

# The Coolbaroo Club


1947-1960

PROHIBITED AREA  
1927-1954

**An exhibition exploring the contemporary history of Aboriginal people in the city of Perth and celebrating the role of the Coolbaroo League in this decade of change after the Second World War.**







**The 1950s were years of change and modernisation in Perth. Young people yearned for a new sense of glamour and freedom from conservative dogma and discrimination. It was a particularly important time for the local Aboriginal population as they broke through barriers on many fronts. This exhibition explores the contemporary history of Aboriginal people in the city of Perth and celebrates the role of the Coolbaroo League in this decade of change.**

**This exhibition tells the story of a group of Aboriginal people who, excluded from white venues and clubs after the Second World War, began organising their own dances. From a modest hall in East Perth in 1947 and at other venues throughout the 1950s, the popular Coolbaroo Club dances were attended by Aboriginal people from all over the state. Club members also ran a newspaper, the *Westralian Aborigine* and became an effective political organisation, speaking out on issues of the day affecting Aboriginal people.**

**The documentary *The Coolbaroo Club* will be shown continuously during the exhibition and screening is free.**

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The City of Perth would like to advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that this catalogue may contain historical photos, images, references or names of people who have passed away.



Photograph of George Abdullah and family – one of Perth's first mixed race marriages, Forrest Place, Perth c. 1950s.  
Photo courtesy Kinnane-Marsh Archives.

# Background on Indigenous History

What was life like for the local Noongar people in the city of Perth in the 1950s? To answer this question we need to look back at conditions experienced by Aboriginal people in WA before the Second World War.

Noongar people were still living under the draconian *1936 Native Administration Act*. This act was essentially a continuation of the *1905 Aborigines Act*, which had legally segregated Aboriginal people and given enormous power to the Chief Protector of Aborigines (later known as the Commissioner of Native Affairs) to control every aspect of their lives.<sup>1</sup>

The Chief Protector became the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and half caste child to the age of 21. The Government had the power to remove a child from their family and place them in institutional care anywhere in the state.

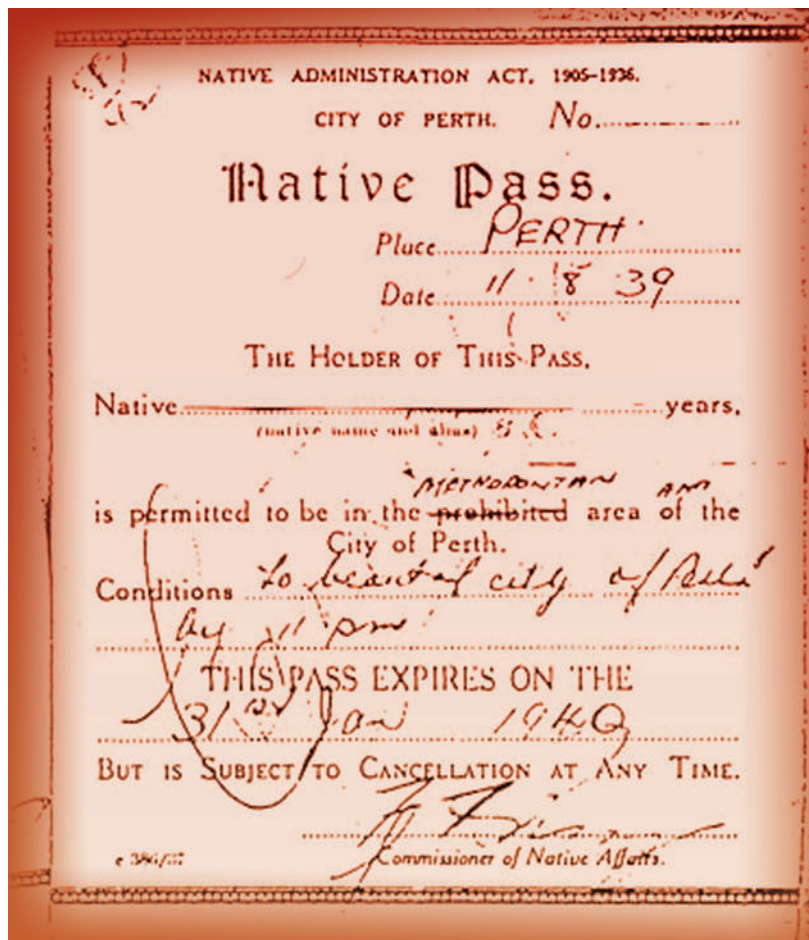
AO Neville was appointed Chief Protector in 1915 and his strict implementation of the Act continued for twenty five years.<sup>2</sup>

Marriage between an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous person was illegal. Noongar families were sent to reserves and settlements. The two main ones were Carrolup near Katanning and the Moore River Native Settlement in Mogumber. Up to 500 people were kept at Moore River at any one time in poor conditions.

Neville instigated vigilant surveillance of Aboriginal people under his 'protection', recording details of individuals and implementing monitoring systems. Employers were required to obtain permits if they wanted to employ Aboriginal people – thus controlling where and for whom they could work. Aboriginal women, many of whom were taken from their parents as children, were trained to work in domestic service for low wages. Many Noongar families lived in camps or reserves on the outskirts of Perth, with little or no available work and no education facilities.

<sup>1</sup> The Chief Protector was based in the Aborigines Department (1905–1936); the Natives Affairs Department (1936–1954), and the Native Welfare Department (1954–1972). The 1905 Act was replaced with the 1936 Native Administration Act and the Chief Protector became the Commissioner of Native Affairs from 1936 to 1954 when the 1936 Act was replaced by the Native Welfare Act (1954).  
<sup>2</sup> For more information on other policies implemented by AO Neville please refer to the Noongar People page on the website of the South West Land and Sea Council (SWLSC) website: [www.noongar.org.au](http://www.noongar.org.au)





Example of Native Pass, 1939, courtesy South West Land and Sea Council.

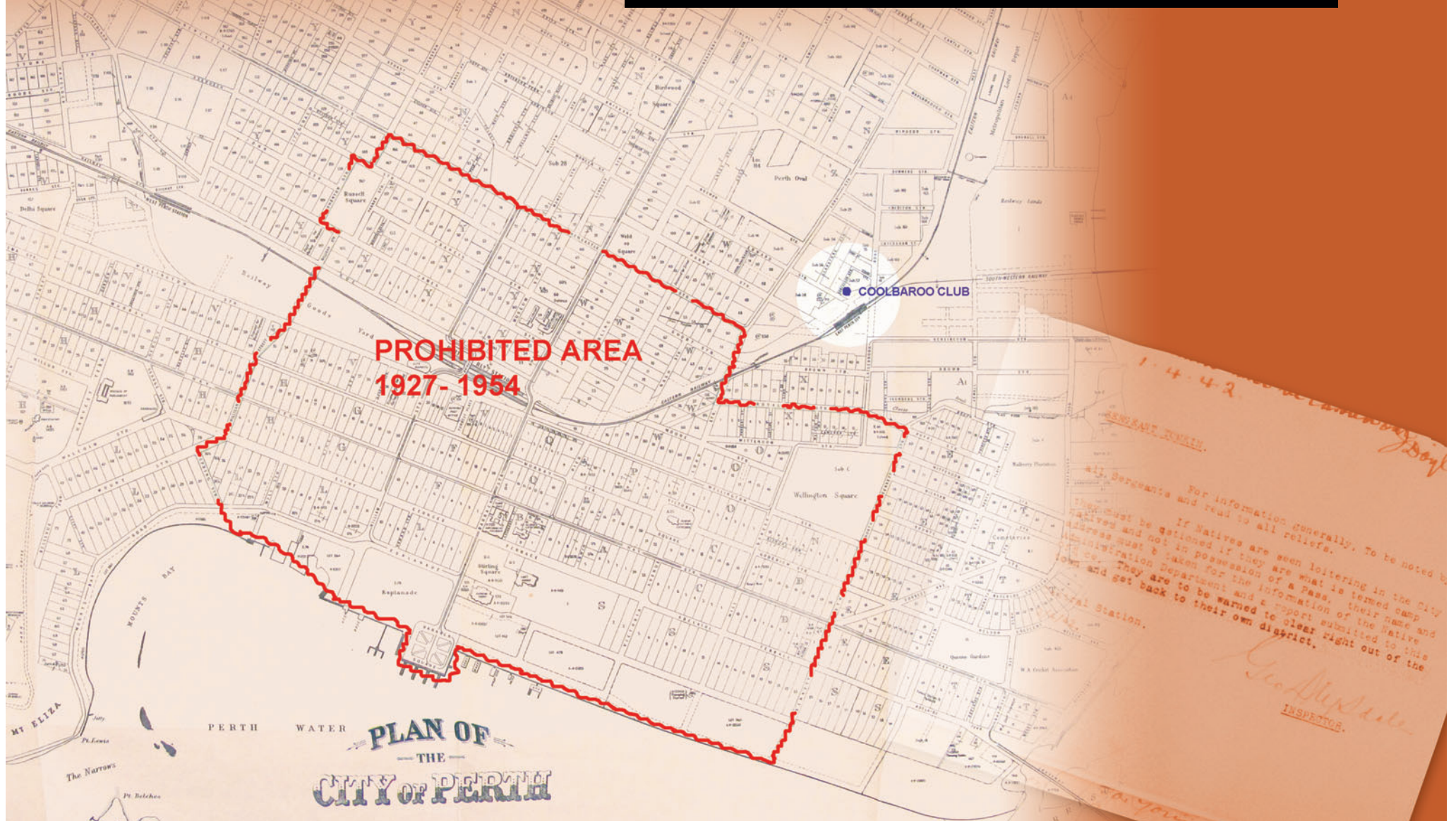
# Prohibited Area Years 1927-1954

In 1927 the Governor of Western Australia, under Neville's suggestion, made a declaration under the 1905 Act to make the city of Perth a 'Prohibited Area'. Aboriginal people now committed an offence if they came within a boundary of approximately five kilometres square encompassing the city unless they could show they were in 'lawful employment'. In an attempt to discourage 'camp natives' from loitering Neville introduced a special 'native pass' to allow those Aboriginal people who had 'legitimate reason' to pass through the city.

The imposition of a 6.00 pm curfew and the resulting police surveillance was particularly disruptive to Aboriginal domestic workers who lived in East Perth and who had to move through the city for work. The Police often complained the system was difficult to police. It also caused hardship for Aboriginal people from all over Western Australia who headed to Perth in search of employment during the Depression of the 1930s.

As unbelievable as it now seems, Perth was a Prohibited Area for Aboriginal people until 1954 and fraternisation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people was considered an offence, for which both parties could be charged and imprisoned.

Prohibited Areas map, image redrawn from the original Map of the Prohibited Area of Perth, from a Department of Indigenous Affairs File, City of Perth Prohibited Area: (1938/1927) in the State Records Office.





# WORLD WAR II

Geoff Harcus outside the Coolbaroo League Office c.1954.



Helena Clarke (nee Murphy) c.1947.



## Founding of the Coolbaroo League 1947,

### PLANNING THEIR OWN 'UTOPIA'

Representatives of Perth's coloured population of mixed aboriginal and white blood are striving to create a "Utopia" for their kin.

Organised in a year into the Coolbaroo League (Coolbaroo is Murchison aboriginal for magpie, indicating mixture of black and white), they have emerged from a disorganised community to a people with a purpose.

Their committee has pooled suggestions, sketched a plan of a community settlement and had it properly drafted by a Perth architect on modern lines.

One of the main driving forces in this committee is intellectual, attractive Helena Clarke (24). Claiming Scotch, Irish and aboriginal blood, she has been striving since 1942 to lift her kin into recognition.

#### Site Sought

Her friend Hazel Watling describes her as completely engrossed in the Coolbaroo League and uninterested in men, marriage, or romance.

But Miss Clarke claims little credit for the work, says that the real pioneers were elderly William Bodney, his schoolpal Thomas Brophy and club member George Abdulla.

Site of the community settlement has yet to be selected. An area at Armadale was suggested but was rejected as unsuitable.

Coolbarooos everywhere, are seeking the ideal site to start their "Utopia."

#### Ten Houses

Each of the houses will have a small front garden and will open out on to the community garden and orchard where the elder people will grow produce for the settlement.

Describing the community settlement plan today, Miss Clarke said that, for a start, ten houses for ten selected families would be built in a row in one street.

The plan includes provision of a sports ground for young and old, a communal guest room, a sewing room and a library.

"Books are very essential to the children. Our kiddies have not read enough," Miss Clarke said.

The settlement will have a sick bay to cater for minor ailments, also its own school. The guest room will be available to prominent visitors to the State who will be invited to address the Coolbarooos and learn what they are doing for themselves.



HAZEL WATLING



HELENA CLARKE

Newspaper article about Helena Clarke, Daily News, Saturday December 20, 1947, p12.

Photo: Bill and Jack Poland, Glendower St, Perth c. 1945.  
Photos courtesy Kinnane-Marsh Archives.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women enlisted and fought for Australia during World War II.<sup>3</sup> In the Services they often experienced equality not granted to them in civilian life. Many Indigenous Australians came into contact with African American servicemen who had far more civil and economic rights than them. Visiting African American Servicemen were appalled at the lack of equality experienced by the Noongar community in Perth and 'got furious because they said it was wrong'.<sup>4</sup>

After the war the inequality with which Aboriginal ex-servicemen were treated was a grave injustice. Aboriginal soldiers were not entitled to the same rights as non-Aboriginal soldiers. They could not even have a beer alongside other returned servicemen.

This situation galvanised two brothers, Jack and Bill Poland, both returned servicemen (Yamatji from the Shark Bay area), their white friend Geoff Harcus who they met in the army and a young woman (a Nor' wester from Port Hedland) called Helena Clarke (nee Murphy), to change things. These four became the founding members of the Coolbaroo League.

Jack Poland suggested the name *Coolbaroo*, a Yamatji word for 'Magpie' because it suggested a message of reconciliation – of white and black coming together. For some it represented a way of describing their identities as people of mixed race, black and white, and was preferable to terms such as half-caste that were in common use at the time. From the beginning however, it was agreed the League be Aboriginal-run and owned.

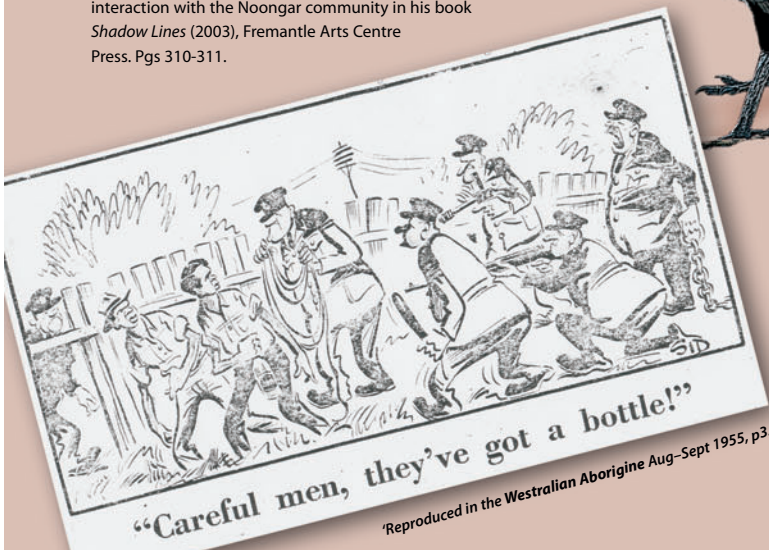
The League flourished because it had the support of elders such as William Bodney, Thomas Brophy and Bertha Isaacs as well as younger leaders such as Ronnie Kickett, Manfred Corunna, George Abdullah and George Harwood.

This made it different from other benevolent groups operating at the time and encouraged the activism necessary to fight for change.

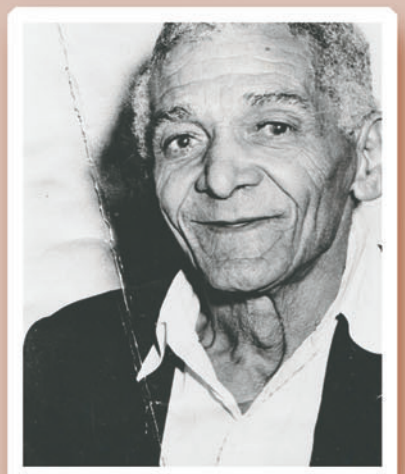


<sup>3</sup> It is thought that 3000 Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders served in World War II. Some 3000 others were employed as labourers performing vital tasks for the military. For more information see this website: <http://www.w2australia.gov.au/allin/indigenous.html>

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Kinnane gives examples of African American Servicemen's interaction with the Noongar community in his book *Shadow Lines* (2003), Fremantle Arts Centre Press. Pgs 310-311.



Reproduced in the Westralian Aborigine Aug-Sept 1955, p3.



William (Bill) Bodney, c 1958.



# The Dances

The first dance organised by the group was at a venue organised by the Modern Women's Club in the city. This was unsuccessful because it was in the Prohibited Area. So in January 1947, the group shifted the dance to the Edward Street 'Pensioners Hall' near the Railway station in East Perth. The dances, under the name the Coolbaroo Club, were held every Friday night and became very popular.

Aboriginal musicians such as drummer Ronnie Kickett and singer Gladys Bropho entertained the crowd. The dances attracted people from all over the State and united the dispersed urban Aboriginal population of the time.

The first Miss Coolbaroo, 14 year old Lorna Deeble was chosen in 1947 and a bathing beauty pageant was held yearly, sometimes attracting male contestants.

In 1952, a corroboree was the main attraction of Flower Day in Forrest Place and that night at the Coolbaroo Dance prizes were given to girls dressed in flowers and to the man who wore the largest flower in his buttonhole. In 1953 Gladys Bropho was crowned Coolbaroo League Queen by Sir Ross MacDonald for her work in raising money for a youth hostel fund. In February 1954 it was the secretary of the League, Miss Norah Shea who was selected as 'Coolbaroo Bathing Beauty'.

Gladys Bropho crowned 'Most popular Yorga', Coolbaroo Dance, 1953.



Lorna Deeble, crowned first Miss Coolbaroo 1947, 'Daily News'.



Miss Coolbaroo beauties c.1950s.

Photo courtesy Shirley Corunna, (runner up on left).

## Coolbaroo Ball Was Biggest Ever Held

THE 1953 COOLBAROO BALL at the Y.A.L. Ballroom, Perth, on October 29, was the biggest and brightest function of its kind ever organised by aborigines in Australia.

Attended by several hundred, the crowd included many white supporters of the Coolbaroo League.

The highlight of the evening was the crowning of Miss Gladys Bropho as winner of Coolbaroo Popular Girl competition. Miss Bropho presented with an engraved silver cup by Sir Ross Macdonald.

There was loud applause as she was handed the sceptre.

### Prize

Miss Bropho received a gift ticket to Gerald-McRobertson-Mills Company and a holiday to the town expenses paid as a

the most money. Her

wore a black dress—depicting her white. She is well-known as a popular crooner and has sung at Coolbaroo dances and the Perth Town Hall.

Miss Roma Kickett, the runner-up in the popular girl competition, received a five-guinea order from Corot and Company and Miss Monica Ingram—third in the competition—was given a handbag by Darro.

Ball Debut

### A QUEEN IS CROWNED







Norma Miller (centre) and the dancers from *Coloured Rhapsody*, 1955. Far left a young Phillipa Cooke and third left Penny Shaw.  
Courtesy Phillipa Cooke.

# Visitors to Perth



Nat 'King' Cole and wife Michelle at the Adelphi, Perth 1956.

## LEAGUE MEMBERS SNUBBED BY NON-AUSTRALIANS

**HARMONY IN COLOUR**  
COOLBAROO League members have come up against colour discrimination — this time at York — for the second time in two months.

In the latest incident several league members were snubbed, because of their colour, by a non-Australian shop proprietor.

On arrival at York the last of the Coolbaroo members season dinner a group of league members accompanied by two white members — a pianist and a transport driver — sat down at a table in a cafe.

While awaiting service two other league members who had arrived earlier came to the table and when they had been refused a cup of coffee.

**No Table Service**  
The members said they 'seen old days' and 'not be served at the table. If they wanted anything to eat they could go to the shop opposite.

The proprietor told them that if they wanted a coffee they could buy a bottle and take it away.

The seated group, identified by the news agent as a Bulgarian proprietor who said that they were snubbed while other members were refused service.

**Trouble-free**  
He replied that they were not snubbed from sitting at the table and were accompanied by white people.

Though natives had caused any trouble the league was not big enough for mixing black and white could never be done, he said. It was bad for business.

White people objected seeing natives in the shop, he served one native and he would have to go.

**Different Policy**  
The league asked the proprietor of the shop what his policy on natives was. He replied that he served natives at tables though he did prefer they buy their food at the shop and take it away.

"A REAL BOOMERANG. At last I've caught up with one," cried a delighted Nat King Cole as Coolbaroo League President W. Bodney presented him with one from the league's art shop. The occasion was when Nat was over here a short time back. The league presented Mrs. Cole with an aboriginal motif scarf.

Boomerang presented to Nat King Cole.  
*Daily News*, January 1956.

Bill Bodney and members of the Coolbaroo League welcome Albert Namatjira 1957.



## NAMATJIRA COMES TO PERTH

Albert Namatjira received one of his greatest welcomes when he visited Perth last month. It was W.A.'s greatest welcome since the Royal visit.

Throngs of people fought and pushed frantically to obtain a glimpse of him. Many tried to touch him. Hundreds besieged him for autographs.

Namatjira was simply paid at all the time.

The Perth visit was sponsored by the West Australian Native Welfare Council to promote wider interest in Aboriginal welfare.

On his arrival on Easter Monday Namatjira was met at the airport by Council President, Mr. E. C. Carr and Coolbaroo League President, Mr. G. Harwood, members of both organisations and milling crowds trying to catch their first glimpse of the great Australian artist.

The Boston artist was a tall, slender figure in his aboriginal dress, with a stockman's clothes and a wide-brimmed hat.

but something else was noticeable, and of his deep thoughtful eyes some little drops of glittering moisture.



Poster image: Harlem Blackbird poster.  
Courtesy of His Majesty's Museum of Performing Arts.

The Coolbaroo Club also became an important point of contact with black musicians and artists from around the world.

Harold Blair, a famous tenor, Aboriginal activist and member of the early Aborigines Advancement League visited The Coolbaroo Club in July 1951 when he gave a recital with the Symphony Orchestra at the Capitol Theatre.

In 1955 African American drummer Michael Silva and members of the Norma Miller dancers, starring in the *Coloured Rhapsody* show at His Majesty's Theatre, visited the Coolbaroo dances and introduced modern dances like the Jitterbug, the Jive, the Hokey Pokey and the La Conga.

When Nat 'King' Cole came to Perth in January 1956 to perform at the Ambassadors Theatre he was presented with a boomerang when he invited members of the Coolbaroo Club to visit him at his hotel.

In 1959 the Harlem Blackbirds, Australia's first 'All Coloured Revue' with 32 'sepia stars', performed at Perth's Capitol Theatre. On Friday nights, after the show, they would attend the Coolbaroo Club dances.

In April 1957, renowned artist Albert Namatjira travelled to Perth and stayed with art patrons Mr and Mrs Claude Hotchin. He was treated as a national celebrity on his arrival and the Lord Mayor of Perth, Sir Harry Howard, granted him a civic reception. He was welcomed at the airport by League President G Harwood and on the last night of his visit (April 27), attended a Coolbaroo dance and was presented with life membership for his work raising funds for the Native Hostel.



# COOLBAROO

SATURDAY NIGHT

## DANCES

COMING—

Narrogin:

Nov. 3

in the  
TOWN HALL

PERTH:

Nov. 10

at MANCHESTER  
UNITY HALL

YORK:

Nov. 17

in the  
MASONIC HALL

Katanning:

Dec. 1

R.S.L. HALL

YORK:

Dec. 15

in the  
MASONIC HALL

Narrogin:

Dec. 22

in the  
LESSER HALL

Saturday Night country dance schedule,  
*Westralian Aborigine*, Oct-Nov 1956, p 2.

# WESTRALIAN Aborigine

PUBLISHED BY THE COOLBAROO LEAGUE MARCH-APRIL, 1955 Registered at the General Post Office, Perth, for transmission by post as a periodical. PRICE: 6d.

## TRANSPORT PROBLEMS ENDANGER OUT OF TOWN DANCES

AT SEVENTEEN NGARLA IS A NOTED FILMSTAR

LACK of transport to and from country centres is threatening the closure of Coolbaroo League dances in Narrogin and York. League officials say that if the dances are closed, the league's country dances social welfare work will be seriously impaired.

*Westralian Aborigine*, Front page, March-April 1955.



IT TOOK film producer Charles Chauvel two years to find seventeen-year-old Aromia girl Ngaria Kunoth to take the "same part of the film 'Lodja'". After being chosen for the part, Ngaria soon captured the hearts of all in the film and proved herself an outstanding actress and became a true ambassador of the aboriginal race, which had its world premiere in Darwin a few months ago, will be seen at the Capitol Theatre.

Since the start of the league's country dances six months ago the dances have not only brought pleasure and enjoyment to hundreds of aborigines, but have also helped to raise funds for the establishment of a Native Social Centre in Perth.

Transport in the past has been arranged by members of Toc H, who have always been willing to supply the league with their service and cars.

However, with other important commitments Toc H members will only be able to help the league with transport occasionally. League president Bill Boddy said that voluntary transport was a vital factor in keeping Narrogin and York dances functioning.

**Financial Losses**  
On several occasions recently the league had had to hire a taxi to save many of its country patrons from disappointment. This had involved the league in heavy financial loss.

If another source of voluntary transport could not be found, the number of country dances would have to be reduced or completely cancelled.

The league was appealing to car owners with time to spare at weekends to take some league members to York and Narrogin dances.

Dances were held once a month at Narrogin. Cars left Perth at 10.30 a.m. and returned from Narrogin immediately after breakfast on Sunday.

Dances at York were also run on a monthly basis. Cars left Perth at 9 p.m. on Saturday and returned at 12.15 a.m. on Sunday.

All expenses, including petrol, oil, meals and hotel accommodation, incurred by car drivers assisting members were paid by the league.

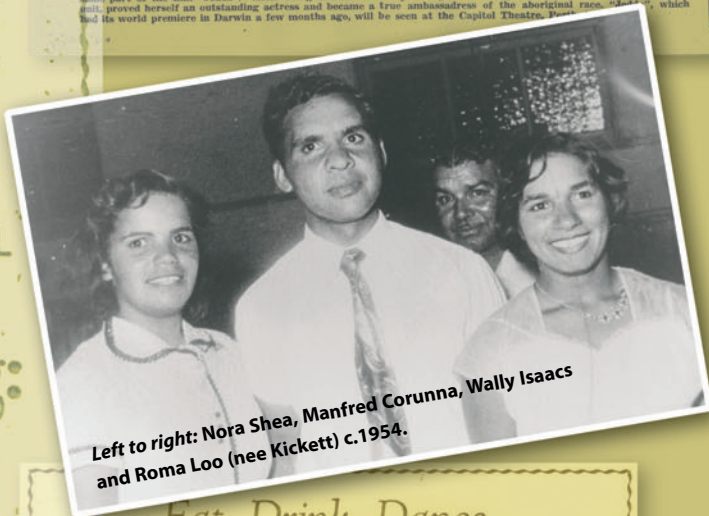
Anyone able to assist was asked to get in touch with league secretary Miss N. Shee, at 102 Beaufort-st., Perth, or by ringing her at HA 2814 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. during the week.

The following Grants 'in Aid' have been made to missions operating in W.A.:  
Aborigines Rescue Mission, Jigalong: £210 for its water supply; La Grange Mission, 50 per cent of the cost of a new truck; Mt. Margaret Mission: £100 for a dining room, kitchen and girls' dormitory.

# The 1950s Balls and Country Dances

Despite the continual police surveillance (to check 'sly grog' was not being distributed), the Coolbaroo dances grew in popularity in the 1950s and were attended by hundreds of Aboriginal people and their white supporters.

The Coolbaroo League raised their own money and became an effective political organisation, speaking out on issues of the day affecting Aboriginal people. They published a newspaper, *The Westralian Aborigine* from 1952 to 1957. They also called for an end to the Prohibited Areas policy.



Left to right: Nora Shea, Manfred Corunna, Wally Isaacs and Roma Loo (nee Kickett) c.1954.

In 1953 the League held their first Ball, attended by hundreds of black and white supporters at the YAL Ballroom. One of the great attractions of the Ball was a large corroboree.

In 1954 the Prohibited Areas restrictions were finally rescinded and the Coolbaroo Club, for the first time, was able to hire the Perth Town Hall for their 'Royal Show' Ball on October 4.

In 1955, the theme for the third ball held on October 3 at the Perth Town Hall was 'Night out West'. The infamous can-can girls danced; and people danced to the music of 'Kickett's Kustard Kreek Killers'.

During the 1950s the weekly dances moved several times. In 1954 they were held at the Braille Hall on the corner of Stirling and Newcastle Streets (later known as The Hole in the Wall Theatre Company, the Old Time Music Hall and The Castle). In May 1955 the dances moved to Riley's Hall in Inglewood and James Street, Northbridge. In 1956 they played at the Manchester Unity Hall.

From 1952 the League took dances to specific country towns in an effort to raise funds. Dances were held regularly at Narrogin and York. Despite finding it difficult to provide transport<sup>5</sup> for these regional events, dances were also held in Mullewa in 1955 and Katanning in 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Initially Toc H members had voluntarily provided service and transport. Toc H was a community based movement concerned with putting Christian values into practice. It started in 1915 and after WW I members continued to practice aims of Unselfish Service, Fair Mindedness and Reconciliation.

COOLBAROO BALL Keep Monday, Oct. 4, Clear IT WILL BE HELD IN PERTH TOWN HALL



Ron Kickett in the Coolbaroo League art shop, 1955.



The "Coolbaroo" ABORIGINAL SHOP  
 NOW RE-OPEN AT THE NEW ADDRESS  
**42 Pier Street Perth**  
 Between Hay and Murray Streets

— ★ —

Aborigine designed and produced articles, including genuine Weapons and other items used in aboriginal tribal life.

Editorial

**What Has Come Over Mr. Middleton?**

MR. MIDDLETON and the Native Welfare Department have done much for the Aborigines of Western Australia. But it is a change from this helpful attitude when Mr. Middleton chides natives who infringe discriminatory laws which they had no part in imposing.

By what stretch of imagination does Mr. Middleton expect natives to repent when they are gaolled for breaking laws of this type?

Why shouldn't their attitude be defiant and disrespectful?

Why shouldn't a white man counsel natives to leave white employers who exploit them under near-slavery conditions?

Westralian Aborigine has not heard the other side of the dispute between Mr. Middleton (or his Minister) and Mr. McLeod, and until it has heard both sides it has no comment to make on Mr. McLeod or his treatment of the people he leads.

But it does take sides in any quarrel between Mr. Middleton and the natives themselves.

It deplores the suggestion in Mr. Middleton's report that the department has refused to continue with schools, hostels, etc., in the Pilbara district because it doesn't like the way the natives are thinking.

That smacks of coercion. Use of these people as pawns cannot be tolerated, whether the offender is Mr. McLeod or Mr. Middleton or anybody else.

Mr. Middleton's annual reports have had plenty to say about the shocking way pastoralist employers, in the main, treat their coloured employees.

Why shouldn't these pastoralists and the discrimination with exploitation, they deserve support, be treated with truth or otherwise of Mr. Middleton's annual reports. Mr. McLeod did go to gaol for a better deal.

If the department had given them concrete or moral support at the time it would have earned their confidence as Mr. McLeod earned it.

# A Political Force

**Stare At This Spot**



If it turns yellow — see a doctor.  
 If it turns Pink, it's too late anyway.  
 If it remains black and you have aboriginal blood, you should become a financial member of the Coolbaroo League by sending your name and address with 12/6 to the Treasurer, The Coolbaroo League, 102 Beaufort St., Perth . . .

**AS FAST AS YOU CAN!**

The 1950s was an important time for Aboriginal people as they broke barriers on many fronts. One of the most important was the full integration of Aboriginal children into Government schools, it being no longer legal to exclude Aboriginal children.

In 1953 the League rented offices from the Carpenter's Union at 102 Beaufort Street, Perth. Two years later the League was praised by the Union for being exemplary tenants.<sup>6</sup>

In August 1952 a display of native arts and crafts was arranged by members of the League as part of the All Nations Arts and Crafts Exhibition at the Perth Town Hall. It proved extremely popular and in November 1955 the Coolbaroo League opened a small Aboriginal art shop (42 Pier Street), unique in Australia, behind its Beaufort Street premises. The shop, run by Ron Kickett aimed to give Aboriginal people 'with artistic abilities the opportunity to make money through their talents.'<sup>7</sup> Art and craft works such as boomerangs, shields, emu eggs and pearl shells were sourced from all over WA.



Example of the policy of racial equality being carried out by the Education Department. A full-blood and a white boy work side by side at Eden Hill State school.

**WHITE, BLACK SIT TOGETHER**

Old Australian, New Australian, or even native, there is no racial discrimination against any children in W.A. Govt. schools.

Aboriginal children join the classroom.

Supt. in charge of Native Schools, G. F. Thornbury told The Sunday Times this week that "a new deal has started for colored children. The natives have just as much ability as the white children and they will be treated in the same way as white children."

At Eden Hill school, full-blood, half-caste, Old Australians and New Australians work together, play together in the one school community.

Teachers make sure no one calls colored children "niggers."

"They do what they can to break down any barriers. So far, there has been no protest from white parents about their children having colored workmates."

Mr. Thornbury explained that the native children go through to 5th and then they fade out. He believed that the children, at this stage, become color conscious and realizing prejudices surrounding them lose heart.

He is working to give them a little self-confidence, certain they can do as well as the whites.

"Real problem for them will start when they leave school. Who, for instance, would give a native a job behind a counter? We must make sure that we break down the barriers against them and give them a chance," he added.

## Allawah Grove

In November 1957, as part of the post-War assimilation policies of the Native Welfare Department, 33 temporary houses were established for an Aboriginal community, near Guildford and people moved into the houses from camps scattered around the Metropolitan Area.

The Allawah Grove Settlement was administered by the Native Welfare Department until the responsibility was handed over to the Coolbaroo League. The Department made financial arrangements with the League to enable a paid caretaker to be employed and to provide improvements and repairs including a Health Clinic.

In 1958 serious unemployment conditions hampered progress of the Coolbaroo League's plan to have regular rental payments made by the residents but within a decade, the people of Allawah Grove had established their own Administration, Women's Committee, Progress Committee and Advancement Council. The Settlement was closed in 1969.<sup>8</sup>

Although the Coolbaroo League closed in the early 1960s, and the dances finished, many of its leaders went on to form the Aboriginal Advancement Council in 1965. In that same year Aboriginal workers won the right to equal wages. In 1967 a Commonwealth referendum allowed Aboriginal people to be counted in the census as Australians for the first time.

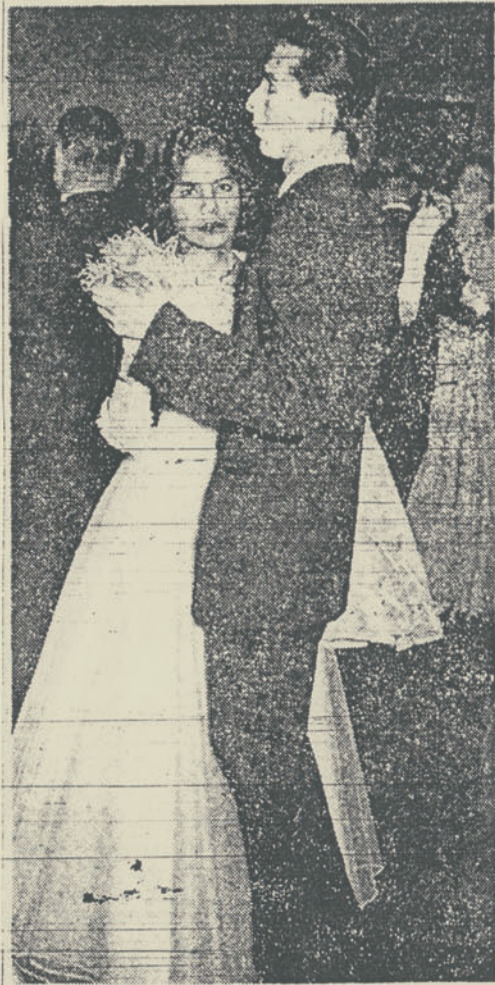
<sup>6</sup> Westralian Aborigine July 1954 page 1.

<sup>7</sup> Westralian Aborigine, Perth June-July 1955

<sup>8</sup> Curators Robyn Smith Walley and Tracie Pushman from the Berndt Museum of Anthropology (UWA), using Allawah Grove Photographs, created an exhibition titled *On the Outskirts* in 2005.



## NATIVE GIRL IS A SOCIAL SUCCESS AT PERTH BALL



"The people were wonderful; I had the time of my life!" declared 17-y-o native girl Monica Ingram of East Perth referring to the exclusive Empire Ball at Government House which she attended on Friday evening.

Miss Ingram, of Brown-st., East Perth, had accepted the invitation of a young Perth man of social standing to accompany him to the ball as a practical gesture to assist native social assimilation generally.

Eric Stringer, 19, of West Perth, arranged trained assistance in the selection of a special ball frock and accessories.

He met her for the first time only a few weeks ago.

"Perfectly"

"Everything went off perfectly," Mr. Stringer said yesterday.

Miss Ingram said that during the evening several people approached her at different times to ask her, kindly, if she were enjoying herself.

Other strangers went out of their way to come up to her and tell her she looked "lovely."

"On the way to Government House," said Monica, "I called at the native social at the Braille Hall to say goodbye to mum and dad and show them how I looked."

"They were terribly proud and happy to think I was going to the ball at Govt. House," she added.

Mr. Stringer said: "It certainly was a wonderful evening and Monica acquitted herself admirably, as I knew she would."

"I am more interested than ever in the native problem and intend to increase my efforts on their behalf."

Mr. Stringer said last month: "I feel that my lead in taking as a partner a native lass may have the result of assisting native assimilation generally, particularly at the upper social levels. I feel that Monica could more than hold her own in any company, as could so many native girls. I hope the ball will prove this beyond doubt."

*"My name is Monica Jones now. I was born Monica Ingram in Black Point in Geraldton in the year 1936.*

*"The Coolbaroo Club was where everything started.*

*That was a fantastic place. There used to be a dance every Friday and it cost 10 shillings. Everybody used to save their money.*

*There used to be a lot of bathing beauty competitions going on around Perth at that time. Anyway, the Aboriginal people decided to have one of their own. And so all the girls entered. I got the first prize. It was through that that they chose me for this Ball.*

*That was June 5th, 1954. I'd just turned 17. And I was invited to this ball at Government House. I had no idea what I was getting myself in for... Well, it was the first time that an Aboriginal person had ever been invited to a place like this.*

*The women there, you know, they had daughters my age and they found out that young Aboriginal women were not different than their own children. And they were really amazed to find that I could converse, you know, and speak in their own language, sort of thing, and conduct myself the same way that their own children did. They didn't really expect to see something like that. We weren't the gibberish, talking monkeys that they thought we were.*

*I didn't let our people down. I did my best to show them in a different light than what they were seen in before. I like to think I did.*

*It was a really magical night, to tell you the truth. I was not without a partner all night. It was just one dance after another. I never expected it to be like that. I thought I'd just have the one partner all night long, you know ... that they'd be afraid to come near me because I was black. But it was different to what I expected it to be altogether. Yeah, it was really something."*

Monica Ingram at the Government House Ball, *The Sunday Times* June 6, 1954, p 7.



*Allen Jones was living in Quairading when he travelled with his sister Gloria the 45 miles to York to attend his first Coolbaroo League Dance in 1955.*

*He was 13 yrs old. The dance was special because permission had been given for the 6.00 pm curfew usually imposed on Aboriginal people in York at the time, to be relaxed.*

*It was at this dance that two special things happened. Firstly he saw his future wife Merleen Kickett for the first time. She was 12 and he describes her as a 'ratbag' tomboy girl with long plaits. He saw her sitting next to a young man of 17. It turned out that this was his brother Ross, who Allen had never met and didn't even know existed. Ross had travelled up to the dance from the Carrolup Mission in the South West. When the two brothers met they went outside to catch up. Allen was very emotional at the meeting and didn't know what to do 'cry or what'? He remembers the cops coming along and 'putting a torch on us'.*

*Allen didn't see Merle for a few more years but then at 17, while shearing in the district, was able to visit the York Reserve regularly to visit her. Merle's grandfather Doojar was not keen on the partnership. Doojar had a fierce reputation based on the fact he had 5 daughters and carried 2 Doaks (magic Kalari sticks). Because of Doojar, Merle refused Allen's marriage proposal twice before agreeing to elope with him in August 1960.*

*The two young people hid at Allen's grandfather's place in the tiny desert outpost of Yoting, near Quairading. Merle's parents wouldn't agree to the marriage. As she was only 16, a local missionary, Sid Williams negotiated with the Native Welfare Department, which finally gave permission for them to marry on the 20 May 1961.*

*Merle and Allen will celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary in 2011.*

*Interview with Jo Darbyshire, 11 May 2010.*



Allen Jones c.1959 'with 30 pounds in my pocket' at the York Show.



Merle and Allen Jones soon after their marriage in 1961.



Merle and Allen Jones in May 2010.



This catalogue was printed to accompany the exhibition *The Coolbaroo Club and the Coffee Pot, two extraordinary places in 1950s Perth*.

Exhibited at the Perth Town Hall, 20 October – 5 November 2010

The City of Perth aims to make the history of the City of Perth a living history and show the role of Council in contributing to the cultural life of the city. Thank you to the Arts and Cultural Development staff, Community Services Unit and Local Studies, City of Perth Library. All photos courtesy Kinnane/Marsh and Corunna Archives.

Thank you to Steve Kinnane for his guidance and generosity in providing information. For more information please see:

- *The Coolbaroo Club*, (1996) Documentary directed by Roger Scholes, and written by Stephen Kinnane and Lauren Marsh.
- 'Living the Dream,' Anna Haebich and Lauren Marsh in, *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950 – 1970*, (2008) Anna Haebich, Fremantle Arts Centre Press.
- *Shadow Lines* (2003), Stephen Kinnane, Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

Thanks also to Merle, Allen and Dianne Jones, Gail Jones, the Corunna family and Chris Owen from the South West Land and Sea Council (SWLSC). For more information on Noongar history please refer to the Noongar People page on the website: [www.noongar.org.au](http://www.noongar.org.au)

Thank you to the staff of the State Records Office. Please note the Prohibited Areas map is an image redrawn from the original Map of the Prohibited Area of Perth from a Department of Indigenous Affairs File, *City of Perth Prohibited Area: (1938/1927)* in the State Records Office.

The City of Perth acknowledges the Elders and broader Aboriginal community; their connection to the land on which the city of Perth is located and the importance of protecting and celebrating cultural heritage.

This publication is available in alternative formats on request by telephoning 9461 3145.

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The City of Perth would like to advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that this catalogue may contain historical photos, images, references or names of people who have passed away.



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Photos courtesy Kinnane-Marsh Archives.