHPA, 1990)

Museums have tended to see their major role in terms of presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' material culture, however, they also have obligations to the peoples whose cultural heritage they hold. (Museums Australia, 2000, p. 1)

Through their collections, exhibits and programs, museums have long held power to make decisions about if and how indigenous cultures are portrayed and pre-

sented. One of the principles undergirding this policy is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders should be involved in the "management of collections and information, and their use in public programs of museums, including exhibitions, education and publications." (Museums Australia, 2000)

In 1993, the Sovereign Hill Museums Association endorsed the objectives and principles of the policy of *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, launched by Museums Australia Inc. That year, as part of Sovereign Hill's celebration of the international Year of Indigenous Peoples, the Gold Museum hosted the *Koorie* exhibition, a large traveling display produced by the Koorie Heritage Trust. A Koorie Activity Day was held on International Museums Day in May. Local Koorie artists and musicians worked with education officers and arranged a program of activities for children. A local indigenous musician was employed in 1993 by the Gold Museum as a Koorie Trainee, and he worked in the curatorial section assisting staff catalogue and care for the Ballarat Historical Park Association's collection (BHPA, 1993). A second mobile exhibition, *Between Two Worlds*, was staged at the Gold Museum in October 1998. This exhibition focused on the removal of Aboriginal children.

In 1996, the Association undertook research into the development of two major new permanent exhibitions on Koori cultural heritage and on the pastoral era. "Sovereign Hill and Gold Museum staff have worked closely with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative in working towards the Koori exhibition" (Sovereign Hill Museums Association [SHMA], 1997, p. 21). This collaboration resulted in the opening in April 1999 of an exhibition called *Land of the Wathawurrung*, a three-dimensional experience or sound and light show set in a circular theatre within the Gold Museum. The exhibition presents a history of the Wathawurrung people. The exhibition received funding from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and Sovereign Hill (SHMA, 1999). An adjacent gallery space allowed school groups to explore further Aboriginal history and culture.

In July 1999, in collaboration with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, an exhibition entitled *New Stories* was staged. The exhibition featured 60 works from local artists. That year Sover-

eign Hill received a grant from the Local History Grants Program to construct an education and activity space to extend the experience of school groups studying Aboriginal history and culture (SHMA, 2000). Aboriginal heritage is also presented at "Narmbool," a 1900-hectare pastoral property near Elaine, southeast of Ballarat, that was acquired by Sovereign Hill in 2001. "Eco and Heritage" tours operate at Narmbool and visitors learn about "the Aboriginal and European presence at Narmbool and learn how to find traditional Aboriginal bush tucker" (SHMA, n.d.).

Sovereign Hill's Web site claims that it "faithfully depicts Ballarat's first ten years after the discovery of gold in 1851." The Web site allows readers access to "research notes" prepared for secondary and primary school students. These notes cover topics such as "Law and Order on the Goldfields," "Women on the Goldfields," "The Chinese in Ballarat," and "Life on the Goldfields." There is one secondary school resource sheet devoted to "Ballarat's Aboriginal Heritage"; however, this says very little about Aboriginal people and gold. The site also has a "Frequently Asked Questions" service. There are 14 questions, ranging from "What was life like for the Chinese on the Goldfields?" to "How much gold was found in Ballarat?" Again, there are no specific questions such as "What was life like for Aboriginal people on the Goldfields?" or "What was the impact of the gold rushes on Victoria's Aboriginal population?" This Web site gives the Sovereign Hill Museums Association an avenue to include Aboriginal dimensions into Victoria's and Ballarat's goldfield story. The themes identified below would be suitable subjects for a series of information sheets for students and visitors.

Since its opening in 1970, Sovereign Hill has sought to be inclusive of indigenous interests, as can be seen from the above survey, though it must be stated that Sovereign Hill in terms of its core mission, that of portraying Ballarat's and Victoria's gold history, has failed to include Ballarat's and Victoria's indigenous gold history in its outdoor museum. The question has to be asked why the Aboriginal side of the goldfields story is excluded from Sovereign Hill's outdoor museum. One possible explanation is the common misperception that Aboriginal experiences of the goldfields were primarily negative. This may well explain the reluctance to include Aboriginal

interpretations in the presentation of goldfield history in Sovereign Hill's outdoor museum. There is no doubting that for many Aboriginal people the goldfields were destructive and negative, and these unpleasant truths need to be articulated, but it is also the case that there are many positive aspects to this history that need to be brought out.

Outside of Australia, heritage theme parks presenting indigenous culture have focused on a "community of people" who actually belonged to the areas being presented (Halewood & Hannam, 2001, p. 568). Reenactment activities of the Viking period in Western Europe have steered away from the Anglo-American stereotypical recipe of Viking heritage being one of "big men with big swords under a big sky." The participants in Viking heritage tourism often engage in a trading fair. The market itself is usually accompanied by a play, combat displays, horse riding displays, and/or craft demonstrations such as building construction, replica houses, boats, and cooking. Halewood and Hannam (2001) claim that Viking heritage tourism operators recognize and acknowledge the sensitive issue of authenticity and commodification. Moreover, they point out that cultural tourism can be actively used for the development of local culture, "intensifying the traditional rather than diluting it" (p. 577).

An interesting example of mining/indigenous heritage tourism is found in Potosi, a colonial city in the highlands of Bolivia. Mine tours in Potosi are offered and narrated by indigenous Quechua (sometimes spelled Qhechwa) and subsequently mining tourism becomes an opportunity to favor the indigenous population, rather than the colonial invaders. A brief survey by Micheal Pretes (2002) of three international mining communities—Ballarat, Kimberley in South Africa, and Dawson in Canada—that have turned their mining history into cultural tourism revealed that the indigenous populations hold only a very marginal place in the tourism narrative. Pretes (2002) considers that in each of these sites: "indigenist discourse is distorted, suppressed or omitted" and that "Indigenous voices have been carefully silenced" (pp. 447–454). Of Sovereign Hill's outdoor museum, Pretes noted that "there is virtually no mention of the earlier Aboriginal presence or any discussion of how mining affected these people" (p. 446).

This article is an attempt at revealing that Sovereign Hill and the gold heritage tourism industry in

general have an opportunity to be more inclusive in the ways that the Aboriginal presence and contribution to Victoria's rich gold history is presented and represented.

Indigenous Theme: Attraction of the Goldfields

Aboriginal people were attracted to the goldfields for a range of reasons. For one thing, the fields were on traditional Aboriginal lands, and they were keen to continue their association with their clan estates. Furthermore, the goldfields offered commercial opportunities for trade and exchange. They were also exotic places where unusual people lived with strange possessions and animals. The Aboriginal man's reaction to seeing a trombone for the first time being played in Ballarat (see below) is an example of this exoticism. It is also possible to find examples of Aboriginal people, themselves, succumbing to gold fever of the Victorian goldfields, and immigrant Aboriginal people joining the rush to Victoria.

Antoine Fauchery (1857/1965) commented on the attraction of the goldfields. "They always wander from place to place without ever staying anywhere for more than three or four days. Divided into nomadic tribes made up of fifteen or twenty individuals, they are seen now in the bush, now in the towns, and still more frequently on the diggings, which they visit by preference" (p. 96). Fauchery's comment on the attraction of the goldfield is not an isolated example. TH Puckle (13/2/1857, in Victoria Public Records Office), the Commissioner of Crown Lands based in Hamilton, reported to the Surveyor General in February 1857, that the chief places of resort of the Aboriginal people in his district included the Mt Ararat goldfields. William Huon, of Wodonga, informed the 1858 Select Committee that in his district, the "tribes for the last few years have been in the habit of frequenting the various diggings and other townships" (Victoria, 1858–1859, p. 28).

Fauchery (1857/1965) has recounted the encounter of an Aboriginal man at the Ballarat diggings with a band of wandering musicians.

it was, I think, the first time music was heard on the diggings. An agreeable sensation for all, and particularly novel for the natives. Coloured men, women and children were laughing, foaming, twisting in a general fit of epilepsy. [Only one man] kept his dignity, and, neglecting the varied ensemble of the orchestra, all his attention was fixed on the trombone. You know the

mechanism of the trombone: four tubes inserted one within the other, which are lengthened and shortened at will as the notes require it. It was this mechanism above all that aroused the lively interest of the observer. What could that yellow, shining creature be, that was now four feet long and now only two? What could possibly, in their back and forward movement, become of those hard metal tubes that had no points of separation, even from the Alsatian who was blowing into them with the strength of his lungs?—A mystery!—The full extension of the instrument did not over-astonish the black man; but when he saw it, drawn back by the instrumentalist's hand, go up again, diminish and reduce itself to its simplest proportions, he completely lost his head; he touched the brass with his black quivering hands then he came back to the Alsatian, on whose person he devoted himself to the most minute researches, opening his coat, his waistcoat, feeling in his pockets, pulling aside the pleats of his shirt, thrusting his hands everywhere, but finding nothing, nothing at all that might tell him where half of the instrument disappeared. Suddenly he stopped, enveloped in a fiery gaze the musician and the trombone now all of one piece, then struck his forehead and cried, 'He is swallowing it.' And he ran away, waving his arms in the air, and showing signs of the most dreadful despair. (p. 98)

The Victorian gold rushes were also responsible for attracting a Tasmanian Aboriginal family to leave Tasmania and settle in the Buangor district in 1853 at Eurambeen station (Barwick, 1985). John Briggs and his wives Louisa Strugnell Briggs and Ann Briggs, and their family joined the rush to the goldfields where they lived independently from any government assistance until the early 1870s. John and Louisa had nine children during this time. John Briggs and his family worked on Eurambeen station as shepherds and general farm hands until the late 1860s. The Eurambeen wages book (in Anderson, 1969) dated 1855–1862, has several entries concerning John Briggs. He was first employed to be “generally useful” at £1 a week, but, in April 1856, he commenced shearing. Two months later he decided to try his luck at the nearby diggings, only to return to Eurambeen a fortnight later when he slept in a watchbox guarding a flock of sheep. The following year he was reengaged at £70 a year with his wife as hutkeeper. In November 1857, John was earning £58 and four rations pitching hay and carting split timber from the mountains. In 1858, his wages rose to £70 and three rations. Briggs went off to the diggings in March but returned to build a new

hut on the station, and do other bush work such as cutting bark at 6d a sheet.

Several respondents to the 1858 Select Committee were of the opinion that “it would be beneficial to them to be kept from the different diggings, if it was possible” (Sherard, in Victoria 1858–1959, p. 33); “I think they would derive the greatest benefit from being excluded from the towns, more especially those on the goldfields” (Synott, in Victoria, 1858–1859, p. 33).

Indigenous Theme:

Aboriginal Discovery of Gold, and Prospecting

In the historic record, there are numerous instances of Aboriginal people discovering and/or prospecting for gold. For example, Joseph Parker, the son of Assistant Protector Edward Parker, has claimed that gold was found in the Loddon valley in 1849. “The first gold in the district was discovered in 1849 by an aboriginal boy in picking up what he supposed to be a stone to throw at a wounded parrot, but it turned out be a nugget of gold! A European shepherd secured it and kept it a secret for two years” (Morrison, 1971, p. 51).

In miners' reminiscences there are occasional allusions to Aboriginal miners on the Victorian goldfields. For example, J. F. Hughes, a digger at Porcupine Flat (near Bendigo), in 1853 proclaimed that “Among those gold-seekers might have been found representatives of nearly every phase of human society” including “the Aboriginal” (Hughes, n.d., p. 4). Similarly, William Howitt, writing of the would-be reformists on the Ballarat goldfields and their design for a “diggers flag,” thought that the “native blacks” flag should also be represented as “there were several” (Keesing, 1967, p. 210). At the Linton diggings, Charles Ferguson met a large number of the “Wardy yallock” Aboriginal people. According to Ferguson (1888/1979):

There was one black fellow of this tribe who told me he knew where there was plenty of gold, about sixty miles away, and offered to take me or Walter there. We made arrangements to go with him and take one other person also. . . . They were gone about two weeks. They got gold, but the boys said it was the last place ever made and they would not stop there if they could make a pound weight of gold a day. The same place, but a short time after, turned out to be a good gold

district and a great quartz region, known as the Ararat diggings. (pp. 79–80)

F. McKenzie Clarke recalled that members of the Native Police Corps were prospectors at Golden Gully (Bendigo). McClelland, a drill instructor with the Corps, was stationed briefly on Bendigo Creek in 1851–1852.

Sergeant McL. Paid us a visit with a party of black police on patrol and after camping, he took the black boys up the gully and they immediately began picking up gold on the surface in considerable quantities and by night, with the assistance of the dish and shovel we lent him, he and the black boys obtained over two pounds weight of gold and this he greatly augmented during the two succeeding days. Then, greatly disgusted at the necessity that obliged him to resume his duties . . . he entered into negotiations with our party to purchase his claim. (Cusack, 1979, p. 13)

McClelland's claim was known as "The Black-boys claim," a reference to the Aboriginal troopers. As one digger explained, the troopers "were always called boys [even] if they were fifty years old" (Fels, 1988, p. 219).

Aboriginal people camped at Myer's Flat at Bendigo in 1852 "were regularly seen fossicking (or 'specking') on the red clay heaps along the gullies" (Annear, 1999, p. 206).

Cahir (1998, p. 40) has noted that a number of miners were accompanied by Aboriginal guides who on occasion were the actual discoverers of new gold deposits. In a letter to the *Geelong Advertiser*, Paul Gooch, a miner in the Canadian and Prince Regent gullies reported in September 1852: "that the way in which the Eureka diggings were discovered was on the occasion of my sending out a blackfellow to search for a horse who picked up a nugget on the surface. Afterwards I sent out a party to explore who proved that gold was really to be found in abundance."

There is also some cultural evidence that Aboriginal people regarded gold as a precious stone. Aldo Massola (1969, p. 69) has recounted a story of how mounts Buninyong and Elephant were formed. Although he is of the opinion that the legend contains "post-European elements" believing that gold "could not have appeared in the original version, since its value only became known to the Aborigines through the white man."

Mount Elephant and Mount Buninyong were once men. Mount Elephant was in possession of a stone axe. Buninyong offered him some gold for it. Having agreed they met at what is now the Pitfield diggings for the exchange. Some time later Buninyong reconsidered, and desired his gold back. Elephant refused. Buninyong sent him a fighting message, and the challenge was accepted. They met at Pitfield diggings. Elephant buried his spear in Buninyong's side, and the hole can be seen to this day. Elephant received a deadly blow on the head from Buninyong's stone axe. The gaping hole in Elephant's head can also be seen. The two men, mortally wounded, retired in opposite directions. Their bodies turned into mountains at the spot where they died. (Massola, 1969, p. 69).

It is also possible to find examples when miners used Aboriginal bush craft on the goldfields. For example, Lord Robert Cecil who made a visit to the Kyneton diggings in 1852, recalled how the diggers at Specimen Gully "showed me what the natives call 'blackfellows' sugar.' It is a species of manna falling plentifully from the white-gum. It tastes very much like the second layer in a wedding cake" (Scott, 1945, p. 31). Pepper and De Araugo (1985) confirm that Omeo Aboriginal people were used by miners "as guides to the Omeo fields, making use of the fact that they still wandered in search of food, either hunting for it or getting rations in exchange for work" (p. 102).

Indigenous Theme: Living Conditions

Aboriginal deaths on the goldfields were common, especially drunken people falling down diggers' holes. One of the Djadjawurrung farmers, "Lanky," met his death falling down a digger's hole at the Yandoit Creek diggings in April 1855 (Clark, 1990). The circumstances of his death were that he was out late at night, and had been selling his farm produce at nearby diggings. Parker believed he had been "induced to take some liquor to which he was not usually accustomed." Parker told the 1858 Select Committee that there were "many persons on the diggings who seem to take a pleasure in compelling even those who are disposed to be sober to take liquor, in spite of their reluctance."

Correspondents to the 1858 Select Committee of the Victorian Legislative Council on the Aborigines confirmed that the mortality amongst the Aboriginal populations of their districts had been remarkable, especially since the discovery of gold (Victoria,

1858–1859), attributable primarily to venereal diseases, intemperance, and influenza.

Alcohol abuse became a characteristic feature of Aboriginal life from the 1850s. Alcohol had certainly been available on squatting runs but, with the advent of mining settlements, it became more accessible. Some people at the diggings were believed to take pleasure in inducing Aboriginal people to drink liquor (Bonwick, 1874, p. 152; Victoria, 1858–1859, p. 21).

John Bulmer, who was at the Bet Bet (Dunolly) diggings in 1854, noted that many diggers found it amusing to get Aboriginal people drunk and watch the fights that ensued. Wrote Bulmer, “On one occasion two men fastened on each other and with mouth and hand tried to injure themselves. One man I noticed had his lower lip bitten off, and this was a scene that made the crowd laugh” (Bulmer papers, in Christie, 1979, pp. 146–147).

Alfred Joyce believed that the Aboriginal people in the Plaistow district “did not show any signs of serious diminution till the breaking out of the diggings, but their demoralization had been going on all the time previously. Debauchery and drink was doing its work” (James, 1949, p. 92). He recalled that often “in passing through the diggings township near us, I have seen them squatting about the streets or near the public house, when they generally shouted out my name as I passed, as recognising an old acquaintance, followed by the usual appeal to ‘Give it sixpence’ that they might get something to eat, but more likely something to drink” (James, 1949, p. 92).

A correspondent in the *Gold Diggers’ Monthly Magazine* of 1853 wrote:

The poor aborigines are sadly neglected and degraded. By begging or bark cutting they obtain money at the mines, and wretches are always found ready to take their cash and give them fire-water. Cases of intemperance abound in their tribes. Their revelries and quarrels disturb the camp at night, and disease, misery, violence and even murder follow in the train. We were horrified at the sight of an expiring blackfellow—the victim of the preceding night’s drunken fracas. (Bate, 1979, p. 30)

On 10 August 1858, the *Mount Ararat Advertiser* ran the following story headed “Affray with the Aborigines at Cathcart.”

On the afternoon of August 5, a party of these “sable gentry” were amusing themselves by throwing their spears and boomerangs at each other, when one deliberately threw his boomerang at the Ballarat Medical Hall which finally landed on the surgeon’s table amongst his instruments. Upon being remonstrated with, one of them levelled a spear. Inspector Smith intervened breaking the “blackfellows” spear and other “instruments of destruction.” The blacks for some time past have been congregated in considerable numbers round this quarter, and mostly in a state of intoxication, when they are exceedingly noisy and troublesome, and it is high time something was done to abate the nuisance!

Indigenous Theme: Native Police Corps

Cahir (1998) has argued that one of the most significant and best-documented impacts Aboriginal people had on the goldfields was through the role of the Native Police Corps in establishing order on the goldfields. Members of the Native Police Corps were the first police on the goldfields. On duty, they accompanied the commissioners on their rounds, and like so much police work their presence alone was important, along with their readiness to intervene in the event of any disorder (Fels, 1988, p. 213).

In 1849, Commissioner Powlett, one sergeant, and eight Aboriginal troopers were sent to guard the “mines” discovered at Daisy Hill in the Pyrenees (Fels, 1988, p. 212). In 1851, Captain Dana, the officer in charge of the Corps, spent 3 months at the Clunes goldfield, and reported that his troopers picked gold from the ground everywhere they looked. In September 1851, a detachment of the Native Police and Lydiard escorted the first pack-horse convoys of gold from Buninyong to Melbourne. In October 1851, Dana and the sergeant-major returned to Nerre Nerre Warren, leaving some troopers under the control of Police Magistrate William Mair; however, four of them deserted within a fortnight under Mair’s control—two from Ballarat and two from Buninyong. Fels (1988, p. 215) believes that given Mair’s attitude to them in 1849, when he objected to pollution of his mounted police paddock by the Native Police camping in it, the troopers were unlikely to enjoy serving under him.

An incident on the Ballarat goldfields on 21 September 1851 illustrates their success as a force prepared to intervene in case of disorder. Commissioner Doveton and his assistant David Armstrong ex-

plained to the diggers the government's decision to introduce licensing fees, which attracted an angry response from the miners. A public meeting was held immediately, and when the first men came forward to pay the fee, they were struck and pelted by "the mob" as Dana called them. Had it not been for the presence of the Native Police, Dana reported, "those diggers would have been seriously injured" (Fels 1988, p. 213). Cannon (1993) takes the view that the overbearing methods of the Native Police "so antagonised the diggers that a flame of rebellion was lit, culminating in the Eureka Stockade three years later" (p. 239).

John Chandler recorded his reaction when he first espied the Native Police Corps in Melbourne. "They looked enough to frighten any one; their black faces, big white eyes, long moustache, long swords, carbines, and a pair of pistols in their holsters, was a caution to timid people" (Chandler, 1893/1990, p. 45). A reporter for the *Argus* in October 1851 called them a "Satanic Battalion of Black Guards" (Fels, 1988, p. 215).

William Brownhill, who found gold at Brown Hill in 1851, told James Oddie of how he was caught without a license, taken to the commissioner's camp, and "guarded by eight or nine black troopers, who in their uniform and polished boots, looked as proud as possible" (Fels, 1988, p. 212).

Artist and miner, William Strutt, did not share Chandler's reaction to the Native Police. At the Commissioner's Tent, at Golden Point, Ballarat, the police were headquartered, and the "fine and interesting corps of aboriginal black Troopers did their share of duty here before they were unwisely disbanded. I was getting interested in these fine soldierly fellows, and my drawings from them are the only existing pictorial records of their ever having existed at all" (Mackness, 1979, p. 27). Strutt's numerous portraits of the Native Police Corps at Ballarat and in Melbourne are testimony to the high regard he had for these Aboriginal men.

The useful black troopers were for a time made to escort prisoners to town (as also drawn by me) these fine fellows were at first the only mounted police, and indeed performed all the police duty at the Ballarat Diggings. It was an absurd mistake, however, employing them to collect or examine the diggers' licences. Of course their ignorance was then taken advantage of, as might have been anticipated. How could men unable

to read, discriminate between one piece of printed paper and another? And so the men were disbanded, and eventually all murdered by their fellow blacks. Such was the end of as useful a set of men as could be found for special service; particularly trekking in the wild bush carrying despatches, and they seemed to lend themselves wonderfully to military discipline, and as to their riding and capital seat, you could literally say that man and horse were one. I had much pleasure in making several studies and sketches of this, long since defunct, Black Police Force at their snug little barracks in the Richmond Paddock, near to Mr Latrobe's, the Governor's, called "Jolimont." One young man who could read and write well, and whose name was "Charlie Never" was the tailor to the force, but he in turn got murdered; he became much attached to me, and I wish I could have kept him as a servant. (Mackness, 1979, pp. 31–32)

Fels (1988, p. 216) considers the story that the black troopers were failures on the goldfields because they could not read as apocryphal. According to Fels (1988), Strutt

displays a surprising lack of imagination and knowledge, especially from an artist with a trained eye. It is a fundamental mistake of the literate to assume that pieces of paper look the same to the non-literate, and an absurd error on his part to conclude that these men, skilled as they were in reading signs, could not notice a difference in the inscription of a bank note and a licence, even if they could not interpret the meaning of the difference. (p. 217)

Indigenous Theme: Relationships With Miners

The relationships Aboriginal people formed with gold miners were complex and varied. The following excerpts portray the diverse nature of the relationships that miners and Aboriginal peoples formed.

George Robins, a miner on the Castlemaine goldfields, had mixed fortunes with the Djajawurrung people. Robins, while baling water out of his claim fell in and was saved from perishing by a "blackfellow." On another occasion, however, he was "held up" by Aboriginal bushrangers.

I took the first bullock from Mount Korong to Dunolly, and the first government safe to Mount Moliagul, and while at the last-named place I lost my horse, so I employed a black tracker to hunt him up. The fellow asked ten shillings, and insisted on pre-payment, but after getting the cash he refused to do the job. A lot of blacks surrounded my dray, and one got possession of my gun and threatened to shoot me if I did not give

him some sugar, tea, and flour. Of course, I had to comply and during the night I got away from the place altogether. (Robins, n.d., pp. 176–177)

On the road to the diggings at Beechworth Emily Skinner witnessed a corroboree and engaged in conversation with some Aboriginal women.

We came upon a large party of Aborigines at one place, Longwood, I think and they were holding a corroboree, I was told. Certainly they made noise enough. Their dancing and antics were dreadfully grotesque during the short time I watched them. They kept it up till far into the night. In the morning before resuming our journey I had an opportunity of seeing them and talking to some of the poor women “lubras” with their little piccaninnies fastened on their backs. (Duyker, 1995, p.45)

Gold miner, Walter Bridges, has recorded an instance in 1855 when his family encountered the Buninyong Aboriginal people.

My mother and wife and small boy that come out from England with us was standing at the tent one day all alone no other tents near when they saw a mob of Native Blacks and Lubrias and a mob of dogs with them come across the Gully so my wife said to Mother what ever will we do now so Mother said we must stand. So up they come yabbering good day Missie You my country woman now. My Mother had to be spokesman the Blacks said You gotum needle missie you gotum thread you Gotum tea you Gotum sugar you Gotum Bacca. So Mother had to say yes to get rid of them and had to give them all they asked for to get rid of them. That was what was called the Bunyong tribe and when they left they gave their usual salute. (Bridges, n.d.)

James Barr, in his reminiscences of McCallums Creek in 1854, recalled how some Aboriginal people visited his mining camp, and how a drunken digger made amorous advances to one of the Aboriginal women with the result that the party broke up in the wildest possible confusion (Flett, 1974, p. 7).

At the Dunolly goldfield, where Charles and Sarah Belcher pitched their tent, Aboriginal people would visit them and give much attention to the Belcher's young baby. When Charles Belcher went to Castlemaine for supplies, these Aboriginal people took care of Sarah Belcher, cutting wood and bringing water (Flett, 1974, p. 8).

Some gold miners formed relationships with Aboriginal women. Some of these liaisons were not

always positive. Some of these relationships produced children. One important example is the case of the Connolly family, a prominent Victorian Aboriginal family who is descended from John Connolly. Connolly was born between the years 1855 and 1860 at the Pleasant Creek diggings where his Aboriginal mother lived with a gold digger (Clark, 1991), and was raised by his maternal great uncle. Connolly was later to be a very important informant to A. W. Howitt in the summer of 1883–1884, and from Howitt's notes we can learn much about his early life. What is significant about Connolly's childhood is the richness of the cultural education his great uncle gave him. Thirty years after the first intrusion of Europeans into the Stawell district, the cultural knowledge of the local Aboriginal people was rich and it was being passed between generations. Furthermore, cultural practices such as tooth avulsion were still being practiced. Connolly gave Howitt much information concerning vocabulary, moiety and totem divisions, food distribution laws, notes on headmen, meetings, messengers, customs of marriage, doctors, clans, and other information (Howitt, n.d.).

Indigenous Theme: Environmental Degradation and Social Disruption

A corroboree was staged at the Wendouree Swamp in March 1857. A *Ballaarat Times* reporter witnessed the ceremony. At one particular interval, he reported that a performer

would go round to the visitors and make a strong appeal to each and sundry to give “black fellow a shilling.” Some people were silly enough to comply with this demand. . . . In leaving the place we stumbled on the mia-mia of King Billy. He was sitting in state at one side of a small fire, and in company with the princess his daughter, and his son-in-law. The old man seemed grieved at the revelry and debauch which on all hands surrounded him, and was evidently taking no part in the noisy performance. The princess did not imitate her father's taciturnity, but, at once, with all the volubility of a female tongue, proclaimed that the whole district of Ballaarat was at one period the patrimony of her sire. The dogs barked, the savages yelled, and the corroboree was pronounced at an end—all hurried towards their homes—while the blackfellows crowded to the nearest hotels, to spend in rum the proceedings of the night's pantomime. (“A Corroboree,” 1857).

Surveyor Walter Woodbury, who was surveying in the Buninyong district, wrote to his mother in June 1853.

We have had a tribe of the native Blacks camped near us for the last week so that we have an excellent opportunity of seeing how they live. . . . they construct what they call miamias, consisting of two forked sticks placed in the ground with one stick running across the top of them, they then rest large pieces of bark or branches of trees on these which gives them a shelter from the wind. They lie all around their fires at night and all the covering they wear is a possum rug or a blanket thrown around them. Their principle food is the opossum which they find out by knocking on the trees and where they find a hollow sound they cut open the tree and so catch the opossum. They also kill turkeys, pigeons and parrots with the boomerang which they are very expert at throwing. When they are very hungry and can get nothing else they will pick up the spiders, beetles, cockroaches and ants and eat them. (Woodbury, 1853).

Some Aboriginal people, nevertheless, asserted their rights. In 1852, James Madden, a bullock driver at Merino Downs visited the diggings. Near Lake Goldsmith, he and his wife were met by some Aboriginal people, one of whom "a big fellow who proudly assumed his kingship by stepping out to threaten us if we did not leave his terrain" (Anderson, 1969, p. 88). A group of Aboriginal diggers at Forest Creek in 1852, when asked to show their licenses, replied to the mounted police that the gold and the land were theirs by right so why should they pay money to the Queen (Annear, 1999, p. 289).

Indigenous Theme: Trade and Commerce Opportunities

Aboriginal people moved quickly to grasp the economic opportunities presented to them by the miners flooding to the gold diggings. Aboriginal people traded and sold possum skin cloaks, fish, and game such as possum. The Djadjawurrung farmers at Mount Franklin capitalized on the nearby goldfields by selling excess produce from their farms.

J. F. Hughes, a Castlemaine pioneer, recalled that possum skin and kangaroo skin rugs were "sold to settlers and lucky gold-diggers at £5 a-piece (Hughes, n.d.).' Miner James Arnot bought a possum rug in Melbourne made of 72 skins sewn together with sinews, also for £5 (Annear, 1999, p 92).

Aboriginal people from the Mitta Mitta and Little River districts, to the east of the Ovens goldfield, paid regular visits with possum rugs for sale (Pepper & De Araugo, 1985, p. 102). Eugen Von Guerard's 1854 oil painting "Aborigines on the road to the diggings" or "Barter" shows some Aboriginal people offering possum skins for sale to some bushmen.

The importance of possum skin rugs was confirmed in 1865, when a settler in the Carngham district, Henry Davies, sought to get the Local Guardian of Aborigines to "get an opossum-rug made for him, to take home to the old country, to show what the pioneers of the goldfields frequently used to sleep in. An Aboriginal couple was engaged to make a rug that they completed in four days, and were paid 30 shillings" ("The Decaying Race," 1865).

For the Aboriginal farming families near Mount Franklin, the goldfields offered them an avenue to sell their farm produce. These Djadjawurrung families had been farming 21 acres of land since 1852. They had built residences, and cultivated and reaped several crops (Clark, 1990). William Westgarth visited the Mt Franklin Aboriginal station in 1857 and met the schoolteacher there, and one of the Djadjawurrung farmers.

We learned, however, that some who had been trained here [the protectorate station] had afterwards settled themselves in the neighbourhood; one in particular being alluded to, who had married a wife of his own people, built himself a hut a mile from the station, and lived somewhat like ourselves by his daily labour. He was married to an aboriginal wife, and had a hut or cottage of his own, not far off, where he cultivated and sold produce. We, therefore, supposed him to be the person alluded to by the teacher we had just visited. (Westgarth, 1857, pp. 223–224)

Conclusion

This brief historical review through some of the available literature on Aboriginal themes has gone a long way to demonstrate that the four misconceptions we began with—namely, that most Aboriginal people were attached to pastoral stations, rather than townships; that those few at mining settlements were on the periphery; that those on the periphery, were bewildered spectators; and finally, that Aboriginal experiences on the goldfields were primarily negative—are groundless.

The practice of history at Sovereign Hill forces us to consider the question of "whose heritage?" is presented in the historical park. Since the opening of the park in 1970, this question has become much more complex. Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) have commented on the rise of "heritage dissonance" in "new world" settler colonies, such as Australia, where the question of "whose heritage?" has been complicated by the emergence of additional and overlapping interest groups "who have entered the arena with their own political agendas and their own versions of the interpreted past." One of these groups is "native peoples" who have emerged in most settler societies "with a new consciousness of their identity and sets of demand for inclusion with in a national heritage" (p. 180).

This article began with the suggestion that the exclusion of Aboriginal voices from the historical discourse of the Victorian goldfields in the 1850s was analogous to the exclusion of Aboriginal people from Australian historical writing. This inattention to Aboriginal people within Australian history was explained to be a structural matter, a view from a window that had been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. Aboriginal people were not included because they were not in the eye of vision, but "out of sight" and "out of mind." This article has only scratched the surface of the available literature. It has nevertheless exposed enough material to demonstrate that the exclusion of Aboriginal voices from the story of the Victorian goldfields is not due to a dearth of available information. The silence and selectivity must be explained by other reasons.

There are several ways that Sovereign Hill may present indigenous perspectives as it interprets the history of gold mining in Ballarat and Victoria from 1850. More information can be made available, by such means as a series of publications ranging from books to Web pages and activity sheets for children. Interpretive displays focusing on the specificity of Aboriginal people and gold, centered around the themes reviewed in this article, could be constructed. Aboriginal guides could interpret this rich heritage for visitors to the museum.

The gold rushes provided Victorian Aboriginal peoples with many opportunities. Owing to the exodus of European laborers to try their luck at the diggings, numerous pastoral stations were only able to

survive this disruption by employing Aboriginal labor. In some cases, Aboriginal guides were the discoverers of new gold deposits. The lure of the diggings even attracted an Aboriginal family from Tasmania, who paid their way to the Beaufort district, where they based themselves for 20 years. Aboriginal men served on the diggings as members of the Native Police Corps. Some Aboriginal people sold and traded possum skin cloaks to diggers. Aboriginal women formed relationships with miners, and there are many members of the community today who are descendants of these unions. Diggings were also places where Aboriginal peoples had access to alcohol, and some Aboriginal people met their deaths through falling down mining holes when in a drunken state.

Aboriginal people were present on the Ballarat goldfields, and elsewhere, in many capacities, as Native Police, as miners, guides, and gold finders, as wives and sexual partners, as farmers and entrepreneurs trading cultural items and food, and as local residents going about their every day lives, staging corroborees and other forms of interaction with other inhabitants. Many of these interactions could be "activated" by Aboriginal people; for example, there is scope for activation of the corroborees staged in Ballarat in the 1850s, of the Aboriginal encounter of the traveling musical troupe as witnessed by Antoine Fauchery, of the trade between Aboriginal people and miners, and of the critical role played by the Aboriginal Native Police in maintaining law and order in Ballarat and other goldfields in the early 1850s.

In 2002, the Sovereign Hill Museum Association agreed to become an industry partner with Dr. Ian D. Clark for an Australian Research Council Linkage application. Entitled "Black Gold: a history of Aboriginal people and gold mining in Victoria, 1850–1900," the application was successful and commenced in February 2003. The research program is the first major study of the history of Aboriginal involvement in Victoria's gold mining, and will provide a major information resource that will be available for the indigenous community, the goldfields heritage industry, and for the wider community. The outcomes of this research may see indigenous themes move from being the preserve of the Gold Museum to becoming a central part of the goldfields story as presented in Sovereign Hill's outdoor museum.

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