

Chapter Two

Saltwater People and the Commonwealth

According to Alcorta, 'a declining population, a stagnant economy, and calamitous race relations were the legacy of South Australia to the Territory and the Commonwealth' (Alcorta 1984:xiii). Rather than discuss in full the legislation implemented for the 'welfare' of Aborigines by the Northern Territory Administration under the Commonwealth Government, this chapter focuses on the way the NT Administration formed legislation which both created and controlled authorised living places for 'town' Aborigines. While this reflects a particular perspective or 'layer' of Darwin's history it provides a context from which to view an emerging urban Aboriginal political movement which called for civil rights, land rights and a right to determine where and with whom Aborigines would live.

Patrol Officers Kelly and Beckett considered that it was the 'unrestricted association' between 'blacks' and the 'Asiatic residents' of China Town and the use of 'opium and vile spirits' which had 'debased' Aborigines and 'rendered them vicious, cunning and untrustworthy' (Kelly & Beckett 1911). Aboriginal women in particular were 'ruined physically and morally' through their prostitution by 'unscrupulous persons' (Kelly & Beckett 1911). In agreement with Kelly and Beckett, the new Special Commissioner and Protector of Aborigines, WB Spencer, immediately ordered, for the 'better supervision' of Aborigines, their removal from the proximity of the Township into a 'village or compound [to be located] at a convenient distance from the town' (Spencer 1913). Spencer believed that the 'natives' living in and about the township had 'so completely lost all their old customs' that there would be no difficulty in gathering them together and removing them to the new compound. Part of Spencer's scheme 'devised for the purpose of preserving and uplifting' the local Aborigines was to replace the 'old ramshackle, dirty huts' in which they had previously lived with 'neat huts' consisting of 'walls of stringy bark and roofs of iron'. Spencer acknowledged the established 'division of the Larrakia tribe' into two camps in his selection of the new site by providing for 'two encampments - one on the shore and one on the cliff above' (Spencer 1913). Spencer had previously referred to this division of the Larrakia camp naming the camp 'on top of the cliffs as *Gwi-ambirra*' and the other almost immediately below this on Lamouroux Beach, called *Nim-birra*. *Nim-birra* was recorded as being, 'particularly well situated on a somewhat sheltered cove, with a beautiful spring of clear fresh water bubbling up into small rocky pools immediately at the cliff foot, overhung by dense foliage. Spencer recorded the spring being called *Korowa demara*' (Spencer 1912:56). Topsy Secretary, a Larrakia elder, speaks of this place as her father's and grandfather's camping place and maintains that 'demara' represents the eye of a fish and signifies a spring of water at the Lameroo beach camp:

You know where the native people used to get a water? It's ruined now. King tide, they used to walk up but too many rocks and oysters. There's a cave ... ferns hang there. They used to get water, bucketful ... on their head, ride around to Cullen beach. King tide, they used to go with canoe and fill it up - see Darwin ruined (pers. comm. Topsy Secretary 1994).

It is possible to learn from the written historical record that this area was used as a camping place for Aborigines from at least the time of settlement until the establishment of Spencer's compound in 1911. Today it is part of 'Bicentennial park' and there is no indication that it was a long term residence of Darwin's traditional owners. The park in front of the Northern Territory's new Parliament House has been named Dameora Park by Topsy Secretary and Lameroo - possible a derivation of 'dameora' - remains the name for that beach but there is no description of the significance of this naming.

In implementing his scheme Spencer realised that 'some of the natives, none of whom have been under any restraint until the beginning of last year' would 'at first, resent any discipline' but considered that with 'firm treatment this difficulty would be overcome' (Spencer 1913). It was subsequently reported however, that although 'most of the camps in town have been broken up, and the Aborigines removed to the Compound at Kahlin' ... '[i]t has been a difficult matter to induce the different tribes to amalgamate and fraternize' (Stretton 1913).

Once the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound was instituted it housed primarily members of the Larrakia, Wagait and Woolner groups, occupied approximately 6 acres along Cullen Beach and was about two miles from the town centre, near Myilly point (Cummings 1990:18). The Compound was governed by a Superintendent and Matron, who also acted as school teachers. Houses were provided for families while separate accommodation was available for single women and men residents as well as for visitors. The whole Compound was fenced in with 'no one save Aborigines and officials of the Department [having] access to it, except by order'. There was a curfew for Aborigines between sunset and sunrise and they were not permitted to leave Darwin without the consent of the Superintendent or a Protector. A garden and fish trap were established and provided a source of both labour and sustenance. Rations were distributed to 'old and indigent' natives while others were self-sufficient gaining paid employment in the garden, in private houses or in business places. As on mission and government settlements, the women were schooled in such 'domestic' duties as sewing, cooking and cleaning and 'mending' was done by the inmates for themselves as well as for patients at the Hospital and the Channel Island Leprosarium (Cummings 1990:18). The Compound laundry, staffed by inmates, serviced the general township as well as the institution. Methodist missionaries sometimes visited which 'broke the monotony of institutional life and provided a form of entertainment for the inmates' (Cummings 1990:38).

Apart from establishing the Compound such regulations as placing a curfew on Aborigines, prohibiting the entry of unauthorised persons to the Compound and declaring the town area restricted to Aborigines who did not possess special permits were introduced in a bid to prevent further increases in prostitution and the use of opium and spirits. However it was felt that 'so long as single or unattached men are present in large numbers, sexual connection between them and native women will not altogether cease, unless perhaps a bagnio (licensed or unlicensed) becomes established' (Gilruth 1916). In support of these regulations Beckett, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, stressed that 'the ongoing liaisons between black women and white men would 'retard the progress of the Northern Territory and a class of men will congregate whose very presence will deter the settlement of respectable families with children' (Beckett 1916).

A few years after the introduction of these regulations it was determined that the:

usefulness of the Darwin Compound becomes more apparent each year. The natives are happy, and under the thorough control of the Superintendent, for whom, it is evident, the great majority have a high regard. Instead of nomadic natives being camped throughout vacant areas of the towns and suburbs, such visitors are now compelled to camp within the compound area, on which unauthorized Europeans are not permitted to enter. Those who require food are found useful work to do, and all are more or less under discipline. The permanent huts in the compound are much prized by their occupants, and all are kept in thorough order. Native customs and names are, so far as possible, encouraged, and the co-operation which exists between 'King' George of the Larrakeah Tribe, who exercises no small authority, and the Superintendent is of considerable value in the maintenance of discipline and harmony (Gilruth 1915-16/1916-17).

Contrarily Beckett reported that the regulations were difficult to enforce as the Aborigines were proving difficult to 'confine', the consequence being 'that they slip away to assignations and men invade the Compound under cover of darkness'. Beckett believed

that such men should be prosecuted and further suggested that it would be 'wise to discourage' public visiting at the Compound merely for the purpose of satisfying 'curiosity or for watching corroborees or taking photographs' (Beckett 1916).

As was noted in the previous chapter, almost from the time of settlement Aboriginal groups from neighbouring and outlying regions began moving into Darwin on either sporadic visits or permanently. By 1913 Aborigines from the 'Daly, the Victoria, the Roper, the Katherine, the Alligator, the Adelaide, and the Mary River districts; from Port Essington, Melville Island, Junction Bay, and even from remote Wessel Island and the English Co. Islands, and from Borrooloola' were represented in the town Aboriginal population (Beckett 1913). The affect of this migration on the Larrakia was noted in Inspector Beckett's report:

Though the town of Darwin is situated upon the country of the Larrakia tribe, that tribe has now fewer representatives in the town than have other tribes from distant places. As the result of close observation and careful inquiry amongst the Aborigines, it appears plain to me that the Larrakia tribe, once strong numerically and influential along the north coast, has been brought very low. The Larrakias are now greatly outnumbered in their own country. Disease and excesses have killed, and are still fast killing, them off. Yet considerable virility still persists amongst them, for several tribally married couples at Darwin are raising large and vigorous families, but in each case these are people who indulge neither in opium or alcohol (Beckett 1913).

The Larrakia continued to be perceived as a distinct group and the traditional owners of Darwin and it appears, from Beckett's perspective at least, that there was concern for their demise:

Owing to the fact that Darwin occupies the seat of the tribal district of the Larrakias a great deal of latitude has been accorded those of that tribe who have desired to stay about their heritage. Their ancient burial grounds, used from time immemorial, are on the beaches and in the jungles fringing the beaches. Their traditions are woven around the headlands and landmarks along the shore. The land we have built upon is the tribal property of various Aboriginal families and the right of ownership is still impressed upon the children. Taking these facts into account every consideration has been given to the Larrakia tribe of Darwin and, in order to compensate for the necessity of removing them from certain old established haunts, weatherproof accommodation has been provided for them on Kalin [sic] beach with ample corroboree grounds adjoining (Beckett 1916).

Beckett's reports are important because they show that the Larrakia continued to practise ceremony and law in such a way that, almost fifty years after colonisation, their traditional ownership was automatically recognised and undisputed. While many other official reports contain disparaging reports about town Aborigines, Beckett refers to the curiosity of non-Aborigines for Aborigines in town and an ongoing awareness that the land was, and continued to be, Aboriginal land. Unfortunately compensation for the non-Aboriginal occupation of Larrakia 'country' was offered in the solution, 'that [all] we can do is improve their condition according to our way of living' (Stretton 1913).

Aborigines continued to be in demand for domestic service and other menial work within the town. In 1917 it was considered that '[t]he demand for Aboriginal labour ... far succeeded the supply available' and consequently 'higher rates of wages than ever previously received have been readily paid by employers (Macdonald 1917-18). At this stage Aboriginal workers in town were generally paid a wage of between five shillings and ten shillings a week with food, clothing and tobacco. Casual labour available to Aborigines in the Compound included looking after children, collecting firewood, cooking, cleaning, grooming horses and looking after other animals, and watering the garden (Hansen TS 640:6). Some Aborigines continued to work on the mine fields, on

pearling boats, with trepang fishers and on cattle stations. Bleakley, reporting in 1929 on the condition of Aborigines and Half-castes in the Northern Territory, stressed that the Kahlin Compound was a great source of 'cheap domestic labour' which 'owing to climatic and other conditions, life in Darwin for many of the white families would be almost impossible' without (Bleakley 1929:12)¹. According to Bleakley, Aborigines employed in domestic service in town fared better than their counterparts in bush employment as they received food, clothes and a wage of approximately 5s per week 'of which 3s, is paid to them as pocket money and 2s. is banked into a Trust Account for them' (Bleakley 1929:6). Bleakley considered that some Aborigines were 'worth' more than this and recommended that the 'regulation of 5s. per week should be used as a minimum and not a fixed rate, the more capable servants being paid according to their real value' (Bleakley 1929:6). Like those before him, Bleakley sought to regulate this employment by introducing strict measures which controlled the mobility of Aborigines. Those Aborigines with permits were allowed to live on the premises of their employers while those without worked during the day and were compelled to return to the compound at night. This measure was introduced in the interests of the 'welfare of the native' as was the rule which forbade Aborigines entry to films which had not previously been approved as 'suitable' and 'not likely to lower their respect for the whites' by the Chief Protector (Bleakley 1929:12). Bleakley advocated the retention of the Cullen Beach site for the Compound and the appointment of a full-time Superintendent and Matron as well as uniformed native police for night watch duties. He also advocated the transfer of the Aboriginal clinic to a site near the General Hospital and the training of Aboriginal assistants for the nursing staff. The Compound was to be re-organised on 'attractive village lines' and action was to be taken in encouraging inmates of the compound to 'improve their homes and living conditions'; building a separate dormitory for single women; 'cultivating profitable occupations for the idle'; organising night time and outdoor occupations and facilities; and establishing a canteen or retail store (Bleakley 1929:14).

Bleakley's report also focussed discussion on the plan to segregate 'full blood' 'tribal' Aborigines on inviolable Reserves and concentrated on increases in the 'half-caste' population with his chief concern being 'how to check the breeding of them and how best to deal with those now with us' (Bleakley 1929)². The removal of children of mixed descent from their Aboriginal families had been recommended as early as 1900 'so that ultimately they may be useful members of society' (Goldsmith 1900:15). In 1909 Inspector Stretton had opined that although the 'extinction of the rapidly decreasing Aboriginal' was not yet 'in measurable distance ... In the meantime a race more difficult to manage will have sprung up, and every endeavour should be made to ameliorate the condition of this coming race' (Stretton 1909:Appendix). Again in 1915 Inspector Beckett recommended the removal of children of mixed descent from their Aboriginal mothers as children living 'in camps ... assimilate the habits, customs, and superstitions of the full-blood aboriginals ... [which] make it difficult to give the half-caste a fair start on the road to civilised life, unless he or she be removed in infancy, before even environment begins to affect the child's character' (Beckett in Riddett 1979a:Appendix IV). Consequently in 1925 the 'Half-Caste Home' on Schultze Street near the Kahlin Compound was established as an Aboriginal reserve and children were subsequently removed from their 'full-blood' parents in Aboriginal camps and brought up at the home independent of their relatives. Bleakley supported this move believing that if the children were 'rescued' from the camps and segregated in 'a specially designed home' the 'predominantly European half-caste should, with proper training and management, be able to take their place in European society' (Bleakley 1929). Cummings describes

¹ In 1926/27 the largest recorded number of Aborigines at the Compound was 600. At the time of writing his report, Giles recorded that 300 Aborigines were currently resident at the Compound as it was the dry season and the Aborigines had mostly migrated to their 'respective hunting grounds' leaving a 'considerable shortage of male labour' (Giles 1927).

² Bleakley 'classified' Aboriginal people according to the 'amount' of European blood possessed by individual Aborigines into 'half-caste', 'quadroons' and 'octoroons'.

Bleakley's policy as one of 'biological and cultural assimilation' which 'depended firmly on the control of the breeding habits of those who were ostensibly in the process of becoming 'more European' (Cummings 1990:13).

Bleakley also made several recommendations about the Half-Caste Home and the implementation of policy in regard to 'half-castes'. Most of these recommendations involved 'check[ing] as far as possible the breeding of half-castes'; the collection and institutionalisation of those children not already institutionalised; the education and training of all 'half-castes' 'to fill a useful place in the labour for development of the Territories'; and an increase in government monies directed towards these ends. Some of Bleakley's recommendations were either not implemented or failed to have the desired affect as letters criticising the operation of the Compound and Half-Caste Home attest. One letter asked that conditions in the Home be improved as they were a 'disgrace to any civilised country' (Waldie 1938). According to this letter the state of food given to the women was 'rotten'; those who worked outside were not provided with clothes; they endured poor living conditions; the women were locked up each night and 'let out' early in the morning to go to work; there were no books or writing implements available to the women; no cultural activities were organised; limitations on fraternising with outsiders; irregular forms of punishment were conducted; and the low wages paid to women working outside were not actually received in full by them - wages went to the Chief Protector for distribution (Waldie 1938³). Every aspect of this letter - except that concerning the need for cultural activities - was refuted by Chief Protector Cook (Cook 1936a). A similar letter to Waldie's referring to the 'appalling conditions' at the Home was also refuted by Cook who claimed that the writer revealed an 'entire ignorance of the factors contributing to the present situation'. However it was acknowledged by both the NT Administrator and Cook that the 'parlous condition' of the finances of the Aboriginal Branch made it difficult to obtain 'funds required to do more than has been done' (Cook 1936b; Weddell 1936). As Cummings work makes clear the appalling conditions at the Compound and the Half-Caste Home were only made more bearable by the enduring spirit of the inmates and their support of each other (Cummings 1990).

Concern about the increasing number of Aborigines in the Darwin region prompted the introduction of strategies which sought to restrict or control the movement and relationships of Aborigines in this region. An Aboriginal Census taken in 1927 recorded the 'full blood' Aboriginal population in the Darwin region being 935 men, 681 women, 363 boys and 193 girls. The 'half-caste' population for the same region consisted of 39 men, 61 women, 26 boys and 38 girls. The combined total coming to 2,336 Aborigines in the Darwin region. By 1932 this total had risen to 3,394 which compares with the population of the entire Northern Territory excluding Aborigines being 4,549 (various Northern Territory Annual Reports). Moves to prevent the 'unrestricted immigration of myall Aborigines' to Darwin included the refusal of rail transportation to all Aborigines 'except those presenting an authority to travel signed by a Protector of Aborigines (Cook 1931-32). This migration was later facilitated by the issuing of a numbered identification disc to all Aboriginal people employed in the Darwin area as well as the appointment of patrol officers. Long's account of the role of inspectors and patrol officers in Darwin indicates that a major part of their duties was to discourage the drift of Aborigines into Darwin while sending 'refractory' Aborigines from Darwin to specially chosen destinations such as Delissaville and Garden Point (Long 1992:36-39).

Increases in the town population⁴ required that the town parameters expand and more land be made available for urban development. In 1936 Chief Protector of Aborigines Cook considered that the Aboriginal Compound site at Myilly Point was no longer suitable for the 'full development of the [Aboriginal] policy' and that 'the outlay for the

³ It is likely that this date should actually be 1936 as Cook's return correspondence is dated 1936 as is further correspondence by Waldie.

⁴ In 1931 the non-Aboriginal population in Darwin totalled 1,572. By the end of 1939 this count had risen to 3,653 (Powell 1988:178).

necessary buildings and equipment' to fulfil this policy would be 'wasted on a temporary site'. In addition Cook considered that the Darwin Hospital was 'insanitary, unsafe, inadequate and difficult to manage' and that the 'most desirable' site for the construction of the new hospital was the Compound site (Cook 1936c). Cook's suggestion that the Compound site be moved was met with a debate which was curtailed by the 1937 cyclone which destroyed much of the Compound. Focus then swung to locating a new site for the Compound with Assistant Chief Protector of Aborigines, VJ White, recommending to Cook that the freehold property of 369 acres, held by L Wilson, taken in conjunction with the Ludmilla Creek Reserve 'would appear to provide an eminently suitable site to which the Compound could be transferred' (Cook 1936c). This land had a sea frontage from which Aborigines could come and go by canoe and could fish from, was relatively convenient to Darwin and Parap and was considered suitable for the cultivation of sisal hemp and vegetables (Cook 1936c).

Reporting on a visit to the Administrator by a deputation of Larrakia worried about the prospective move of the Compound, the Acting Chief Protector of Aborigines, WB Kirkland, wrote that their 'objections' and concerns were 'more imaginary than real'. Kirkland claimed that the selected site was situated in Larrakia territory and thus would provide them with a camping ground in their tribal area, 'proximity to centres of totemic and ceremonial significance' and a sanctuary where their old people would 'find every comfort and care in their declining years' (Kirkland 1936). 'Woolner', 'Wargite' and 'Larrakeyah' would comprise the majority of the new Compound's population and Kirkland did not regard the 'introduction of neighbouring tribes' into the Larrakia 'domain' a problem as 'for many years past the Larrakeyah tribesman have fraternised and intermarried' with their neighbours (Kirkland 1936). At a meeting between a representative of the Chief Protector and 'male members of the tribe' it was deduced that the Larrakia:

had been labouring under a false impression concerning their removal from Kahlin Beach. It would appear that they had been informed that they were to be transferred inland to alien country to some site far removed from the sea-board; being naturally salt water people this fact constituted a grave objection. They were also under the impression that if they desired to continue to work in the town of Darwin they would be compelled to walk long distances. When they were acquainted with the site of the proposed Compound and the arrangements that were to be made for their accommodation, for the schooling of their children and the rationing and welfare of the old people, they expressed pleasure at the Government's action, commenting that they were grieved that they had made trouble for the Government (Kirkland 1936).⁵

If the Larrakia had 'expressed pleasure' others were not quite sure that the site was appropriate. The anthropologist, AP Elkin, believed that the country of the favoured site - known either as the 'eight mile' or 'Wilson's' - was poor quality with mangroves 'cluttering' the seashore and 'tidal creeks and private property mak[ing] the road to Darwin roundabout and difficult'. The openness of this area prevented adequate control or supervision of 'natives' and the 'salt-water people could decamp quickly in the canoes of the Brinken and other groups' (Elkin 1936). Elkin favoured a site for the new Compound 'on the Peninsula opposite Fanny Bay' primarily because of the isolation from white settlement, the ready availability of timber and 'native food on land and sea' as well as the potential of industrial activity for the 'natives' such as mineral exploration, the digging of quartzite gravel and the preparation of skins (Elkin 1936). Although there was local non-Aboriginal resident resistance to the aforementioned site, Elkin's proposal

⁵ Kirkland further reported some 'accurate statistics' about the Larrakia. In the Compound resided 45 'pure' Larrakeyah people, comprising adults and children. He also provided information as to the particular sexual relationships between these people (Kirkland 1936).

was not accepted and in accordance with the original plan Bagot Reserve was proclaimed on 10 March 1938 as part of the plan for the new Aboriginal Compound⁶.

Cook's ambitious plans for the new Compound comprised an administration section and industrial block, a hospital and clinic; a residential section; bakery, dining rooms and kitchen; and a school for the children. The grounds were cleared and the buildings built by the Aboriginal inmates of the Kahlin Compound (Cummings 1990:37; Topsy Secretary pers. comm. 1994). All the residents of Kahlin were transferred to the new Bagot Compound by May 1938 while inmates of the half-caste home were not moved there until 1939 amidst some controversy as it was against policy to have Aborigines and 'half-castes' in the same place (Cummings 1990:36-38). A visiting missionary to the new Compound observed the solution to this problem:

Our house was situated between the half-caste community on one side, and the native quarter on the other. The half-castes lived in concrete houses, while the Aborigines lived in huts of about ten by twelve feet, made of a few sheets of galvanised iron, with a flat roof. In summer they slept outside in the open air, except when it was raining. They were packed in these huts like sardines. You would be surprised at the number of people the huts could hold. Most of the huts had a door but no window ... There were two separate schools at the compound, one for the half-caste children and the other for the native children. The teachers came from the town each day (Rotuman nd:7-8).

Such design and the adoption of different policies for distinct 'categories' of Aborigines were to create rifts in the Darwin Aboriginal population which remain apparent today.

Although situated further from the town centre Aborigines in the newly located Compound continued to provide the bulk of domestic service in Darwin. In 1941 it was reported that demand for Aboriginal domestic servants had 'greatly exceeded the supply available' which was due in part 'to the repatriation of a large number of people to their rural districts' as well as to 'the rapid increase of population in Darwin' (Abbott 1940-41). It was further recorded that 'every available native in Darwin was in employment during the year' and that every 'male half-caste in Darwin has been employed at award rates of pay, and the half-caste population as a whole is enjoying the boom conditions at present prevailing' (Abbott 1940-41). These 'boom conditions' were not to be enjoyed for long.

⁶ The area finally selected comprised Section 839 in the Hundred of Bagot and the adjoining Ludmilla Creek Reserve. Section 839 had originally been part of a larger agricultural lease (No. 5) surveyed in 1894. The leaseholder, David Daniels, a planter of Darwin, converted it to freehold in 1900. Daniels died in 1914 and the title passed to Issac Daniels, who died in 1919. One of Isaac's heirs, George McKeddie [who married Annie, a Larrakia woman], died in 1927 and the other, William Henry Grant, sold the land to Leonard Bartlett Wilson, a plumber, in 1929. Wilson's property was inspected by the Chief Surveyor who reported that there were 50 to 60 acres of good cultivable soil, about 200 acres were gravelly and stony, and the balance was poor. Some land in the reserve was thought to have been used earlier for rice production by the Chinese. The surveyor reported the property to be heavily wooded and carrying abundant supplies of both firewood and building timber, with white cedar trees scattered through the 'jungle growth'. He also noted that there was a good gravel supply and a large deposit of pure shell which could be used to manufacture lime for building purposes. The property was compulsorily acquired from Wilson for 400 pounds by the Commonwealth for the Reserve. The Ludmilla Creek Reserve had remained Crown Land, although it had a short history of Agricultural lease no. 11 under the name of Issac Daniels for one year in 1894. The newly created Bagot Aboriginal Reserve comprised 743 acres (297 hectares) of land (Henderson 1984).

Elkin's proposal was later taken up on 10 July 1941 when a half square mile reserve was gazetted for the settlement of Delissaville - used later to take up 'excess' or 'refractory' Aborigines from Bagot. The Delissaville Reserve, comprising 16 square miles, was officially gazetted on 7 April 1977 and is now called Belyuen Aboriginal community.

During the second world war all the buildings recently established at the new Compound were handed over to the Army for use as a hospital and military camp. The Aboriginal residents of Bagot were evacuated to a number of places, including Berrimah and Delissaville (Belyuen). Shortly after the bombing of Darwin in 1942 Aborigines were moved out of the Darwin area and into 'control camps' - established at Koolpinyah, Adelaide River, Pine Creek, Katherine and Mataranka by the Army. With the 'imposition of military rule' and the 'greater resources available to the Army' Aboriginal people in the Darwin/Katherine region 'were subjected to even tighter control' (Long 1992:42). The movements of Aboriginal women were especially restricted. The war meant displacement from country, separation from families, upheaval and unemployment for many Aborigines living in Darwin. It is also true however, that Aborigines contributed significantly to the war effort by formally enlisting in the armed services or serving in defacto units - particularly in coastal surveillance. Others worked as general labourers and domestics or performed 'corroborees' to raise funds for the war effort (NLC 1979:103; Hall 1990).

The condition in which the Army left Bagot Reserve was described by the Superintendent of Bagot, VJ White, as 'a desolate waste and one huge gravel pit' (White 1945). White, while recognising that 'the demands of the war' necessitated the 'logical exploitation' of the extensive gravel deposits on Bagot Reserve, pointed out that the 'inviolability' of the Reserve had been 'assailed'. The Reserve had also been 'despoiled' and rendered practically useless for any gardening project. White believed that the Native Affairs Department should be compensated for this damage as well as being recognised for the 'real and valuable' service to the Army provided by the 'native community'. Recognition and compensation could take the form of handing over the 'plant, equipment and the second-hand building material' left on the reserves after the war to the Aboriginal settlements (White 1945).

Aborigines gradually returned to Darwin with the cessation of war. It was suggested that the 'full blood' Aboriginal people be moved from Bagot and that henceforth Bagot be available to 'half-castes'. White believed that 'full blood' Aborigines did not appreciate the accommodation provided for them and that there was still too much contact with Europeans. After inspecting various sites White chose the former RAAF Air Defence Headquarters Camp at Berrimah as the most suitable location for the Aboriginal population from Bagot. The camp was 'situated in the bush well off the main roads' and although it was 'in a state of disrepair' it was deemed 'suitable for immediate occupation by natives' (White 1946). A few years later, 'following difficulties associated with control of the Aboriginal community at Berrimah', it was decided to return the full-blood Aborigines - numbering approximately 200 - to Bagot⁷. By the mid 1950s, with a population of approximately 300, it was reported that the community at Bagot was becoming 'stabilised' with 'more people coming to regard Bagot and Darwin as their home country' (Nott 1961). A major change in government policy in respect of Aborigines occurred at this stage with the adoption of a policy of assimilation which sought to:

promote and direct social change among Aborigines in the Northern Territory in such a way that, while retaining connexions with and pride in their Aboriginal ancestry, they will eventually become indistinguishable from other members of the Australian community in manner of life, standards of living, occupations and participation in community affairs (Northern Territory Annual Report 1957-58:36).

Amidst vocal and widespread lobbying by such groups as the Half Caste Progressive Association for civil rights for Aborigines, changes were made to existing 'definitions' of Aborigines and part-Aborigines in the new 1953 Welfare Ordinance. As a result of this

⁷ Some Aboriginal people of mixed descent from the Compound moved to the newly established and gazetted Retta Dixon Home. The 'Home' was located within the Bagot Reserve with a fence being erected to keep Aborigines of full descent separate from the part-Aboriginal children (see Cummings 1990).

ordinance most 'full blood' Aborigines became Wards of the State while Aborigines of mixed descent or 'coloureds' as they came to be known went on to obtain citizenship.

Amidst government and departmental discussion concerning the lack of land within Darwin for urban housing the idea of either moving or revoking the Bagot Reserve emerged in the early 1960s⁸. At first the idea was rejected by the Secretary of the Department of Territories, Lambert, who maintained that 'we cannot reduce an Aboriginal reserve on grounds related solely to the need for land for housing'. He suggested that:

the approach has to be made from the starting point that the land has been dedicated for the use and benefit of Aborigines. That includes not only their present but also their prospective use and benefit ... As they progress towards assimilation it is our intention that they should live in and with the rest of the community and that there should be no 'native' quarter in Darwin. To serve this purpose and also to be fair to the Aborigines we have to make sure that during the next thirty years there are blocks of land available and within their reach. I could not justify cutting up some hundreds of acres of the Bagot Reserve for housing if in thirty years' time the only land left for the next generation of Aborigines was to be a long way out in the paddocks that nobody else wanted ... I suggest that we have to look at a proposal for the future development and use of the reserve for Aborigines and not simply at a proposal for taking away some of it (in Woodward 1974).

Such arguments in support of the revocation as the Housing Commission's inability to meet the needs of Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal families on housing commission lists; the difficulty of 'supervising' residents at Bagot as the 'scrubland and swamps provide the seclusion ideal for drinking and gambling orgies and other forms of anti-social behaviour'; and interestingly, that 'very few of the Aboriginal occupants of Bagot are descended from the original inhabitants of the Darwin area' combined with political and departmental pressure resulted in the Department of Territories agreeing to the excision of a specified area of land from the Reserve (Woodward 1974:paragraph 316). This area was to be determined 'in ration to the number of Aboriginal and mixed blood families ready to move into the tenancy of Housing Commission Homes' as the Department was not prepared to 'reduce the reserve at one sweep' (Woodward 1974:paragraph 304-326). Although the decision had been made on the 'clear understanding that one out of every three blocks obtained by the resumption and the subsequent sub-division ... be kept for Aborigines' and that the resumption be made in two stages with the Administrator indicating when stage 2 could begin, Bagot Reserve was formally resumed in 1965 and a new area totalling 57 acres was proclaimed an Aboriginal reserve with 'none of the conditions outlined above being met (Woodward 1974:paragraph 304-326)⁹.

The resumption of the Reserve coincided with and exacerbated many changes at Bagot. A growing urban Aboriginal population together with Aborigines from outside the Darwin region, officially defined as 'transients' moving sporadically onto Bagot, caused

⁸ Ten years after Bagot Reserve had first been declared for the use and benefit of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Northern Territory an area of 16 acres was excised to provide for Bagot road and an access road to the RAAF base. A further 11 acres was resumed from the Reserve on 3 November 1959 to provide land for the Retta Dixon Home run by the Aborigines Inland Mission.

⁹ Further reasons given for the May 1965 resumption of the majority of the reserve were that more land for housing sites was required because of considerable urban development; only a small part of the land had been developed and occupied by Aborigines; the northern part of the Reserve had to be kept clear to meet air safety requirements because of the proximity of the Reserve to the airport; and part of the area was required for the Post Master General's Department and as a site for an ABC radio transmitter (Woodward 1974).

In December 1987 the Administrator of the Northern Territory formally revoked the Bagot Reserve but it remains today under the name of the Bagot Community. It is surrounded to the North, South and West by the residential subdivision of Ludmilla and to the east by Bagot Road and the Darwin airport and Army base.

overcrowding in the housing available¹⁰. The reduction of the area of Reserve further limited the availability of good camping places and caused much tension on the Reserve with those who had lived on Bagot Reserve for most of their lives becoming increasingly vocal in their opposition to this predicament. Changes in perception of what purpose Bagot served also affected Bagot residents. In 1967 the idea was forwarded of Bagot becoming entirely a transitional training centre for Aborigines across the Territory 'who were regarded as sufficiently capable in learning to maintain a modern housing unit and who are desirous of broadening their social horizons with positive aims of eventually moving into the normal community' (Wilson 1967). Those Aborigines who did not fit this 'category' were to be moved on to other settlement such as Delissaville.

This short account of government legislation in regards to Aborigines is only one layer of Darwin's history as official records present us with a particular perspective on Aborigines. Aborigines were to be supervised or controlled by non-Aboriginal officials, they were instructed as to whom they could form relationships with and they were designated special areas of land on which they were compelled to live. What these official records portray is a sense of powerlessness for a marginalised, defeated group. If, as Wei contends (1990:30), 'government policies and their ramifications ... repressed and sometimes destroyed people's sense of being Larrakia by removing them from their families, their knowledge of their own family history and their land' it is also true that the Larrakia determined a place for themselves within this history. An examination of diaries, journals and oral history records together with the further recording of oral histories would elucidate the life histories and stories of people at the receiving end of government policy and provide us with another layer of history. Apart from forming a significant part of Darwin's working population Aborigines had traditional medicinal skills, local knowledge and cultural traits which were shared with and valued by the non-Aboriginal community. Aborigines and non-Aborigines also formed friendships which were not based on exchanges of opium, alcohol and sex and maintained aspects of their traditional lifestyles while forging new cultures. It seems an understatement for Bessie Robinson to state 'you know the natives had a lot of things that we've never found out about them all (Robinson TS112:43).

Oral history or memories of particular places impact on the construction of 'history' and on a sense of identity for a particular place by adding and validating a range of divergent perspectives. More recently such perspectives are being utilised in studies of Darwin and will continue to figure in further writings. Barbara Cummings study of the Kahlin Compound and Retta Dixon Home is an example of the multi-layering of history and serves as testimony to the resistance, innovativeness, independence and complexities in the myriad responses of Aborigines to colonisation. As Cummings concludes, 'in spite of everything we have survived ... Aboriginal people have constituted a large and identifiable part of the cosmopolitan and multi-racial population of the Territory and will continue to do so ... We will continue to survive and to prosper and will remain vigilant to ensure that this part of our history is never repeated' (Cummings 1990:136).

Policies which focussed on controlling Aboriginal movement and other aspects of their lives combined with a long history in the differing treatment of 'half-castes' as opposed to 'full-bloods', increases in the population at Bagot, housing shortages on the Reserve, the severe reduction in land and internal friction caused by this and continual changes in Government policy forced Aborigines in Darwin to respond in many ways. Some began to organise through local political organisations and trade unions to take control of or at least have a say in their own affairs. These people and their families are today at the forefront of organisations concerned with Aboriginal health, education, law, land rights and general welfare. While others moved away from Bagot to set up their own camps in areas around Darwin. In December 1970 Margaret Moy, Margie Cooper and other women at Bagot helped put together a list of some thirty camps around Darwin, although

¹⁰ By mid 1963, 313 people (183 adults and 129 children) had become permanent or semi-permanent residents on the significantly reduced Bagot Reserve.

some of these were said to not currently be in use. One of these was a site known as 'Galalak' - camp this side ('Wanawininy') for Larrakia - between the Drive in Theatre and the 'place where flowers were grown to sell' (Henderson 1984). Kulaluk's location on the coast together with the presence of a freshwater spring suggests that this area would have been traditionally widely utilised by Aborigines of this area. Jack Phillips, an early supporter of the Larrakia claim to Kulaluk, stressed that the overcrowding at Bagot and internal friction caused by this meant that some people moved to Kulaluk to avoid this scene, '[a]t Kulaluk they were out of all that. It was a much better place' (pers. comm. Jack Phillips 1994). Phillips remembers what the camping place at Kulaluk was like:

All they had there was a great big tent. That's all they had. It was a very big tent. It was all ripped and torn. It wasn't much protection and that was it. That's all they had. They were still getting a fair bit of bush tucker around the place. They were getting bandicoots frequently and there was even some emus down there ... still a few wallabies around ... still eating a fair bit of bush tucker, fish and all that ... no pigs ... wouldn't eat crocodile. It was a pretty quiet out of the way place actually, it was still a jungle out there. Not many people even knew they were there, a real hideout. You had to wade across a creek to get there. A lot of people didn't even know they were down there except the taxi drivers and that, they knew (pers. comm. Jack Phillips 1994).