



J Harvey, photographer, Yaaruun Parrpurr Tarneen, c. 1868, albumen silver carte-de-visite, part of a series of 10 cartes-de-visite of Aboriginal Australian people of the Western District, Victoria. Pictures Collection, H99.31/1-10 (no. 6)

J Harvey photographs of Western District Aboriginal people

Pictures Collection H99.31/1-10

Acquired 1999

This article shows the crucial role of Aboriginal research in uncovering Aboriginal dispossession in the colonial period and recovering connection to country in the 21st century.

The State Library Foundation supported the acquisition of a set of photographs that one J Harvey took of Victoria's Western District Aboriginal people in 1868. The photographs convey the dignity of these landowning people – identified as the Mopors – after being dispossessed of their land by the Ware family. The Wares commissioned Robert Dowling¹ to paint the family and the Mopors on the land they now 'owned'. Dowling's 1856 painting of the leadership group, entitled *Minjah in the Old Time*,² is a very strong statement of ownership by the usurpers.

The Mopors appear to be a clan group with extended family through marriage and other affiliations, such as songlines and totems. In the time before invasion, Aboriginal people's names always included one that identified them with their country. After white settlement, they took up the European names of those who had squatted on their country. Yaaruun Parrpurr Tarneen was the daughter of the Mopor clan headman. Her name was given by her father after a great victory in battle; it means 'victorious'. Yaaruun married Wombeet Tuulawara, who became known as (De) Castella, the name of another Western District settler family. Yaaruun also became known as Louisa (De) Castella.

Tracking ancestors through the archives can be a frustrating and sometimes lonely experience. Many practices of the colonial period, such as moving people around from mission to mission, make it very difficult for Aboriginal people to recover their identity. But because they lived in a society connected through the Dreaming and its totems, songlines, language groups and ceremonies, the sharing of research information across clan groups can lessen the frustration of unravelling the misinformation that grew from colonial practices.

There is still much to learn about the sophistication of our connected society and this is a focus of the State Library's Indigenous Victorian Aboriginal Research Group. As Indigenous Victorian Aboriginal people embark on treaty negotiations with the state government, it is timely to remember our ancestors and their life-changing experiences in the colonial era that have affected our lives too. Harvey's photographs of Western District Aboriginal people help us learn more about our cultural identity.