

Brigida Nailon csb

Father Duncan McNab

1820 - 1896

"Were I free from all defects; had I abundant means; and all necessary faculties

I should still be quite unequal to the work to be done;

I should be but a grain of salt in the ocean.

More missionaries are required.

True it is the work of God, and he gives the grace!"

Reference: ***The Writing on the Wall*** Design by Joseph Vendargon, Published by Brigidine Sisters Printed By BPA
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Duncan Mc Nab was born 11 May 1820 in Scotland. In 1835 he went to Scots College in Rome. He returned to Scotland to be admitted as priest 8 March 1845 and was in charge of a parish at Airdrie, and remained there for nearly 20 years. By the time he left Scotland for Australia, he was forty-seven, his parents were too old to leave behind, and the debt incurred by bringing them with him to Victoria in 1867 obliged him to remain as parish priest in Portland until 1871.

In September 1873 Arthur Palmer's government in Queensland appointed a Commission for Aborigines.

In **1874** the Commission sent out a call for the services of persons qualified to carry out a scheme of training for Aborigines.

To Queensland 1875-1876

It seems that Fr McNab saw an opening and he may have written to Bishop Quinn offering his services. In 1874, when £3,040 was budgeted for a new training establishment for the Native Police. Father McNab protested:

"Why should the Government be so ready and lavish of action and expenditure for their (the Aborigines') destruction and so cautious and parsimonious in their efforts to civilise them?"



Fr Duncan McNab 7923
1820-1896

Fr McMab was welcomed by Bishop James Quinn of Brisbane, to work with Aborigines and spent the first three months reading evidence given to the *1861 Select committee on Native Policies*. He also studied a history of New Norcia. At first Bishop Quinn was prepared to accommodate him and even support his roving commission for Aborigines, insofar as it did not make demands

on other clergy under the bishop's authority. Bishop Quinn was a colonial bishop with expectations that his clergy would deal with the practical concerns of running a parish, in the form of churches, schools, seminaries and orphanages.

Fr McNab later wrote to Archbishop Vaughan that he had told Bishop Quinn: *I should render to him reasonable obedience while I remained in his diocese: that if I were not allowed to devote myself exclusively to the Blacks I should return whence I came.*



A Native Police encampment on the Herbert River about 1872 testifies to the state of war that existed in Queensland in the nineteenth century. (National Library of Australia) 13561 From the Frontier, p314

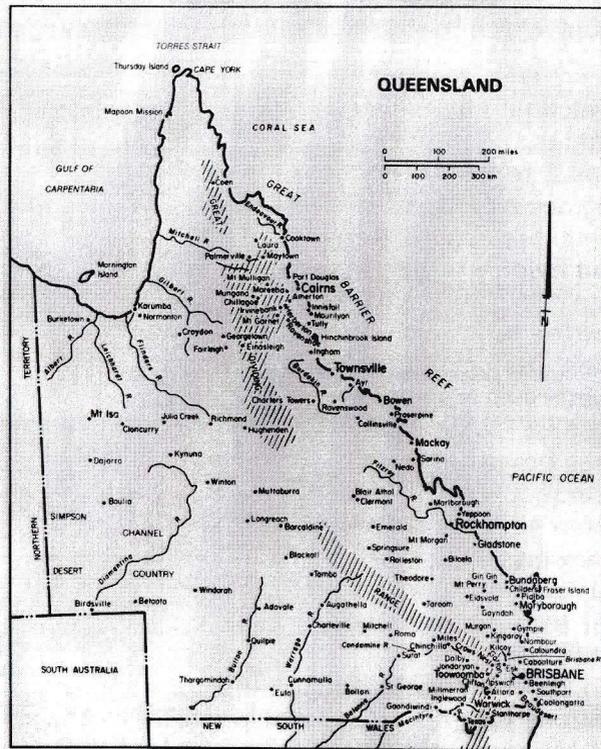
LOBBYING IN QUEENSLAND 1877 - 1879

Lobbying for Land Struggle between Squatters and Selectors

After some Durundur Blacks became Christians, neighbouring selectors petitioned against the reserve, complaining that good land had been assigned to Aborigines who should be confined to mountains and scrubs. At first, Douglas, the Minister for Lands, was reluctant to act with the power given him by the Legislative Assembly to help the Blacks. John McConnel had bought the land in 1841 with his brother, who left in 1861.

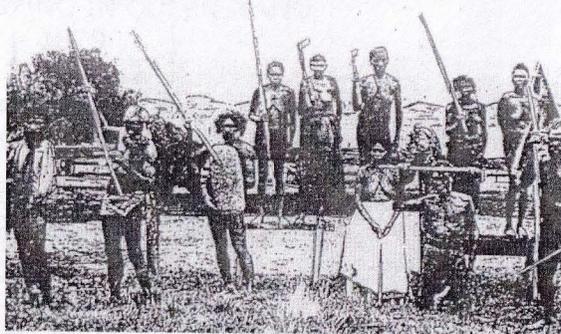
In **1864** Henry Wood first became manager, later he became a partner, and was to play a significant role in the drama which unfolded over the Durundur reserve. In the beginning it had functioned as a collection point for Blacks of the district, who never gave any trouble. In 1864 more than five hundred had gathered there for a corroboree.

Local tribes remembered poisonings at the adjoining Kilcoy Station in 1841 and lived under constant threat of aggression from 1860-1880 from



*Map of Queensland From the Frontier, p vi
The settlement and economic exploitation of
Queensland were based on immigration*

Aborigines of 'Durundur' pose on Stockyard fence. About 1843
(Lengthening Shadows p8)



A squatter with his
wife and daughters

The red ochre found at Durundur was used to paint bodies for ceremonies and celebrations, and to paint bones before burial. Never traded in big amounts, a piece about the size of the thumb would purchase a *duljn*, (a special ornament cut from the Nautilus shell in the shape of a half moon). It was valuable to inland tribes. This small quantity was used to paint fifty men. Lengthening shadows on Durundur Country, 1980, p4. JOL

Binambi — is the name of a water hole which was (in the old days) used to collect *jinding* — or magic white stones used for healing and rainmaking; this water hole is rather close, maybe next to, the present-day prison, WOODFORD.

The water hole signifies the water hole, Binambi.

The stones of power (*jinding*) which were collected at Binambi

The Shield design

is a fern, spore-fern, timber design, one of many of the Dungidau, the people who owned & named the area; * the shield being in the centre gives the overall design, the heart of the Dungidau.

The spears give the emblem aboriginality, in the sense of the spear being the basic weapon (whether it is a multi-pronged fishing spear or single blade hunting & fighting spear). It shows the only Australian to use a spear was, and still is, the aborigine.



1841: Durundur is the name of one of the first white settlements in the area which was bought for and owned (by Deed of white man's law) by the Archer brothers.

- This emblem was compiled on Dungidau land by a WAKKA WAKKA Warrior.

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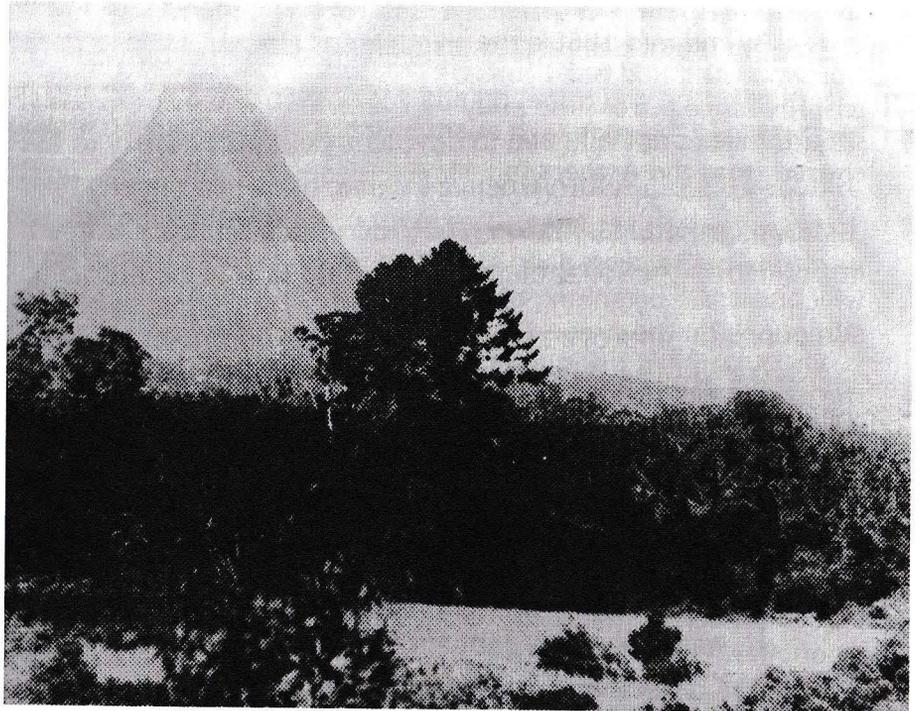
Durunder was situated on the right bank of the Stanley River on a ridge, above flood level.

Beyond Durunder, etched against the eastern skyline were the sharp peaks of the Glasshouse Mountains that had overlooked the principal Kipper (initiation) ring at Durunder throughout all those countless years that stretched backwards into the Dreamtime. These mountains played a very important part in Aboriginal lives and ceremonies held before the 1870's.

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Durunder Reserve - October 1876

Shortly after Fr McNab's arrival in Queensland, Bishop Quinn had introduced him to Governor Cairns. The nature of Fr McNab's proposal for Durunder Run was more consistent with the character of the Reserves movement as endorsed in the Parliamentary Resolutions of November 1876.



Glasshouse Mountain (Lengthening Shadows p11) 191197

By the mid 1860's the Durundur Run had been considerably reduced from the sixty square miles originally purchased from the Archers in 1848.

In 1868 an *Act for Closer Settlement* was passed which saw the beginning of resumptions on the property.

A detailed description of the practice of dumming suggests that partnership with the ex-manager Wood (1873) may have been an attempt to forestall further resumptions from the Homestead Act of the previous year.

Fr McNab met with Aborigines around Durundur near the present site of Woodford.



Aborigines of 'Durundur' 1867, *Clothed and Captive*. From left: 1. Unknown, 29. King Buckna, 3. Werrum, 4. Tungarun, and Lucy far right. Front: Sitting on right: Buckna, Buckna's wife, Maria. (*Lengthening Shadows* p 9) 191198

10 October 1876

An order was made by the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, that a copy of all correspondence that passed between the Rev Duncan McNab and the government, respecting the Aborigines, and the proper mode of providing for them, be made available.

22 September 1876

Rev D McNab wrote to the Minister for Lands from North Kenilworth that he would petition His Excellency the Governor by calling attention to the condition of the Aborigines saying, *"I wish to remind you of their present miserable condition, which I cannot more briefly describe than I have done in the first part of my letter to the editor of the Gympie Times, and contained in this issue of the 9th of August, whereof I send you a copy.*

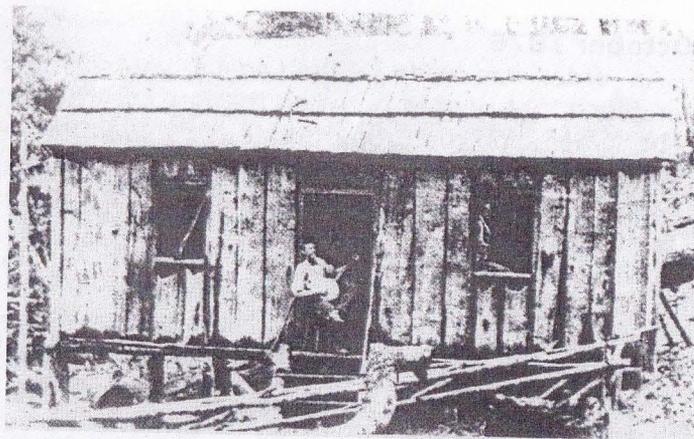
In the prevailing atmosphere of government parsimony, administrators were reluctant to commit money on a purely philanthropic basis but Fr McNab had come to Queensland with the reasonable expectation that the colony was ready to take important steps towards civil rights for the Aborigines.

29 November 1876

Two Resolutions to help the conditions of the Blacks were passed by the Queensland Legislative Assembly and Fr McNab later viewed these resolutions as the culmination of his own lobbying efforts. The first resolved that reserves should be made for Aborigines under the authority of the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1868; the second that £500 should be granted annually for the purpose of implementing such measures. Because of the Bishop's expectations and his own desire, Fr McNab prepared for the instruction of the blacks. From the beginning he had prayed, and requested prayers from others. He now adopted particular modes of dress, one for travelling and one for instruction. Both were photographed and sent ahead so that the blacks would recognise him when he came.



Gaiarbau, Yoel, Yunnamaloo and Yandah at Kilcoy, Lengthening Shadows, p3



Settler's Hut

Lieutenant G Murray of the Native Police with his junior officers and seven of his boys who operated on the Dawson River in the late 1850's. The native Police earned their fearsome reputation by the proficiency of their sneak attacks on Aboriginal camps.

*Their deeds were so horrifying that orders were rarely written down and officials always evaded accountability. (E B Kennedy, *The Black Police of Queensland*, London, 1902. Frontpiece) From the Frontier p 314.*





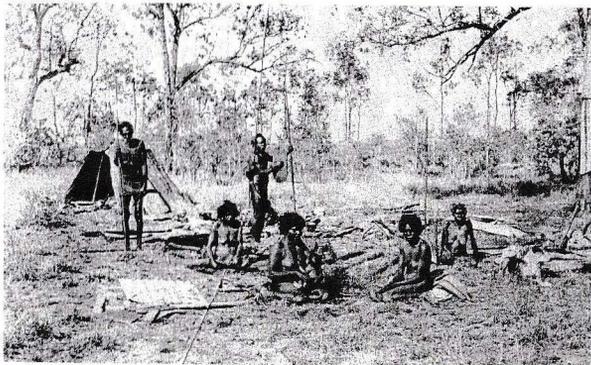
Climbing Aborigine



Scene in Queens Park, Maryborough (with the Post Office and St Mary's Catholic Church in the Background From the Frontier p 12 'ABORIGINES - Maryborough, 1870's (69224) "Collection: John Oxley Library, Brisbane"

The original caption read: "The Best Shot in the Native Mounted Police". (W R O Hill, Forty five Years' Experience in North Queensland.

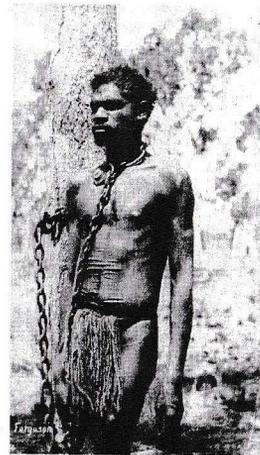
(Brisbane, 1907, 32).



1895 An Aboriginal Camp

An Aborigine named Cumjam in custody in March 1894 after his arrest for the murder of a white man in the Croydon district. Prisoners were often chained to trees if there was no gaol or lock-up. From the Frontier, p202 ABORIGINES - Croydon Distract, 1894

(63494) "Collection: John



4
**In 1896, Cardinal Moran published extracts from Duncan McNab's Diary 1875-1878:
 Christmas, 1875**

Father McNab was at Mackay, where he found Father Bucas, a Breton priest who had laboured among the Maoris in New Zealand for three years, and had come to Queensland to devote himself to the Blacks. Ill health had, however, prevented Bucas from carrying out his design, and he was now in charge of the district of Mackay attending to the spiritual wants of a considerable white population. Father McNab describes him as a very good priest, "*being candid, upright, extremely charitable, affable hospitable, a practical worker, a musician and universally liked.*" McNab remained at the reserve station for the Blacks at Scrubby Creek, not far from Mackay, for three months, "*The Blacks there were perfectly naked, and knew very little English. The manager, Mr Bridgman would not allow me or any other missionary to give them religious instruction. I told them I was there to learn their language, and would afterwards teach them what they should do to go to heaven.*"

April 1876

Struck down with fever, McNab returned to Brisbane. In a lengthy correspondence with the Queensland Government, he endeavoured to secure fixed habitations and allotments of land or at least homesteads leased for the various Native Tribes. For a time there was a gleam of hope that he would be successful, but eventually all his prospects failed. He thus speaks in general of the treatment and the dispositions of the Queensland Blacks: "*According to the statement of the public press, the Aborigines have been too frequently and still are occasionally subjected to an indiscriminate slaughter, the guilty and the innocent alike. The Government maintains a standing army of Native police for the protection of the colonists by the destruction of the Aborigines. Their misery is greatly increased, and I may say completed by their physical and moral corruption and degradation derived from their*

intercourse with Europeans. With reference to their dispositions, I must say that they are quick of apprehension, and susceptible of instruction and training, and many tribes have expressed to me their desire of being civilized and their inclination to give a fair hearing to the exposition of Christian Doctrine. Their nomad habits, savage usages, their superstitions, and imperfect knowledge of our language, and the want of abstract terms in their own language, are great impediments to their improvement."

1877

Father McNab set out on a tour of instruction among the tribes. At Mooroochie, about seventy miles from Brisbane, they listened to him patiently for a time but when he spoke to them of the mysteries of religion, they said they could not understand what he preached, and left him.

"At Durundar, where there was a reserve of 2400 acres, he met with more success: "In the midst of the forest they came every morning to morning prayer, and, before a great fire, attended catechetical instructions at night. By day I divided them into hunting, fishing and working parties, and inspected and directed the operations of the workmen engaged in collecting materials, or in the construction of their houses. Hitherto they had no houses, but were sheltered at night only by boughs of trees or a few sheets of bark rudely put together. I availed myself of the services of the young, who understood English best, to instruct the old, what I had learned of the Native tongue at Port MacKay being of no use to me here, for to them it was quite unintelligible. They listened to me for six whole weeks before they expressed any opinion on what I taught them. They then said they wished to go to heaven and not down to hell. They received the religion as good and true, and they promised to remain on the reserve, and to make it their home. At the end of two months I baptised twenty-seven of them and married nine couples. An emissary had been sent by King Tidy of Sampson Vale, to disperse them, but, he became a convert and was the first baptised and named 'Paul

Wanbahu'."

A few months later Father McNab passed to Bribie Island:

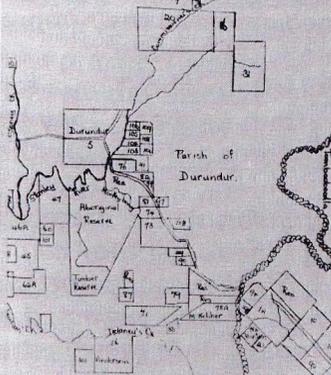
"There being some children there of age for school, I taught them by day their letters. For the rest, however, I married one couple, and left six catechumens, with a promise that I would see them, recommending them in the meantime to learn as much as they could from the manager's wife, who was a Roman Catholic. The Blacks do not like long instructions, they want the bare idea to be given them quickly, and they pay more attention and learn better at intervals than continually."

From Bribie Island he returned to Durundur, and remained there for two months completing their instructions and administering the Sacraments. He remarked: *"During my absence, they have behaved on the whole very well, worked diligently, and kept remarkably sober, even though a publican had brought drink to the reserve, there was no sign of any disposition to apostatise. They were proud of wearing the little crosses I had given them, and one who had lost his was much distressed, and made me promise to send him another from Brisbane."*

From Durundur he proceeded to Kilcoy,

roasting parts of the bodies of some of the Aborigines who were killed in this melee, the sheep being close at hand and three of the bodies of the murdered shepherds picked up untouched. There is little doubt, however, that Cannibalism in general owes its origin to the extreme difficulty at times of obtaining the means of existence in their barren wilds, for though the fighting men are in general well nourished, the women and children are in a horrid state of starvation.

Notwithstanding the numerous atrocities they have committed in the district, I consider them upon the whole a good natured, humorous race of savages, by no means deficient in intelligence; but having few wants, they consider increased comforts dearly purchased by increased toil and the abandonment of that merry, jovial life they lead in the wilds of Australia. Hence when pinched by hunger, they return to their usual habits. With perseverance, however, and kindness something may perhaps be done to ameliorate their condition, more especially as regards the rising generation - and the Commissioner of Crown Land and stations if properly organized for this purpose, might be rendered available for that object.



well for the system of kindness that the local tribe warned him and helped fight the intruders off. In 1845, William Vant was wounded on Archer's estate.

During the 1870's an Aboriginal Reserve, 'Binambi', was established at Durundur under the management of three trustees: Messrs Smith, Wood and Nicholson.

FATHER McNAB: the first priest connected with our district was Father Duncan McNab. Born in Glasgow Scotland in 1820, he trained as a missionary. Because of the shortage of priests in Scotland, he was not released to work in the Australian missionary field until he was forty -

During the 1870's, an Aboriginal Reserve, 'Binambi', was established. Fr McNab was the first priest connected with the district. It was closed in 1902. In 1905 the Aboriginal settlement moved from Woodford to Barambah (now Cherbourg). By 1911, there were only an estimated 8400 of the original inhabitants remaining in Queensland.

"to teach the Blacks there the truths of Christianity at their own request and remained with them some time." He did not, however receive any of them into the church, partly because the king was a bigamist, and partly because there were some Whites among them who were a disgrace to the Christian name. He gives the instance of one of the Blacks who "walked eighteen miles to learn from me how he could get land, then went off to get work by which he could earn enough to secure it, and subsequently came to me at a distance of seventy miles from where we first met, in order to get his instructions in the Christian doctrine completed and himself baptised."

From Kilcoy he passed on to Collington, where he found only a few Blacks, the others being away in the mountains, the bunya being then in season. Those few he instructed, but could not admit into the church on account of their marriage difficulties.

5/ **Early in the year 1878**

Heading?

He again set out from Brisbane to proceed to Broad Sound to perfect himself there in the dialect, which he had begun to learn at Mackay, which would be most useful throughout the whole of the northern Vicariate. At Bellai Creek he gave instructions for a time. "As elsewhere, some of the Blacks would not listen to me, and others listening would not believe. Eight believed and were baptised, and two were married."

At Kenilworth there were but few Blacks, yet he received one family of five members into the Church. On his way to Imbil he revisited Bellai Creek, where he found that an impostor had been deluding them during his absence and pretending to be a Catholic priest. He met there a mob of about a hundred coast Blacks mustering for a fight against the inland Burnet Blacks. "*Bent upon such a purpose they would not then listen to religious instruction.*"

At Imbil he found but three Blacks, one of whom he baptised the other two being already baptised. *"The rest had gone to the muster for the fight, as all from Gympie to Caboolture had been summoned to attend. They had regular couriers on foot to give accurate information of the gradual approach of their foes."*

He stopped for some time at Maryborough. *"Between Maryborough, Frazer Island, and the surrounding country the Blacks number about 1000. They are very much corrupted by their intercourse with the whites, and begging and jobbing and drinking in the town, and, in consequence of the former residence of a Protestant missionary among them, they expected to be supplied with food for listening to instruction."*

A Native from Bribie who had there known Father McNab, introduced him to these Blacks and sixteen were after a time prepared for baptism. On the eve of the day appointed for receiving them into the church, a Protestant brought spirits to the camp and remained drinking with them all night. Nine of the catechumens resisted the temptation to drink and were baptised. Two of the others subsequently repented of their drunkenness, and were baptised and married in the Catholic church of Maryborough.

"Here all the Blacks told me that they and all to the northward had believed in the existence of God before any Whites came among them. They call him Biral, that is, the High One. They could not say the Most High, for there are no degrees of comparison in their language. At Kilcoy and Mount Brisbane some called Him Munbal, that is, Thunder."

June, 1878

Father McNab returned to Brisbane, worn out with constant journeying, and being in his 59th year. There ends the diary from which the above extracts have been taken. Regarding the language of the Queensland Blacks, he observed:

"Although the dialects are numerous and different they are intelligible over a great extent of country, and the languages are comparatively few.

Every little tribe between Brisbane and Rockhampton has what they call a language of their own, but which is only a dialect and intelligible to all, at any rate, as far as Bundaberg, if not to Rockhampton and all over the Burnett district.

The language is different at Port Mackay, but there it extends from Board Sound to Townsville, and probably from Rockhampton to Cardwell. The language of the Barcoo is also different.

The Blacks have been thought stupid by those who did not know them, or who judged them when addressed in a language almost unknown to them and in which they could express their sentiments only by halves.

They are not only fit to receive Christian instruction, but they have also a clear perception and a strong sense of moral obligation when once it is explained to them and their conscience is aroused. They have no prejudices against the truth. Their superstitions are easily removed and replaced by Catholic belief.

They are generally disposed to listen to instructions when once convinced that their instructor is in earnest for their temporal and eternal welfare. But they like to get it in a few words, and not to be kept long at a time.

I have written of the semi-civilized Blacks only in the occupied districts of the colony, because my experience is with them.

I am told that the others, totally removed from intercourse with Europeans, are far more tractable and docile, because more simple and less vicious where they are not hostile.

In the northern vicariate they are mostly hostile, and at present inaccessible or unapproachable except towards Cardwell."

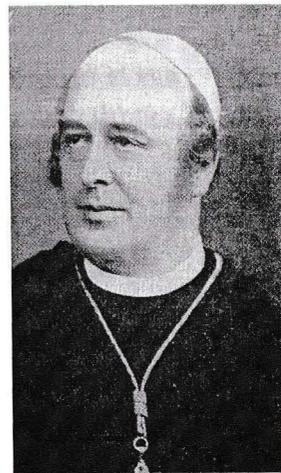
In his report to Archbishop Vaughan in 1878, Father McNab stated that imperfect knowledge of our language and the want of abstract terms in their own language were great impediments to Aboriginal improvement. He wrote: *I also found that although the dialects are numerous and different they are intelligible over a great extent of country, and the languages comparatively few. Every little tribe between Brisbane and Rockhampton have a language of their own, but it is a dialect and intelligible to all, as far as Bundaberg seventy miles to the North of Maryborough, if not to Rockhampton and all over the Burnet district ...I still have a facility in relating the words to those in European languages, and a couple of months after my return to Maryborough I expect to find out and arrange the grammatical inflections and construction of the language.*

Lobbying for Aborigines and 'Regular Marriage'

The struggle for civil rights for Aborigines was not limited to the Lands Department. Fr Fr McNab was registered as a marriage celebrant but a minor breach of regulations at Durundur sparked bad feelings between himself and the Registrar-General's Office. As a matter of fact and practice, it had always been assumed from the inception of the Registration Act in New South Wales both in that colony and in this since separation, that such an act was not intended to apply to Aboriginal Natives of the colony.

The whole incident of the 'Case' was a telling admission, less in its own right, than its frank acknowledgement of the gulf, which existed between the theoretical status of the Aborigines under law, and their actual position. The solution of a distinct register was offered.

Father McNab believed that the Aborigines were British subjects. His campaign for the registration of their marriages in particular, and for their civil rights in general were under the written by a belief that Aborigines should be brought under British law and made sub-



Archbishop Vaughan

tection and its penalties.

The 1874 report of the Aboriginal Commissioners had noted:

Hitherto the Aborigines have been almost exempt from both the protection and penalties of our laws, and, except in cases of personal violence towards Europeans, the records of our courts of law show but a very small proportion of Aboriginal offenders.

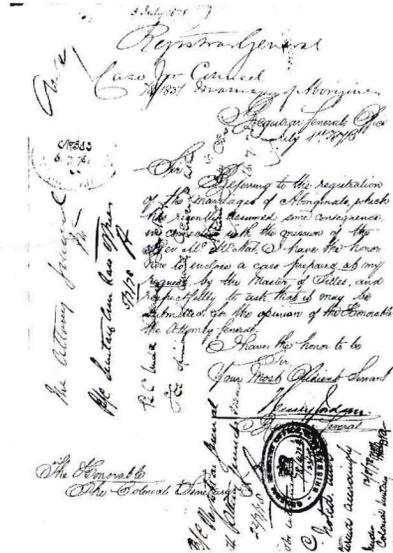
Fr McNab insisted that laws, which theoretically protected Aborigines, be enforced.

In particular he demanded their legal protection from murder by native troopers and white settlers.

He also called for new laws to protect Aboriginal rights. He wanted the regulation of labour contracts and agreements. He suggested a law to protect Aborigines from slavery, that is, being forcibly abducted to perform unremunerated service.

He also sought legal retribution against colonists killing game where it was scarce or otherwise destroying their (the Aborigines') means of living.

The case did not only refer to marriages, but to births and deaths of Aborigines.



The reference COL/A260 2434/1878, QSA, actually consists of 7 pages of a case regarding Aboriginal Marriages in relation to the duty of recording births, deaths and marriages of persons residing in NSW and the State of Queensland. It is actually the considered opinion of the Attorney General of the day, July 1878.

His other object was to complain of lack of Australian Church support for Aboriginal evangelization. He argued that missionaries needed to be sent by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda for they could not be hoped for from the Catholic Bishops of Australia. One of them was said to hold the theory that God wished to save natives through the natural law alone; others said that natives were not of their dioceses. After the Provincial Synod of Melbourne all of them declared publicly that they had neither the men nor the money and they fulfilled their obligations towards the natives when according to their promise to the Holy Father they helped a society of religious men commissioned by him to do the work of conversion.

For such reasons the Supreme Pontiff should not only send missionaries, but also the missionaries should remain directly subject to him.

Fr McNab's words echoed Propaganda's sentiments. He was encouraged to seek priestly assistance from a number of missionary congregations in the United States. Cardinal Simeoni responded with another approach to the General of the Jesuits, Pietro Bechse, with a view to obtaining Jesuit support for a mission to the Australian Aborigines. Three years later, in 1882, this would result in a mission in the Northern Territory. Cardinal Simeoni authorized Fr McNab to request assistance from the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, a central organization, based in France.

29 September 1879

Father Pietro Bechse, the General of the Jesuits, wrote in Italian to Cardinal Simeoni in Rome when he was returning McNab's memorial on the Australian mission (Enc. 169-172, Duncan McNab: Memorial, Rome, 15 September 1870 in Italian).³ Up to this time, Father Bechse had not received replies from the Austrian and the Irish Provincials.

20 October 1879 Father Pietro Bechse, the S J General, wrote to Cardinal Simeoni:

While I was in Rome last September, your very Reverend Eminence told me about a new mission to be tried among the barbarians and the aboriginal savages of Australia. This

idea seems to me to be worthy of the charity and the zeal of the Holy Congregation, and the difficulties and grave dangers they say surround this planned mission certainly should not weaken the keen desire that we have to second the desire of the holy See in this case as well. However, I expected, and now I find it true, a difficulty, that seems to me for now to be insurmountable. That is the absolute lack of subjects at the present. As the province of Austria has colleges and boarding schools and very many small mission stations around Adelaide already, and the province of Ireland has colleges and missions in Melbourne and Sydney, I wrote straight away to the two respective provincials to put forward the matter. Both of them answered me, explaining to me the situation of the extreme need of subjects which they find themselves in, and the sum difficulty that they are experiencing to support those in remote regions who have already undertaken beyond their strength. I know for certain that these difficulties are only too true, and all the other provinces are feeling the same lack of subjects. Nevertheless, I have continual pressing demands: be they to replace the gap left by missionaries who die, or to provide for the new missions, those which have recently opened, and those which are opening. Add to this the military conscription that is passed over (?) in many provinces, plus the necessity to train the missionaries well before they engage in such a zealous ministry. Therefore I beg you to believe, your very Reverend Eminence, that for the moment although there is the will to serve you, there is no means to do it. Yours, Pietro Bechse, Fiesole, 20 October 1879.

24 October 1879

Father McNab wrote a very long 's long letter to the Colonial Secretary. Only the introductory paragraph is included here.

According to the statement of the Chief Commissioner of Police in Brisbane the natives of Queensland in their wild state, where they have not been injured by the Colonials, are of a gentle and friendly disposition.

He also said that in seven of every ten cases of outrages committed by the Blacks, provocation had been given by the Whites. Yet the Queensland Government maintains a standing army of native troopers under European officers for the protection of the colonials, and of their flocks, by the destruction of the Aborigines. ...They live frequently, not from choice, but by necessity, on reptiles and such food as men resort to only when reduced to the last extremity by siege or famine. In our time all condemn the institution of slavery, and many feelingly lament the miseries to which slaves are subjected.

But what are these compared to the suffering and the degradation of the Queensland Aborigines? All slaves are better fed and housed than our blacks!

They are at any rate protected from foreign violence and extermination whereas the natives have too frequently been and still are occasionally subjected to an indiscriminate slaughter of the guilty and the innocent.

Their misery is greatly increased, and I may say completed by the physical and moral corruption and degradation derived from their intercourse with Europeans.

By instruction from home the Queensland Government has legislated for and protected the interests of South Sea Islanders and others, and appointed special inspectors to see that contracts made with them are just and fairly carried out, and that they are humanely treated; and I doubt not that by direction from the Colonial Office it will in like manner provide for the more equitable treatment and the well being of the Aborigines.

For the greater part of four years I have camped and lived with the natives of Queensland, and was one of the Commissioners appointed to look after their interests till I resigned in consequence of my associates having declared their incompetence and my finding the then existing Ministry and the country nibbling at or rather trifling with the question of Aboriginal civilization. (The complete letter is very long narrating many of Fr McNab's experiences.)

8/ **Western Australian Plea for Missionaries**

4 December 1979 The Leading Article: 'Religious Wanted at the North-West Coast', *West Australian Catholic Record*, set the scene for an invitation to Father McNab:

9/ **Reaction at Government Level in London**

11 January 1880 While in Paris, Fr McNab addressed a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Michael Hicks-Beach, noting the injustices of the colonial situation and setting out his scheme to right these wrongs.

13 January 1880 Fr McNab had forwarded his description of the treatment of Queensland's Aborigines, 'Notes on the Condition of the Aborigines of Queensland'. It was drafted in October 1879 and sent by the English Cardinal, H E Manning.

31 January 1880 In the eyes of the Colonial Office, McNab was little more than a well-meaning but ill-informed humanitarian. The combination of a Colonial Office reluctant to meddle in the 'internal affairs of Queensland and a Queensland administration anxious to resist interference was powerful.

2 February 1880 Father McNab wrote to Mary MacKillop from Scotch College in Rome:

My dear Cousin,

Having yesterday received your long and interesting letter, I hasten to reply lest I should not have leisure to do so for some time to come, although I have but very little to say, having already written to Uncle Peter from whom you will, of course, get all my news....

You say you have cold weather in Victoria. Except about a fortnight since I went to Scotland till now I have been in the midst of snow and frost, often of both. As I hope to see you ere long, I will write no more at present. Your affectionate cousin, D McNab.

11 February 1880 Mc Nab called at the Colonial Office for his interview, but it was not granted.

12 February 1880 In London, McNab wrote to the Colonial Secretary of his desire to leave London in the near future and asked again for an interview. He had called at the Colonial Office the previous day to be told that both men whom he wished to see were engaged with each other, and he could have seen Sir Michael then. There is record of a cryptic note of Sir Michael's comment, "I do not think it necessary that Mr McNab call on me."

22 February 1880 It was decided that a letter would be sent from the office of the Secretary of State for the Colonies to acknowledge receipt of the Memorandum received in a letter from Cardinal Manning.

In this Sir Michael Hicks Beach would thank Fr McNab for his suggestions and state that he had transmitted copies of the papers to the Governor of Queensland with the request that he would bring the matter before his ministers.

Fr McNab's theories on the granting of land were also noted: *if the Blacks show a tendency to settle upon the land, the colony might well relax the regulations in order to allow them to do so.* Yet Herbert (ex Colonial Secretary of Queensland), whose opinion, backed up by colonial experience, would doubtless have carried weight, also wrote: *A copy of the minutes of the meeting held to discuss Fr McNab's letters was sent to the Governor. The discussion fell under three headings:*

- (i) *The brutality of the Native Trooper Force;*
- (ii) *The want of a required legal status and rights felt by the Aborigines;*
- (iii) *The action taken by the Queensland government in the matter.*

February 1880, London issued a gentle reminder to the Queensland Government noting the government's responsibilities to the Aborigines, requesting a report on Durundur and forwarding a copy of 'Notes on the Condition ...'.

12 July 1880 Arthur Palmer's reply reiterated the impracticality of McNab's proposals and highlighted the extent to which the Scottish cleric had been alienated from the mainstream by enclosing with his reply one of Hale's letters to the Brisbane Courier. Palmer diluted the part being played by the Native Police and concluded:

Although I regret to say that steps which have been taken on their behalf have given no adequate return for the care bestowed upon them, and consequently there is little encouragement to hope that any lasting benefit will accrue therefrom, the efforts of the government will be nonetheless strenuous.

BACK TO AUSTRALIA, AUGUST 1880

3 August 1880

Father McNab from St John's College Sydney, to Mgr Masotti, Propaganda: (Original written in Italian)

Very Rev Monsignor,

I arrived here the 1st of August... While I was in California I searched in vain for missionaries from the Dominicans in San Francisco and from the Capuchins in Milwaukee. An Irish lay priest of St Giuseppe Church promised to ask his Exeat from the Archbishop and to come to save the Aborigines of Queensland. I hoped to arrive here much earlier, but because

of lack of money I had to work in the mission in California for some time.

This stay seems to me to have been sent by divine providence, because, all the time I was in America I gained health and strength and now, after the long sea voyage, I feel completely recovered and as if I have got younger by 10 years, that's how much my strength in spirit and body has grown. But the thing that seems the most miraculous is that even my memory has been in large part restored. On the sea voyage I was able to learn nearly all the vocabulary I had written down of a native Australian language by heart.

I hope to be able to see Father Henneberry of the P P S in a few days and to plan with him what he is able to do for the natives. Then I will write to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda.

27 August 1880 J Masotti, Secretary, from the Palace of the Holy Office, to Mgr James Quinn, Bishop of Brisbane:

The doubt and the questions submitted by the priest Duncan McNab, missionary for the Australian Aborigines in the diocese of Brisbane, which were the subjects of your dispatches from Your Most Illustrious Lordship, one dated the 29th February of the current year the other 8 May, were taken under examination by the Most Eminent Inquisitors-General in their meeting of Wednesday the 18th instant, and were given by them the following answers.

To the doubt, whether the Australian Aborigines may be permitted to eat reptiles on days of abstinence, the reply is in the affirmative.

With regard to the faculty of dispensing from the summoning of the unbaptised spouse it was decreed as follows:

Let the Rev Lord Bishop of Brisbane be given power to sub delegate missionary and other faculties according to the Brief of Benedict XIV of 16 January 1749, with the instruction thereto annexed. For this end let a copy of the said instruction be enclosed herewith.

Finally, with regard to the particular case of George MacKenzie and Sara Danber, the Most Eminent Inquisitors-General have decreed that the Ordinary should be written to "ad mentem".

The "**ad mentem**" means the following:

If the man to whom the aforesaid Sara was married while unbaptised is still unbaptised, and if he cannot be summonsed even summarily and informally, or (supposing he were to be summonsed) it is foreseen that he would give a negative answer, let the Ordinary dispense from the summonsing.

If, however, it is uncertain whether he can be summonsed or whether the summons would turn out to be useless, let the Ordinary summons him and if there should be some other difficulty let him reopen the case.

But if the man has been baptized, let the case be started all over again, the man stating when he has received baptism.

The Holy Father having deigned to grant a dispensation from the summonsing of the unbaptised spouse according to the mind of the Most Eminent Fathers, the undersigned assessor of the Holy Office gladly brings it to your Lordship's notice, at the same time taking occasion to renew the affirmation of his great respect. A Jacobini.

10 September 1880

The last letter received from London was good enough for the Colonial Office. The letter from Hale in particular made its point.

Herbert reiterated his confidence in the Queensland Government's readiness to deal benevolently with their black charges and to punish cases of abuse. The new Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley, was prepared to defer to Herbert's expertise and let the matter drop there.

14 September 1880

Fr McNab's pleas were falling on deaf ears in the Colonial Office. It was agreed that correspondence with Father McNab should not be prolonged:

"Although a well-meaning man, he is one of those enthusiasts it is impossible to convince."

16 November 1881

Memo, The Secretary of Lands would be glad if Mr McNab were to indicate the places where reserves are required. After Bishop Quinn died, Bishop Cani went south to administer the vacant diocese. He used his temporary charge of the Diocese of Brisbane to have Father McNab change his plans for the Aborigines around Brisbane to those in the Vicariate. Bishop Cani was doubly interested in redirecting McNab to the Vicariate because the latter had prospects of obtaining missionary priests to assist him. So, late in 1881, with hopes, possibly too high, of personnel from the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, based at Marianstein in Ohio, and from the Province of the Congregation of Passionists in New Jersey, Father McNab abandoned his plan for a mission in Western Queensland near the Thomson and Barcoo Rivers, and went to the Cardwell area of the vicariate.

In Father McNab, Bishop Cani had obtained the only priest in eastern Australia who was devoting himself to Aborigines in a full time capacity. Father McNab had already encour-

aged the Jesuits to evangelize in the Northern Territory.

3 December 1881 Fr McNab from Cooktown:

Sir, In reply to your letter of the 16th November 1881, I move to say that I repeat an inability quite to satisfy the desire of the Hon Secretary for Lands, by indicating the exact places where the Aborigine Reserves are required in the Squatter's district, as I am unacquainted with them. Each tribe of Blacks has its local boundaries (about sixty miles in extent on the coast,

I know not how extensive in the interior) and ordinarily may wish to reside within their own limits. Where they are most numerous. The Reserves need to be more frequent and larger and near the water courses.

From considerable inquiry I am satisfied that a Reserve is needed at the junction of the Thompson River and the Victoria or Barcoo. I mean the land between these rivers flowing by the sides of the Johnston Range. For the rest, till I shall have learned more of the squatting districts, I can only repeat my former suggestion that the localities for best Reserves should be fixed by the local Land Commissioners and the Stock Inspector.

I am, Yours truly, D McNab.

8 April 1882 Brisbane Courier:

The Rev Father McNab, whose name is well known in connection with efforts for the benefit of the aborigines of this colony, which unfortunately have hitherto been attended with but little success, is still persevering in the charitable work. On Sunday last he returned to Townsville, after a sojourn of several weeks in the vicinity of Cardwell, whither he had been to inspect an Aboriginal Reserve proclaimed by the Government close to what is known as Kohn's selection, where a settler of that name was murdered by the blacks some years ago.

He found the reserve to consist of nothing but sandy ridges, mangrove swamps, and

scrubs, and the only living things he saw were a few selectors' cattle, the birds, and the mosquitoes. He was therefore obliged to give up all idea of starting a native settlement there, and his object in visiting Townsville was either to meet some assistants, who were promised him from Brisbane, or to engage the services of an aboriginal whom he has known for a long time, and who was baptized by him.

Father McNab will return to Cardwell whence he will probably set out in search of land suitable for a mission station, which he will probably take up as a homestead, so as to be safe from any of those vicissitudes which sometimes overtake ordinary aboriginal reserves. It is stated that the Rev Dr Cani, Bishop of Northern Queensland, is also interesting himself on behalf of the natives, and is endeavouring to get the Passionist Fathers to undertake a mission to them. Other efforts are likely to be made by the Catholic authorities in the south; and, however doubtful we may be as to the possibility of permanently benefiting the aborigines of this colony, we must all cordially wish God speed to anyone who, in spite of hardship and discomfort, will labour to reclaim these wretched savages, who are at present being driven into a position of worse misery and degradation by the very civilization which ought to be their best protection.

While Fr McNab was making preparations to minister in the Vicariate, Bishop Cani told him that he would take over the negotiations with the Americans.

Shortly afterwards, Bishop Cani was appointed to the newly-created Diocese of Rockhampton, so the correspondence with the Americans was inconclusive, and McNab was left in the hands of the next Pro-Vicar, Paul Fortini.

Fr McNab discovered the difficulty of working under Fortini, and soon had cause to complain to Propaganda that Fortini forbade him to finalise a mission site before it was inspected by himself, yet made no effort to visit the area.

8 July 1882 Father McNab had told Propaganda Fide that in Queensland it was easier to interest Cabinet Ministers who were Protestant than it was to obtain support from the Catholic Church in matters of Aboriginal welfare and evangelisation.

8 August 1882 Bishop Salvado wrote to Dr Griver, Bishop of Perth (both in Rome, whereto they had travelled together) when he heard that Dr Griver was about to leave: "*I proposed to him a priest from Sardinia, to take to Australia*" (no name given). Bishop Griver returned to Rome later.

24 September 1882

After he had persuaded the South Australian Jesuits assigned to Aboriginal missions, to select the Northern Territory rather than Queensland, Father McNab turned his attention to Western Australia. Three Jesuit Fathers and one Lay Brother went to Palmerston to establish a mission for the conversion of the natives.

10 October 1882

The Jesuit missionaries settled at a reserve granted by the Government. The site was heavily wooded, fertile and well watered, in area not more than 320 acres. At the request of the Mission Superior a larger grant was made of about a thousand acres extending right to the ocean, something they wanted in view of the fishing.

Despite feeling that he had achieved little, motivated by a compelling sense of duty, Fr McNab would keep trying to improve the conditions of Aborigines for the next 15 years.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The taking up of land displaced Aboriginal Peoples all over Western Australia. After **1840**, for fifty years, pastoralist on land leased from the Crown dominated land utilization. 'Temporary Occupation Leases' and 'Licenses to Depasture' made it possible for settlers to run their livestock in the bush.

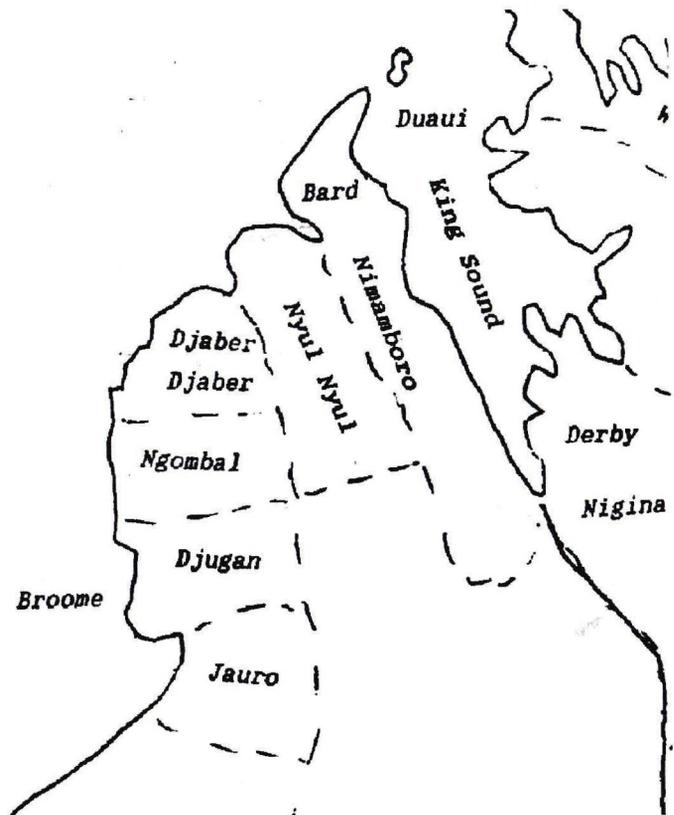
In **1851**, these were replaced by a system of Pastoral Leases, of one year's duration in settled areas and near the coast, and of eight years' duration farther inland.

Pastoralists paid an annual rent of 10 shillings for every 1000 acres leased.

After the introduction of convict transportation in **1850**, the availability of ticket-of-leave and exipree labour for shepherding encouraged the expansion of the pastoral industry, and therefore of the area under leasehold.

The **1860's** saw the first major push into the eastern districts and the North-West. This was followed by consolidation in the Murchison and Ashburton districts in the **1870's**, a major rush for pastoral land in the early **1880s**, and expansion in the Pilbara and Eastern Goldfields, as pastoralists followed the Gold Rushes of the **1890s**.

As they prospered, pastoralists endeavoured to insure the security of their tenure by purchasing from the



A simple tribal map of the Dampier

crowns the choicer parts of their runs.

In **1873** they were assisted by the establishment of a system of 'Special Occupation Licences' that enabled settlers to select (before survey) lots of 100 to 500 acres at 10 shillings per acre, payable over three-year or ten-year terms. Although the 'Special Occupation Licence' was intended to encourage settlement by small farmers, it enabled pastoralists to 'pick the eyes out of the landscape'. In **1877** the Surveyor-General asserted that his surveyors were like nomads, with half their time spent travelling through the desert from one oasis to another – that is, they had to cover long distances through pastoral leasehold land in order to survey the small pockets of land under 'Special Occupation Licence', selected by leaseholders on patches of good soil and alongside permanent water.

Between **1870** and **1888**, over 4000 occupation blocks were sold, with an average area of just under 40 ha. In other words less than 170 000 ha of rural land were sold at this time, and more than 40 million ha were under leasehold. In the early 1880's, on a number of occasions, the Commissioner for Crown Lands was critical of the way in which pastoralists had used the regulations to buy up all the springs and waterholes, as well as small plots in the centre of every good piece of land.

Also, the progress of closer settlement was restricting pastoralism to the hotter drier parts of the State with natural pastures everywhere deteriorating after half a century of grazing. Since the pastoral industry was of fundamental importance to the Western Australian economy, the Government progressively introduced longer leases and easier terms in order to encourage and protect the pastoral leaseholders.

In **1878** A newspaper article outlined Church policy about the Aboriginal situation in Western Australia:

It is a work requiring the services of a religious community...there is no other means possible for the welfare of the natives than the plan which embodies religious teaching with civilizing

employment requiring the agency of a laborious and devoted community, ... a wistful glance is turned in the direction of the fervent community of Benedictine monks at New Norcia, for from Perth, aid is almost hopeless. With his staff of only nine priests for his enormous diocese, Bishop Griver can do nothing, the work of the North-West would demand an apostle and even an apostle would labour to a great extent in vain.

1 January 1879

Bishop Griver asked the Governor to reserve 50,000 acres for the establishment of a Catholic mission.

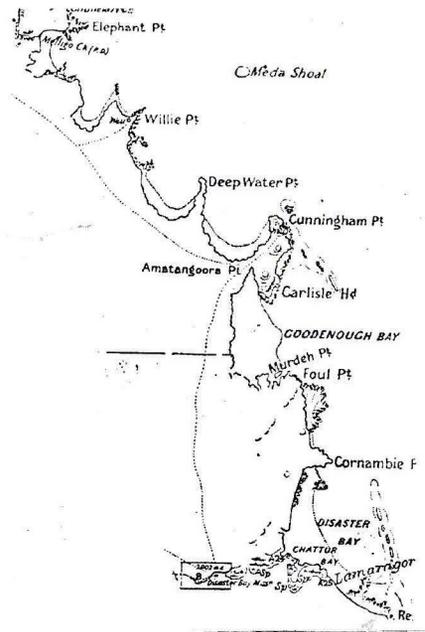
The Kimberley Squatting Era

During **1879**, the first sheep arrived in the west Kimberley. They were brought by ship to Beagle Bay, and from there 625 sheep were taken to establish Yeeda Station and 500 sheep to establish Meda Station.

Hamlet Cornish and his friends formed the First Kimberley Syndicate, the 'Murray Squatting Company'. They applied for some of the land being granted rent-free for 14 years. Hamlet Cornish called his land 'Yeeda Station'.

When they returned to Beagle Bay they hired a shepherd, Brown, an escaped convict, whom the Captain of a trading schooner had hired from the Government. A 'lifer', he had escaped from Lacepede Islands when sent with a guard for water.

The Government planned a new landing place at one of the Yeeda sheep wells, Derby



Coastal Map of the East side of the Dampier Peninsula showing Goodenough Bay

1880 A Port was established in Derby to provide a sea route for export of wool.

1882 Anthony Cornish, brother of Hamlet, was the first European pastoralist to be fatally speared at Mt Anderson Station by Aborigines. When Captain Walcott and a party of police troopers rode out to apprehend his murderer, they held 40 natives in chains until the murderer was captured. As *Justice of the Peace*, Captain Walcott tried the prisoners on the Government cutter '*Gertrude*'. The sheep killers and the men who attacked the shepherd, Chilly, were sentenced to Rottnest Island.

1883 In response to Cornish's death, the first Government Resident of the west Kimberley region was appointed, and four police officers, a postmaster, a clerk of courts, and a custom officer arrived in Derby. Derby and Broome town sites were declared.

Father McNab in Western Australia 1883-1887

17 February 1883 In his 63rd year, Father McNab accepted Bishop Griver's invitation to the west.

Fr McNab wired Father Gibney that he had left Queensland and was sailing for Perth from Adelaide: *I have left Queensland. I sail for Perth tomorrow.* D McNab.

Chaplain at the Aboriginal prison on Rottnest Island

31 March 1883 Malcolm Fraser, the Colonial Secretary wrote to Father Gibney:

My dear Sir,

The Administration has no objection to Father McNab coming to Rottnest if he can make arrangements. The only document necessary will be one of the attached forms filled up which I shall be prepared to do for Father McNab. Excuse haste, Yours very truly, Malcolm Fraser.

I would have liked to have been able to offer more than this.

In the sad sequel to the youthful enterprise of taking up land, the prisoner Guirella was hanged.

Brown, the escaped lifer convict was left in charge at *Yeeda Station*. At Beagle Bay, a wide drift of sheep carcasses and bones spread from the shore, refuse from the last settler's landing.

Among other squatters at this time, the Daly brothers from Dunolly in Victoria took up land to become Kimberley pastoralists.

Cornelius Daly would eventually give his cattle to the group of missionaries who came in 1890 and become one of them. He was known as Br Xavier.

Rottnest Prison

Fr McNab's position as Chaplain at the agricultural penal reserve gave him the opportunity to learn something of Western Australian tribes. He wrote long reports pointing out the futility of punishing people for reasons that in most cases they did not understand.

He found that the inmates responded well to the simple instruction in the white man's law, but urged that they should at this stage be tried in the light of their tribal law and that Christianity should be taught with emphasis on the best aspects of their own beliefs.

They should be encouraged, he believed through training in agriculture, various trades and the management of their own affairs to settle in stable occupations or on land of their own; but he stressed from his experience on Queensland reserves that little could be done with those who had abandoned their tribal code for the worst practises of white society.

In fact his proposals echoed the intentions of Governor Hutt over 40 years before, for Hutt had established the dreaded island settlement as a humane alternative to close confinement and chaining of prisoners.

**Abstract Return of Aboriginal Prisoners at Rottneest Prison
From 1st January 1878, to 30th September 1883: -**

Year	In Gaol 1st January	Received during the year	Total	No. of deaths	Discharged during each year
1878	88	58	146	9	59
1879	78	28	106	3	52
1880	51	30	81	-	47
1881	34	60	94	1	31
1882	62	157	219	10	55
*1883	149	120	269	+59	47
			82		291

3 November 1883

Father McNab wrote Care of H W Pead, Cossack, to Father M Gibney:
Rev dear Father,

I remained four weeks on the Gascoyne. Soon after my arrival I started up the river with the intention of going to Mount Dalgetty. I went up the river about forty miles. One of my horses became lame and I got sick myself but was soon recovered. By what I learned by enquiry from strangers from the Murchison and from Victoria, from strangers who passed near Dalgetty and from station managers who had extra exploring country for their own occupation or selection and from Mr Carey through Mr Forrest, I came to the conclusion it was unnecessary to proceed farther. The Reserve at Dalgetty is stony, well grassed land without wa-

ter and without Blacks except when on occasion some may pass by it. It is absolutely unfit for cultivation.

On the Native Reserve to the West of Kennedy Range there is a splendid fountain and about two acres of excellent land. Beyond that it is all stony ground. Taking these things into consideration together with Bishop Parry's claim to these reserves I thought it useless to proceed farther. I believe that most of the Gascoyne natives to the West of the Kennedy Range are at Rottnest. I did not see more than about a dozen native adults as far as I went; almost to a man they were in the employment of settlers. I was told there are more in the ranges who are described as outlaws or desperate characters that take refuge there to escape the police. I had to deal with some such in Queensland and found little or nothing could be done with them. Mr Foss, the magistrate at Carnarvon told me he did not think the natives on the Gascoyne exceed two hundred. They all speak the Ingaraman language but are divided into different departments. The dominant or strongest clan is at Nebo, (Mr Marmion's Station). I think the most suitable place for a mission station on the Gascoyne is at Rocky Pool at Nebo because it is halfway between the coast and the Kennedy Range; the land is fit for pasturage and cultivation: there is a constant supply of water and fish and stone for building which I did not see anywhere else.

Having learned that there are six hundred young natives employed in the pearl fisheries in the North-West I came to Cossack on the first of this month, expecting to find in its vicinity a more suitable place for a mission station. It seems that the information I got relative to the number engaged in the pearl fishing is correct. The natives however do not all belong to this district but are taken up at different places from Champion Bay to the Kimberley. This however is a central position and its natives seem to be the principal source of labour supply to the fisheries, as they generally adopt their language. There are also natives attached to all the squatting stations. Many of them know more of English than those on the Gascoyne or in

other parts to the northward. They are not however to be found in great numbers anywhere. The most I can hear of at one place is over 100 employed by Mr McKenzie Grant on the De Grey.

I learned from the Hon Mr Fraser that it is the intention of the Government to make only large reserves of unoccupied Crown Lands to be given to missionaries for the benefit of the natives. Should the Government follow the suggestion made to it, a great benefit would be conferred both on the natives and the missionaries.

The course they follow can be of little or no benefit to either for the Blacks frequent only those portions of the colony where there is water and the land along all the watercourses is already taken up by the colonists, many of whom are mere speculators and have no stock on it and as the rent is only 5/- for 1000 acres in this Northern District and there is no stocking clause in their lease, they can easily hold it for a lengthened period. Then the reserves for natives on Crown lands are necessarily in dry localities in stony ground unfit for cultivation and at a great distance from the seaports and consequently subject to great expense for the carriage of supplies and produce. I understand that most of the squatters who have stations far inland have also some place near the coast whither they bring their sheep for shearing.

In Queensland, reserves are made for natives on occupied squatting runs, six months' notice being given to the squatter and a proportionate reduction of rent.

I consider the reserves as made here of no benefit to the missionaries or natives. The one on the Murchison was made several years ago at the request of Bishop Parry yet he has never used it and I doubt not that it will be so also with those at Dalgetty and the Kennedy Range.

The whole thing seems intended only for a name. In fact it would be much better for the missionaries to take up a run on the ordinary terms as they then might get one in a situa-

ble locality and be enabled to borrow money on it, with which to help to stock it: which they could not do on a reserve. At all events the Government should make some native reserves on the watercourses on some of the stations forfeited for the non-payment of rent, where there is good soil and natives to be civilized and not too far from a seaport. The land carriage of supplies is very expensive, thus a ton of flour is said to cost £30 at the De Grey.

From the West Australian Newspaper I learn that there has been an auction of forfeited runs in the Northern District on the 31st of last month. Possibly they may not all have been disposed of and if so I should like that you would secure for me before the return of the steamer one of 20,000 or 50,000 acres on some of the watercourses between the Ashburton and the De Grey, if possible within 80 or 90 miles of Roebourne which might serve as a head station for the mission and I would remit the rent, when the sum should be intimated to me. There will be no steamer for months thereafter. I also want a Directory for the Office of next year.

I intend to say Mass here next Sunday and I expect to say it at Roebourne the following Sunday. There are several Catholics here who have been married by the Protestant minister and to do any good to them I will need the faculty to absolve them from that reserved case and instructions how to deal with them. When may I look for Father Martelli?

I am told there is a native reserve some ninety miles from Roebourne but I do not see it marked on the map of the district. I will make further enquiry and try, if I can find it, to see it. I remain, Your humble servant, D McNab

Father McNab's reports were placed before the Aboriginal Commission of 1883 and as a result two men were sent to instruct the prisoners at Rottneest in carpentry. The effort was half-hearted and shortlived, its failure adding further weight to the commissioner's summing

up that 'experience of 50 years finds us at a point as if we had not begun...it would appear that positive suggestions contained in the **Forrest Report** concerning the rights of Aborigines as human beings were initiated by McNab.

The first comprehensive attempt at educative content in a **Commission of Inquiry** was in **1883** to inquire into the treatment of Aboriginal prisoners and also into certain other matters concerning Aborigines. John Forrest as chairman and six other commissioners were all men in high government positions.

Specific issues, such as conditions at Rottnest Island prison, and possible improvements or extensions to the existing system, as well as the cost of implementing these, were to be dealt with. The final Report deals with Rottnest in relative detail, probably because of Fr McNab's ideas, but it skims over other important points.

The Report contained negative statements such as:

We have no hope that the Aboriginal native will ever be more than a servant of the white man ... our aim should be devoted to such instruction as will enable him to live usefully and happily among the white population.

Sir John Forrest himself was not enthusiastic. In his explorations he found the natives of very little use to him; one of the reasons given by him being that in order to retain their services he would have had to use force, but he stated that in his opinion if it should be desirable or necessary to use wild natives to find water, it would be absolutely essential that they should be chained up or in some way detained.

But, while all these events were taking place in **1883**, at Sandy Point, near Beagle Bay, an Aborigine named Remi Balagai was born.

He was one of 12 males baptized by Father Alphonse Tachon at Beagle Bay Mission August 1896. Before he died, he told Father Francis Huegel SAC, the story of Felix, the song maker, who had met the early missionaries, and he could remember details about the early

days of the Beagle Bay Mission which was founded in **1990**.

The west Kimberley was occupied by men from the southwest of Western Australia who brought sheep up by sea and then moved along the fertile valleys. They were woolgrowers who practiced paddocking.

The east Kimberley was settled by overlanders from Queensland and New South Wales who brought over 10,000 head of cattle and who held to the 'open range' tradition of grazing.

1884-85

Three great overland treks brought the first cattle to the east Kimberley.

The Buchanans established Ord River Station.

The Duracks established Lissadell, Rosewood and Argyle Downs Stations.

The MacDonalds established Fossil Downs.

These treks took over 2 years to complete.

Gold was discovered in Halls Creek area, bringing thousands of gold seekers to the area. It provided a ready-made market for east Kimberley beef. Tracks were established between the goldfields and the Ports of Derby and Wyndham.

1886 Numerous attacks on stock at Lennard River and Lillimooloora Stations by Aborigines were reported. It was initially thought that Aborigines would be valuable as a cheap source of labour to the pastoral industry. However, relations between Aborigines and pastoralists at this time were often not friendly. There was killing on both sides. As more land was taken up in pastoral leases more Aborigines were dispossessed of their traditional lands. They resisted.

Cattle and sheep killing were common and a number of white settlers were killed. Reprisals against Aborigines for both acts were extensive and it is impossible to estimate how many Aborigines were killed in the early days of settlement. The police force in Derby organised patrols to capture stock spearers. The general method they employed to capture Aborigi-

nes was to locate their camp and raid it at dawn. Those suspected of killing stock, or useful witnesses, were chained around the neck and walked to Derby. After sentencing, prisoners remained in Derby and were used as a labour force. When in prison the Aborigines remained in chains the whole time – they worked, slept and ate in chains. Sometimes they were flogged. However, many escaped and this prison system did not stop Aborigines killing cattle and sheep.

1884 Father McNab to the North-West

11 February 1884

Bishop Griver wrote a letter to Father McNab, sending him to the Kimberley in the North-West

As I wish that a mission to the Aborigines may be founded at the North-West part of this Diocese, where they are said to be more numerous than in any other position thereof and as you came to this Diocese for said good purpose; I direct you to go by the steamship 'Ferret', which is advertised to leave Fremantle on the 19th of this month and to land at 'Cossack' to reside for the present in that town, or at Roebourne, to administer to the Catholics of that district and to inquire about the best place to found the mission to the Aborigines between the Beagle Bay and King Sound, or about the River Fitzroy, or in any other place where the Aborigines be more numerous and as far as practicable, remote from white settlers.

I expect from your zeal for the Christianising of the Aborigines that you will take great interest in this good work and report to me on the place, which, after diligent inquiry, you will deem most suitable for the object we have in view. As soon as I will be able to dispose of another priest, I will send him to labour in the same

district or mission. For the present I will give seven pounds (£7) every month towards your support or maintenance and whatever support you will receive from the white settlers.

I will give you a letter, in which I will state that I, their Bishop, sent you to afford them the consolations of our holy religion and exhort them to contribute to your support, as they are in duty bound. I am willing to give you all the support that will be in my power towards the intended mission to the Aborigines. May God bless and protect you. +Martin Griver Bishop of Perth

21 February 1884 Father McNab left Cossack for Derby, sailing on the steamship 'Ferret'. It was reported in the newspapers that his purpose was to establish a mission for the conversion of the natives, at a point about one hundred miles distant from Derby. He took with him six months provisions, tools, clothing, bedding, etc., the whole cost having been defrayed out of private funds.

26 February 1884

The West Australian stated: Whatever opinion may be entertained as to the usefulness of their aims; it is impossible to withhold respect and admiration from men who, risking life and health, sacrificing comfort and everything which makes life enjoyable, or even endurable, go forth for the purpose of serving their fellowmen, without hope of reward, save the consciousness that, according to their lights, they have done their duty in a labour of love, trying to rescue those whom they consider the fallen and the lost.

That much good, however, will result from the Rev Father's efforts seems scarcely probable. Judging by the papers upon native affairs prepared by him for the Government and laid last year before the Legislature, his ideas, we should say, were visionary – not character-

ized by the sound sense and business capacity with which Roman Catholic clerics appear, as a rule, to be gifted above other clerics.

Father McNab found to his disappointment that most of the sheltered bays and inlets were occupied, and although no legal right had yet been established, he knew that he could get nowhere in competition with these tough pearlers and their native and motley crews. Still, the fact that most of the tribes-people seemed anxious to resist corruption of the lay-up camps gave him hope, and further indicated the need for a place of refuge.

By this time the police not particularly optimistic of his objectives had gained enough confidence in the priest to agree that something should be tried and that instruction of the natives in the white man's law might ease the heavy burdens of the Kimberley force. They had too many native prisoners to hold and organize. Long, embarrassing inquiries followed punitive expeditions.

April 1884 Father McNab settled alone at Goodenough Bay of King Sound. He felt that no one understood or wanted his mission.

30 March 1886 A draft of a letter in Father Gibney's handwriting records:

As the Rev W Treacy who held the appointment as chaplain at the prison has been told off to assist the Rev D McNab at the Kimberley for an indefinite term, I will with your approval nominate the Rev J Dooley to fill his place. Owing to the Bishop's illness I deferred till now the appointment, not knowing exactly what to do.

April 1886

Father William Treacy joined Father McNab at Goodenough Bay. He brought a small boat, a quantity of stores, a spring cart and some building and farm equipment. The two priests, with erratic help from a young native called Knife, and a few others, quickly erected a small church and a house of timber with Spinifex thatch. They fenced a garden plot, ploughed it and sowed some seed. As it was now possible to offer some inducement, the natives began to camp around the mission and would sometimes gather at the doorway of the little church during mass and Benediction. The two priests started building and offering a ritual life. More

Aborigines started to gather. They would sometimes gather at the doorway of the little church. The religious aspect made no more sense to them than the missionaries' practical activities.

They showed some enthusiasm for learning hymns and listened to the Christian message with every appearance of respect and interest, though they were loath to admit that the whites' teaching had anything to offer them. No doubt they had in mind the legend of the teacher Galagang who had preached a good and simple life that proved too difficult for mere men and so had been destroyed. Now he was a dark shade in the Milky Way, he would never return to earth and his story was remembered only as proof of man's affiliation with cult heroes of magic and sorcery.

5 July 1886 Bishop Griver sent a letter to Cardinal Simeoni in Rome asking for the appointment of a Coadjutor Bishop and expressing the need for members of some religious order for the mission

August 1886 When Father McNab left on a business trip to Derby 4 months later, he was diverted by news from Halls Creek, 300 miles east, where prospectors were said to be dying in hundreds by the roadside or in their lonely camps. Father McNab was moved by a heartrending story of men calling in vain for a priest, or asking for letters to be written to their relatives. He felt it his immediate duty to ride to the diggings and give what help he could.

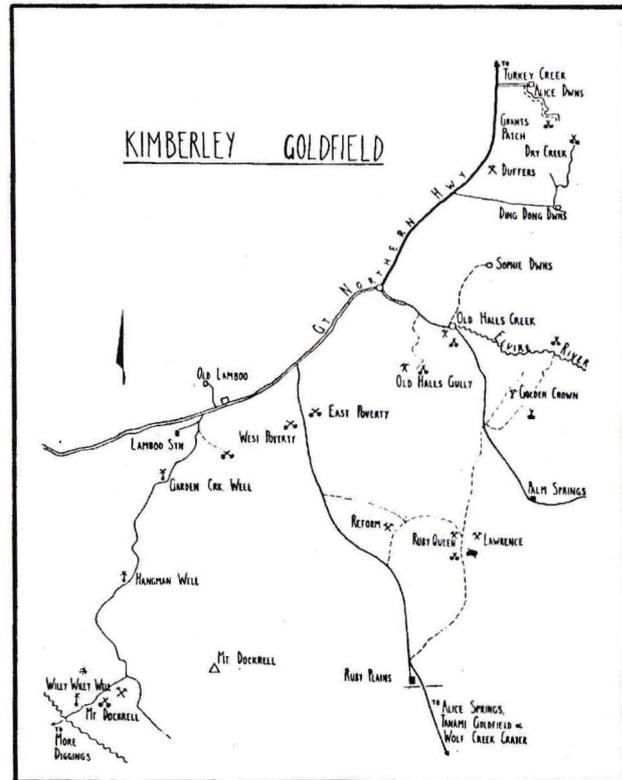
When he returned to Derby he was told that Father Treacy, in delirium of fever, had been brought in by lugger and sent back to Perth. The mission buildings were burned to the ground, the equipment destroyed, the garden returning to scrub.

Some declared that when Father Treacy left, the local Nimambor Tribe ransacked the store and set it alight. Others said it was a bushfire and others insisted that 'lugger blacks' had done the damage at the instigation of their boss.

According to the older natives of the peninsula:

The boy Knife heard Father McNab calling out and found him lying weak and ill among the ruins. Fearing he was about to die the natives returned to help and comfort him, offering to build up the mission again. They found food for him, but as soon as he was strong again he mustered up his horses and rode away. They watched him disappear into the scrub 'poor old Father Maca-Nab' in his worn Khaki suit, battered straw hat, and broken glasses, a pitiable failure of a man in retreat from his dream. Young Knife followed him to the first camp. By daylight next morning he had a fire lit and the horses ready and from there on he rode bareback until a saddle was got for him from a nearby station.

In **1887** Father McNab visited the Jesuit mission station at Rapid Creek. Despite the legends he will surely have travelled to Melbourne from Derby by sea. He certainly sailed to Port Darwin from West-



Map of Halls Creek Goldfields
* Courtesy Hesperian Press

ern Australia. The Jesuits themselves always travelled to and from Palmerston by sea, except when visiting the Daly River mission, and even then they sometimes did so. In those days to travel the overland route from South Australia still required a carefully prepared expedition.

Father Strele SJ was of the opinion that McNab was content that missionaries were coming at last and he could withdraw. The annual letter to the Father General SJ from the Northern Territory mission was probably written by Father Strele, superior of that mission in 1887:

This year our station at Rapid Creek had a visit from the Rev Father McNab, who worked for many years among the natives in the colony of Queensland, by whom he is gratefully remembered, and also for a time in the colony of West Australia. Because of his advanced age and the difficulty of learning new languages, but most of all because he saw that at last the work for the Aborigines' salvation was being seriously undertaken, he gave up labouring as a missionary to become a fellow-worker with us (Jesuits) in a Melbourne parish. He had landed at Port Darwin from a ship from West Australia, and while waiting for another ship to take him south he stayed with us for some days at the station. He was very glad to see what we have been able to do so far, and praised us for it; alas, it is not much! Whatever he had (the price of horses he had sold in Western Australia) he gave to our mission, and with it not a few church furnishings.

Parish Work in Richmond Victoria 10 September 1887 – 5 January 1896

Father McNab lived in a Jesuit house at Richmond and worked quietly in the parish. It was almost thirty years since, at the age of 47, he had set sail from Liverpool, England, on board the 'S S Chariot of Fame' of 1,730 tons, with Bishop Polding. In the Richmond Baptismal Registrar, there are entries for persons baptised by him from 16 September **1887** until 5

January **1896**.

he severe sunstroke he had in Northern Queensland ultimately caused his death. He never properly recovered from its effect and afterwards had recurrent fainting fits. **12 July 1888**

Bishop Gibney wrote to the Colonial Secretary and a personal reply to this letter came immediately from the Governor:

Dear Bishop, Having considered your application for land for a mission for the Natives I wish to let you know (you will receive the letter in due time) that I can offer you a lease under the pastoral clause of 100,000 acres of the King's Sound Native reserve, with a fee simple grant in trust for the use of a Native mission of 10,000 acres of the reserve as soon as the mission shall have expended £5000 on improvements.

The reserve is not pastoral land of the first quality, but I have never heard that sheep or cattle could not live on it. F Napier Broome.

A private copy of the above has the addition of this extra paragraph: *If what I offer is somewhat less than you ask, you must not think I was not doing my best to assist you. We live in times when concessions to religious bodies are watched with jealousy. F Napier Broome.*

Events In Rome

At Propaganda Fide in Rome, Cardinal Moran presented Bishop Gibney's request to have Benedictine monks sent to the Kimberley and on Pope Leo XIII's name day, in the presence of the Abbot of Sept Fons, Lyons and other dignitaries, the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda placed the request.

At the time, the Abbot declined the invitation, but approximately two years later, when Abbot Ambrose Janny was in Rome to arrange for the closure of the Trappist Mission in New Caledonia, he was asked to take charge of the mission.

30 May 1890

From Derby, Abbot Ambrose wrote to France that they had disembarked, expressing his anxiety because there was no means of transport and their luggage had to be left at the jetty. Father Alphonse was to stay in Derby, as he could not ride a horse. The Bishop, Abbot Ambrose Janny, a policeman and a Native guide were to leave with three weeks provisions and seven horses. At the order of the Magistrate the police had made supplies available.

Father Alphonse wrote home to his parents that it was in Derby, the principal town of the Kimberley that they had met their first novice, a young Irishman from a good family living near Melbourne. He was a policeman, a gentle and humble worker who knew a little of the Native tongue besides English, and he had given the mission some bullocks.

1891

Consciousness of social issues arising out of the industrial revolution inspired Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on social questions, '*Rerum Novarum*'. It attempted to persuade Catholics to concentrate more on social issues. Pope Leo claimed that:

The Church intervened directly in the interest of the poor, by setting on foot and keeping up many things that it sees to be efficacious in the relief of poverty. It had established congregations of religious and other institutions for help and mercy, so that there might be hardly any kind of suffering which was not visited and relieved.

This ideology was the thrust of Pope Leo XIII's patronage of the missions when he had personally requested Cistercians from Sept Fons Monastery in Lyons, France, to staff a mission on the Dampier Peninsula where Father McNab had laboured alone.

Father Alphonse Tachon OC, the French Cistercian at Beagle Bay, wrote to Father McNab asking for advice about the Aborigines he was preparing for Baptism in the Kimberley at Beagle Bay Mission.

20 July 1895

Father McNab sent a copy of the letter to his cousin Donald MacKillop, a Jesuit at Rapid River Palmerston.

He asked that Father Alphonse Tachon be sent early and complete answers, under the headings suggested, for the salvation of souls and the greater glory of God.

My dear cousin,

I send you a copy of a letter addressed to me by the Rev M Alphonse Tachon, one of the Trappist missionaries in Western Australia.

I have answered it as far as I could, and told him that I requested you to tell him how to act with the children and parents (questions 4 and 5) and what he wants to know of the Jesuit mission at the Daly River, as I could not do so properly, not having sufficient knowledge nor experience in these matters.

*I hope you will send him an early and complete answer on these heads, for the salvation of souls and the greater glory of God,
Your affectionate cousin, D McNab.*



Father Donald McKillop SJ Father McNab wrote to the Rapid River Mission in the Northern Territory to him, after Father Alphonse Tachon wrote asking advice about baptising Aborigines at Beagle Bay Mission.

18
Death of Father McNab

19 September 1896 Father McNab died 11 September 1896 and at his funeral, Doctor Thomas J Carr, the Archbishop of Melbourne, said:

"In the death of Father McNab we have lost a zealous and holy priest, whose whole life had been given up to God. God alone knew of the untold good effected by his labours as the seed of the Gospel spread by the deceased priest would go on fructifying amongst the Aborigines."

In 1867 Father McNab commenced his duties in Portland. Shortly afterwards he was appointed to Bendigo. He had charge of the Woodstock church, which is served from St Kilian's pro-Cathedral and many of the residents of that farming district will regret to hear of his demise.

The reverend gentleman was a Gaelic scholar who delivered a lecture in Edinburgh on the birthplace of St Patrick. The lecture was afterwards published in pamphlet form and had a fair circulation, a considerable number of copies being disposed of in Sandhurst. Finding his health giving way, Father McNab abandoned the idea of spending his days amongst the Aboriginal tribes, and paid a visit to Bendigo for the purpose of raising funds for others to carry on the missionary work in Northern Queensland. He delivered several sermons in St Kilian's pro-Cathedral in furtherance of the object, and spoke in praiseworthy terms of the high moral standard, which obtained amongst the Aborigines. The last years of the reverend gentleman's life have been spent with the Jesuit Fathers in Richmond. The remains were placed in the church, and were visited by the congregation and the school children to whom he had endeared himself by his genial nature."

The carriage of the Archbishop and of Mgr O Hea preceded the hearse to the General Cemetery, where the burial service was read in the presence of about thirty priests.

In his campaign for social justice for Aborigines, Fr McNab canvassed issues, some of which are still contentious, divisive and unrealised aspirations in Australian society. In his time there was no colonial consensus for Aboriginal policy.

Five years after Fr McNab's death, Australia was in a state of political change. But this time there was an agreement about the Aboriginal Peoples. In January **1901** **The Constitution of the Commonwealth** was adopted. Though the *Constitution of the United States of America* and the *Constitution of the Dominion of Canada* had been consulted for guidance, they had not affected legislation with regard to the care of the indigenous population of Australia. In the United States and Canada, this was an issue, which would come under Federal legislation. **In Australia, Section 51 precluded the Federal parliament from legislating on behalf of the Aboriginal race, and Section 127 excluded Aborigines from being counted in the population figures of the Commonwealth or of a State.**

This legislation directly affected the newly baptised Aboriginal Catholics of the Kimberley, and the growth of the Catholic Church there. The majority of its adherents were Filipinos or Aborigines. The former were considered aliens, and the latter were not counted as citizens. In **1984**, 100 years after Fr McNab's arrival in the Kimberley, Beverly Treacy, a tribal woman from the East Kimberley, was working as a pastoral assistant in Derby. She put a gospel parable into language more compatible with the Kriol being used in the East Kimberley:

*"God's place is like a seed growing from the ground.
When a man throws it on the ground, it grows,
night and day while he is sleeping,
when he wakes up, the seed is coming up and growing,
he doesn't know how this happens,
the land brings the plant up,
the plant comes up."*

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