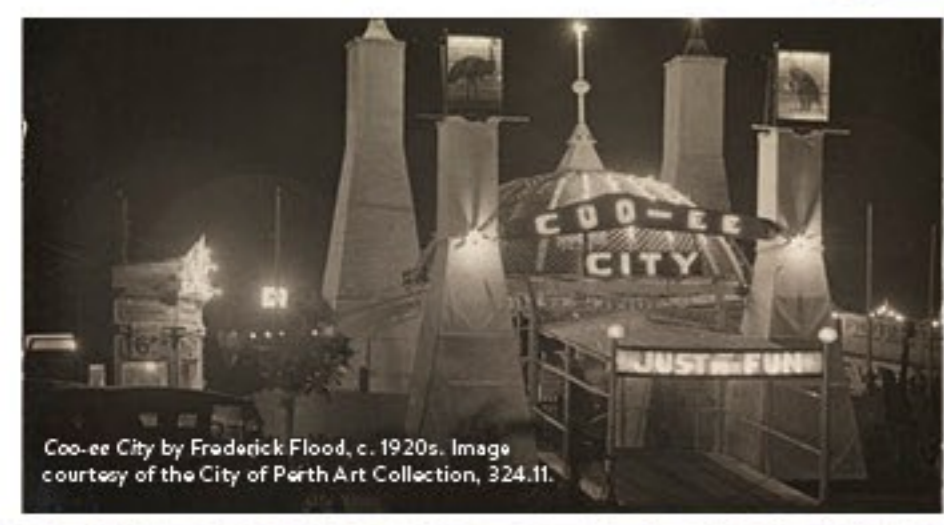
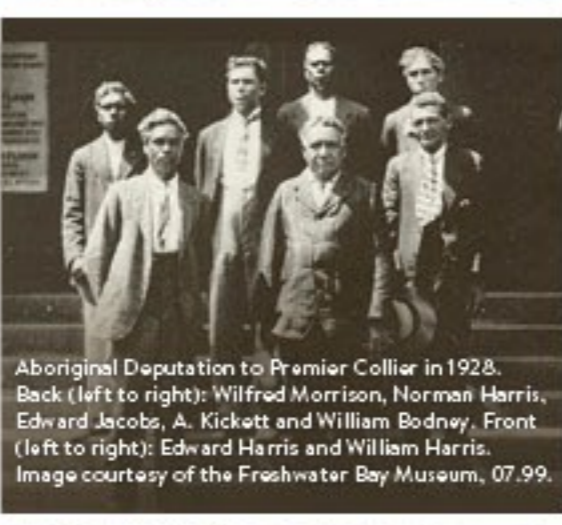


# Fighting for FAMILIES, COUNTRY, RIGHTS AND RECOGNITION

## ABORIGINAL HERITAGE IN THE CITY OF PERTH AFTER 1829



Cooe-ee City by Frederick Flood, c. 1920s. Image courtesy of the City of Perth Art Collection, 324.11.



Aboriginal Deputation to Premier Collier in 1928. Back (left to right): Wilfred Morrison, Norman Harris, Edward Jacobs, A. Kickett and William Bodney. Front (left to right): Edward Harris and William Harris. Image courtesy of the Freshwater Bay Museum, 07.99.



Map showing the boundaries of the Prohibited Area. Original map held by the State Records Office of Western Australia.



Fanny Balbuk. Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 25341P.

A depiction of St Georges Terrace entitled Sketch in the Town of Perth, Western Australia 1839 by Charles Wittenoom. Image courtesy of the City of Perth Art Collection, 351.

**P**ERTH HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MEETING PLACE. BEFORE THE WEDJELA (WHITE PEOPLE) ARRIVED IN 1829, NOONGAR WOULD MEET IN VARIOUS CAMPS TO EAT, TRADE, TALK, AND BE TOGETHER. AS THE WEDJELA BUILT HOUSES NEAR THE CAMPS, THEY STARTED DISPLACING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO WERE PUSHED TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY. BETWEEN 1927 AND 1954 AN EXCLUSION ZONE WAS IMPOSED ACROSS THE CITY WHICH PROHIBITED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FROM ENTERING THE CBD WITHOUT A PASS. HOWEVER, DESPITE THE DISCRIMINATION AND DISPLACEMENT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN PERTH HAVE ENDURED, ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND IDENTITY HAS REMAINED STRONG. THROUGH THE CONTINUED RESISTANCE AND ADVOCACY OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, THEIR CULTURE AND BELIEFS HAVE BEEN MAINTAINED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

### 01: THE PERTH CULTURAL PRECINCT: TAKING AN ABORIGINAL CULTURE TO THE WORLD

The cultural precinct, including theatres, the Western Australian Museum and the Art Gallery, is a testament to the contribution of Aboriginal people to cultural life. Their presence reflects their commitment to expressing their culture and to achieving excellence.

Noongar theatre became prominent in Perth in the 1980s when playwright and poet Jack Davis' play *The Dreamers* (first performed in 1973), achieved international prominence. Early performances included actor Ernie Dingo and actor, musician and artist Richard Walley. Walley formed Middar Aboriginal Theatre with three friends in 1978, and this company has shared Noongar culture in 32 countries. In 1993, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company was formed. The Company is passionately committed to producing and presenting a mixture of contemporary and classic Aboriginal theatre. Aboriginal artists are well represented in the Art Gallery of Western Australia. The Gallery's collection includes works that capture important events and places like Rover Thomas' *Wangkul Junction - Wulanguya* (1988), and Shane Pickett's *Waagle - Rainbow Serpent* (1983). There are also works about urban Aboriginal experiences like Christopher Pease's *Noongar Dreaming* (1999) Julie Dowling's *Death of an Anthropologist* (1996) and Queensland artist Gordon Bennett's *The persistence of language* (1987).

If you enjoy the experiences of the Karla Yarning trails, the Western Australian Museum has a permanent exhibition called *Katta Djinoong - First Peoples of Western Australia*, which provides more insight into Aboriginal people's experiences and heritage across all of Western Australia.

### 02: THE PROHIBITED AREA—1927-1954 (CORNER OF BARRACK STREET AND MURRAY STREET)

In the 1920s, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, A. O. Neville, wanted to exert greater control over Aboriginal peoples' movements and interactions. Using the 1905 Aborigines Act, Neville declared the city of Perth a Prohibited Area and made it an offence for Aboriginal people to enter unless they were in "lawful employment".

The corner of Murray Street and Barrack Street was the centre of the Prohibited Area. Its boundaries stretched 1.3 kilometres from the Swan River to Newcastle Street in Northbridge, and 2 kilometres from Bennett Street in East Perth to Milligan Street in West Perth. From 1927 until 1954 Aboriginal people needed permits to enter the city and Aboriginal employees would be arrested if police found them in the city after the 6pm curfew. The Prohibited Area created major issues for Aboriginal people looking for work or travelling to and from home. Irwin Lewis was employed in the city in the 1950s and became a senior public servant working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy.

*I had to leave work before 5.30pm. It's not like we are talking about the 1800s or 1700s. This was 1950. It was quite common to see Aboriginal people being taken across the railway line to the local police station.*

### 03: THE ABORIGINAL PROTECTOR'S OFFICE (57 MURRAY STREET)

The Aborigines Protection Act of 1905 gave the Protector of Aborigines control over nearly every aspect of Aboriginal peoples' lives including where they could live, who they could work for, what they were paid,

and who they could marry. During this time, Aboriginal children were frequently removed from their parents, which had tragic consequences for many families. Experiences like the one below shared by a boordiya yorga (woman leader) were common:

*They caught me and my young brother in the school, we were sitting in the classroom. I was doing maths at the time, and they said "there's them welfare people. I think they're coming for us." Well they grabbed me, took me. I was in the mission for five years. They took me when I was nine. My mum passed on. I was 14 when she died. When my mother was alive they wouldn't let me stay with her. She was a chronic diabetic. She passed away through that. In the end, when I went along to her funeral day I was offered a job. I went out house cleaning straight away. (Interview, 2014)*

This system of control was run from the Aboriginal Protectors Office at 57 Murray Street. The period of most intensive control was during Neville's reign from 1915 until 1940. While micro-managing the lives of Aboriginal people to the level of approving spending on their underwear, Neville oversaw appalling conditions on the State settlements like Moore River where many Aboriginal people were forced to live. These institutions had poor educational opportunities and horrific rates of disease and death.

Aboriginal people survived by relying on their kinship and friendship networks. Aboriginal people's houses became hubs for information, interaction, assistance and resistance to paternalistic state control. Alice Nannup was a young girl when she was taken from her family. She found strength amongst her friends:

*Jessie [Argyle] was older than me and we were both Nor'westers, so she took me under her wing. ... We loved one another. All the Northies always loved one another. We all belonged to one country, never mind if you're not related by blood.*

Aboriginal identity, culture and connections to country remained strong despite the attempts at this time to segregate Aboriginal people and turn them into an underclass of maids and cheap labour.

Location 4 requires going down and back up a hill. If you would like a shorter walk, you may choose to skip this location.

### 04: THE NEW ERA ABORIGINAL FELLOWSHIP (176 WELLINGTON STREET)

According to Marilyn Strother, Aboriginal institutions in the 1960s and 1970s relied on Aboriginal people "pulling together". One of the organisations created during this period was the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship (NEAF). Its original mission was to achieve equality for Aboriginal and European people, particularly in the areas of justice, housing, education, employment, health and participation in government. The driving forces in NEAF were Aboriginal people like Elizabeth Pearson, Patrick Hume, Lorna Hume, Arthur Prosser, Rose Pearl, Eliza Isaacs, Robert Isaacs, Lesley McFarlane, Jim Morrison, Ken Colbung, playwright Jack Davis and, in its early days, non-Aboriginal people including Iole Burkitt and Cyril Gare. NEAF was very successful at starting new Aboriginal advocacy organisations that continue today. Wadjuk Balardong Binjareb Yuat Warden/Yamatji man Richard Walley was the Executive Officer for the NEAF from 1976 until 1988:

*It was an enabling organisation, and once you set yourself up to enable opportunities, then those opportunities became working parties which then became institutions, which became organisations. New Era actually fulfilled its obligations of setting up the Aboriginal Medical Service, the Aboriginal Legal Service, very influential with setting up the Aboriginal Housing Board.*

### 05: LAND RIGHTS—THE NATIVE TITLE TRIBUNAL (FEDERAL COURT OF AUSTRALIA, 1 VICTORIA AVENUE)

In 1992, the High Court of Australia recognised the existence of Aboriginal land rights. This forced the political parties to act and the Keating Labour government established the Native Title Tribunal in 1993. The Native Title Tribunal in Perth is located on Victoria Avenue. In the court case *Bennell vs. State of Western Australia* (2006), the Noongar were granted the first successful native title claim over a capital city in Australia.

However, the decision was reversed by the Full Court of the Federal Court of Australia. Negotiations between Noongar and the state government are continuing.

### 06: FANNY BALBUK AND GOVERNMENT HOUSE (SOUTH SIDE OF ST GEORGES TERRACE, ADJACENT TO COUNCIL HOUSE)

Government House, located on St Georges Terrace, is also the grave site of the grandmother of Fanny Balbuk, a strong, independent Wadjuk Noongar woman. Balbuk's other grandmother, who was born on Heirisson Island, is buried under Bishop's House (corner of Mounts Bay Road and Spring Street). We know about Fanny Balbuk through her conversations with Daisy Bates:

*One of her favourite annoyances was to stand at the gates of Government House, reviling all who dwelt within [due to the denial of access to her grandmother's burial site] [...] To the end of her life she raged and stormed at the usurping of her beloved home ground. [...] Through fences and over them, Balbuk took the straight track to the end. When a house was built in the way, she broke its fence-palings with her digging stick and charged up the steps and through the rooms.*

As Noel Nannup has explained, Balbuk's actions were a claim to her lawful and rightful inheritance as a Wadjuk boordiya yorga owner.

*That was her songline, her dreaming. She just kept going and didn't take any notice of the new city going up. That's a story of defiance and determination.*

### 07: THE DEANERY—SITE OF THE OLD JAIL (CORNER ST GEORGES TERRACE AND PIER STREET)

In the 1830s, Wadjuk Noongar leader Midgegooroo and his son Yagan struggled to assert their rights against colonial occupation. According to Yuat Wadjuk boordiya yorga May McGuire, Yagan's resistance in particular is important to the Noongar people:

*Yagan is a hero to Noongar people. He stood up for his family.*

After several members of Midgegooroo's family were killed by white settlers, a number of wedjela were killed as 'payback' following Noongar law. Rewards were offered for the capture of Yagan and Midgegooroo. Midgegooroo was captured on 17 May 1833. Despite unreliable evidence and the absence of any defence, Midgegooroo was sentenced to death by firing squad on 22 May 1833. He was executed 30 minutes after the sentence was pronounced. Less than two months later, Yagan was captured and killed by two settlers who claimed a reward offered by Lieutenant-Governor Frederick Irwin.

### 08: THE OLD COURTHOUSE (NEXT TO THE SUPREME COURT AND BEHIND COUNCIL HOUSE)

Initially, the Noongar thought that the white settlers who arrived in 1829 were djanga, or returning Noongar spirits. However they soon began to forcefully assert their ownership and rights over land in the 1830s. This led to conflicts with the settlers and the deaths of many Aboriginal people. Piblemen Wadjuk Balardong boordiya yorga Doolan Leisha-Eatts remembers being told of the conflict:

*They were caught in-between staying on your own land, and you are not allowed to go onto other people's land unless you ask. There were other tribes around as well. They run my people off Kings Park, but eventually they left because they slaughtered them two times. [...] They buried them down near the Bay View Flats, that's what my grandmother told me.*

The Old Courthouse, built in 1836 and located near the Supreme Court on the Perth Esplanade, was where discrimination against Aboriginal people was entrenched in a British legal system. The Old Court House Law Museum provides an interactive experience with photographs, audio and film about Aboriginal people and the law,

including information about the early years of settlement. Descend down the stairs between the Old Court House Law Museum and the Supreme Court.

### 09: SUPREME COURT GARDENS (CORNER RIVERSIDE DRIVE AND WILLIAM STREET)

The shore of the Swan River has long been a site of gathering—for leisure and protest. White City, also known as 'Cooee City or Ugly Land', first established in the gardens behind the Supreme Court at the time of World War I, was a popular summer amusement park. It moved in 1922 to a more permanent area on the Perth Esplanade at the end of William Street. Many Perth residents, including Aboriginal people, would gather here to socialise and dance together. Despite the popularity of White City, certain people objected to it on moral grounds including the Chief Protector of Aborigines, A. O. Neville. It was closed down in 1929 following a Royal Commission.

Because Aboriginal people were excluded from many of the restaurants in Perth until the 1960s, public spaces like the Supreme Court Gardens and the Esplanade became important gathering places. They were also the locations of regular political meetings. Doolan-Leisha Eatts remembers walking through the city protesting as part of a NAIDOC week event organised by Ken Colbung:

*I think we started from Supreme Court Garden, walked down Barrack St, walked up Wellington Square, up William St and back to Supreme Court Gardens. It was a small group and that was the first time. [...] They swore at us, "those black b...s, what do they think they are doing." I'm proud to say that because now we have many non-Aboriginal people celebrating with us.*

### 10: STEPS OF THE OLD TREASURY BUILDING (CORNER OF ST GEORGES TERRACE AND BARRACK STREET)

Under the Aborigines Protection Act of 1905, the freedom and rights of Aboriginal people in Western Australia were restricted by a range of repressive laws. In 1928, a deputation of Aboriginal representatives met with Premier Philip Collier to protest the injustice of the Act. The Aboriginal representatives, pictured at the time on the steps of the Old Treasury Building, were Wilfred Morrison, Norman Harris, Edward Jacobs, A. Kickett, William Bodney, Edward Harris and William Harris. Although Collier promised to give the deputation's concerns the "utmost consideration", no attempts were made to address the issues raised by the representatives.

### 11: THE COOLBAROO LEAGUE AND THE PERTH TOWN HALL (CORNER BARRACK STREET AND HAY STREET)

In 1946, Kimberley Aboriginal woman Helena Clarke, Yamatji brothers George and Jack Poland, and wedjela man Geoff Harcus began the Coolbaroo League. One of the activities the League organised was a Coolbaroo Club dance at the Modern Women's Club, which failed due to its location in the Prohibited Area. The group then moved the Coolbaroo Club dances to East Perth where on some occasions they attracted over 600 people. Doolan-Leisha Eatts remembers the importance of the Coolbaroo League in taking Dances to Aboriginal people in regional areas:

*It was special because it was the only thing around after 6pm. They went to Katanning, they went to York, they went to Northam. They travelled themselves. They saved up themselves and didn't get any money.*

After the Prohibited Area restrictions were removed in 1954, the Coolbaroo League celebrated by hiring the Perth Town Hall for their 'Royal Show' Ball on October 4. This event was an important turning point and a symbol of the return of Aboriginal gatherings to the place of the Wadjuk Noongar home fires, the city of Perth.

**IF YOU HAVE ENJOYED THIS TRAIL, MAKE SURE YOU PICK UP A COPY OF THE OTHER MAP IN THE KARLA YARNING SERIES.**

