

‘Doing their bit helping make Australia free’

Mothers of Aboriginal diggers and the assertion of Indigenous rights

Patricia Grimshaw and Hannah Loney

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Abstract

The article examines letters written by mothers of Victorian Aboriginal diggers protesting efforts by the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) to restrict their access to their sons’ military allotments. The women objected to the BPA’s interventions to persuade the Federal Department of Defence, which paid the funds, to cease payments on the grounds that the Aboriginal mothers were recipients of Victorian state funding as residents of reserves. The interchanges of the women with BPA officials afford further evidence of their continuing forceful defence of their rights despite the power imbalances in their relations with the state.

In 1918 Ada Austin, a Victorian Aboriginal woman living on the Framlingham Reserve in western Victoria, contacted members of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) in Victoria with an urgent request concerning her niece, 14 year-old Winnie Austin.[1] Ada requested in no uncertain terms that it was more than time that the BPA returned Winnie to her family at Framlingham from her isolated situation at the Lake Condah Mission in south-western Victoria. It was two years since Winnie had gone to Lake Condah on a visit, and thereafter had been prevented by orders of the BPA from returning home. It seemed, Ada wrote, that ‘because we are black people they can do what they like with us; they ought to treat us all alike as we got relations fighting at the front and they shouldn’t treat our children like this’.[2] The BPA’s exercise of power over this Aboriginal child had persisted despite the fact that, as Ada pointed out, Winnie had two friends who had been killed in World War I ‘doing th[eir] bit helping make Australia free’.[3]

Ada Austin understood the sacrifices that the Aboriginal community of Victoria had made by sending so many young men to war – a loyal gesture to the Australian nation – and expected their loyalty to be reciprocated by the recognition of citizenship rights at home. Her protest was a further step in a tradition of Aboriginal people expressing their right to proper recognition. The focus of this paper is the negotiations of diggers' mothers when the BPA curtailed their access to their sons' Commonwealth-funded military allotments or denied the recipients usual state assistance.[4] We draw on these mothers' letters held at Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) and the National Archives of Victoria (NAA). They are also included in the collection, *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867–1926* that was edited in 2002 by Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and the co-writer of this paper, Patricia Grimshaw. The collection's editors, after consultation with families and community elders, included almost all the letters Aboriginal women wrote across the 50-year period that were preserved in these archives. References to the published letters are included alongside the archival references in the endnotes. The co-editor, Sandra Smith, a prominent Aboriginal oral historian who worked at the time in the Bunjilaka Centre at Museum Victoria, drew on her personally-held archive to write biographical notes on the 80 women whose letters we included.[5]

Aboriginal women, like Aboriginal men, lived in a state where the government through the BPA had exercised far-reaching control over their personal and communities' lives from the creation of the missions and reserves in the 1860s, and their letters need to be read in the light of this oppressive context. Legal scholars such as Mark McMillan and Cosima McRae, and historians such as Richard Broome, John Chesterman, Brian Galligan and Samuel Furphy, are among those who have described their deprivation and provided details of the relevant Victorian legislation, and shown how these pressures were intensified with the passage in 1886 of the so-called 'Half Caste Act'.[6] This Act forced already impoverished adult residents of mixed descent under thirty-five years of age to leave the missions, and removed any material support that they received beyond it.[7] These historians have also traced the difficulties people of mixed descent faced in their attempts to survive away from the missions and reserves, separated from family support and facing hostility from many settlers.[8] Patricia Grimshaw, co-author of this article, has contributed to this debate through an examination of the ways Aboriginal women, on and off missions, persistently reminded Victorian officials of the state's rightful course of action, showing how the women's mission education and Christian beliefs served to reinforce their identification of systemic injustice and emboldened them to combat it.[9]

There was a sharp divide between official settler and Aboriginal women's understandings of their relative rights and obligations, as the exchange that follows illustrates. Officials who dealt with the allocation of resources to people on missions and reserves regarded them as akin to recipients of charity, expected to understand that reliance on state assistance imposed limitations on their freedom. Reverend Friedrich Hagenauer, the Moravian missionary who was now Secretary of the BPA, spelt out officialdom's views when in May 1891 he wrote to Framlingham resident Bessie Rawlings.[10] She had just summoned home her teenage daughter from domestic service in Melbourne to help in a domestic crisis caused by illness. Swiftly, Reverend Hagenauer put pen to paper to spell out patiently the reality of her situation under Victorian legislation:

You seem to ignore the fact that your daughter is and must be under the Regulations of the Law and that if you try to get the girl away, she will have to go before the Court. The fact is, it cannot be done at all, as long as you enjoy the receipt of Government support. White people can have their children, except they belong to the Department of the Industrial Schools. Half Castes, by earning their money and living without Government aid are considered white people and no one does interfere then, but if you wish to have Government support, you cannot do so. The moment you do so, rations and all other support as well as living on a reserve must stop and I shall have to inform Mr Weir to this effect. My advice to you [is] to consider what you do ... The Board cannot break the law of the country.[11]

Authoritative though Hagenauer assumed this explanation to be, Bessie Rawlings continued to press the BPA to allow her older children onto the reserve and provide supplies to support them there. Neither she, nor other Aboriginal women of Victoria, accepted meekly this version of what the state owed their families.[12] The women believed the new settler state was bound to treat them and their communities equally as Victorian citizens and fellow Christians, together with the particular obligations owed to them as displaced Indigenous people.

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Bessie Rawlings' resistance was characteristic of other Aboriginal women's persistent assertion of their rights despite being rejected by the governing authorities right up to the crisis of World War I. Aboriginal women suffered fear and anxiety as their young men put their lives at risk, and terrible grief when deaths inevitably occurred, and in addition faced another challenge. Upon enlisting unmarried soldiers commonly nominated their mothers as next of kin, knowing that the Department of Defence of the Australian Government would pay them their military allotments, as they did non-Indigenous mothers.[13] Due to restrictions under state laws, even amidst this time of terrible pressure, the BPA sometimes interfered with or withheld from the mothers the service entitlements for sons that were their due. We examine the reactions to this injustice of four women: Eliza Saunders and Agnes Carter of Lake Condah Mission, Jemima Dunolly of the Coranderrk Reserve, and finally, Bessie Rawlings who became engaged in yet another spirited engagement with the BPA.

The concern of BPA members that women residents of missions and reserves were receiving sons' military allotments first arose explicitly when the BPA considered Eliza Saunders' use of the allotment to which she herself in all innocence drew attention. Eliza (Elizabeth) Saunders of Lake Condah Mission had been born in Mount Gambier, South Australia, in the 1850s but moved to Lake Condah Mission when she married a Victorian Aboriginal man, Henry Saunders, in the 1870s. By 1917 she was a widow with two surviving adult children.[14] Both children are of interest. Her son, Walter Christopher George Saunders, known as Chris, described in enlistment records as a groom, was serving in France with the 10th Machine Gun Company.[15] Eliza was listed as his next of kin.[16] Eliza also had two grandsons at the front: the sons of her daughter, Lizzie, who was married to Joseph Crough. The older son, Joseph, was a twenty-two-year-old horse breaker, who enlisted on 8 September 1915.[17] His younger brother Kenneth, a nineteen-year-old horse breaker, enlisted before him on 23 March 1915 and saw action at Gallipoli before being deployed to France.[18] Both brothers listed their father, Joseph, as next of kin on their attestation papers. Joseph senior and Lizzie had raised a large family of ten children on the BPA reserve at Elliminyt, near Colac in western Victoria. They received no systematic support and had made a poor living, with Joe taking work as a horse breaker as he could, even though he suffered greatly from tuberculosis in his later years.



Private Walter Christopher (Chris) Saunders, son of Eliza Saunders, circa 1916. AWM P00889.012.

We first encounter Eliza Saunders when we hear of her presence assisting the family through Lizzie Crough's numerous letters to the BPA. Lizzie made clear their urgent need of assistance as they endured terrible struggles through cold winters, illnesses, confinements, and near destitution. In a letter to the Chief Secretary on 18 May 1904, Lizzie explained: 'my children's clothes is threadbare [sic] and they have to go to school half freezed[;] when the board placed us here at first they gave us nothing that would help us[;] we had to struggle and it has made it so hard for us[;] now we want cows or wires for fencing that we can either milk or grow something but everything my husband earns he has to buy food'.[19] Lizzie mentioned frequently in her letters that Eliza was staying and helping her daughter as best she could.[20]

Eliza Saunders first communicated with the BPA about her son Chris's military allotment in August 1917 writing from Lake Condah Mission, describing to their obvious consternation, her careful saving of the money in a savings account. She now wanted to use the money to buy a house in the vicinity of Lake Condah: '[m]y only son has been serving his countrys [sic] good since May 1915', she wrote to the BPA, 'and I have received £1-8-0 weekly and have saved it for my long looked for wish [for] a home of our own if he is spared'. Eliza was negotiating for a nice two-roomed cottage with a three-quarter acre of land, for which the asking price was £50; added benefits were a paling fence, a 'new large tank and lovely stove'. The land was lovely, too, for growing vegetables and she also planned to keep fowls. She felt some sadness leaving the station, 'but a woman does love her own little home and [the] gentleman in Heywood says I have a great bargain and I have the money ready'. She emphasised that she needed a swift reply because the deeds were already waiting to be signed. She wrote not to ask for permission to buy the house, which she clearly saw as her own business and right, but to request support for a helper. All she needed was one ration for a young girl from the community, who could come and live with her until her son came home. 'So I must close hoping to hear from you soon your most humble servant Eliza Saunders'.^[21]

The mission manager backed Eliza Saunders' story that her son Chris wanted his mother to buy a house with his pay, but officials expressed consternation that Eliza had been receiving army pay as well as mission rations. ^[22] Should they confiscate the money in compensation? Was her health good enough for independent living anyway? How could a situation come about that a woman living on charity saved the cash to buy a house? As the realisation dawned that these Aboriginal women were receiving army income through the Australian Government, and that in this case the mother had been able to save, members of the BPA were clearly put out. One might suspect that apart from their supposed attachment to the ideal of 'fairness', the men of the BPA feared that these women would enjoy a small degree of independence through access to a little money free from BPA control. Their official line with the Department of Defence would be to insist that the mothers were wasting the money.^[23] In January 1918, the BPA asked the Department of Defence to suspend payment of Aboriginal servicemen's allotments to female relatives who received state assistance and, instead, to keep the funds in trust pending the men's return from the front. The women were, the BPA alleged, squandering the money.^[24]

To return to the story of Eliza Saunders: while the BPA deliberated and came to the decision to refuse Eliza's request, the house was snapped up by another buyer. ^[25] Eliza wrote again. How could they have denied her this request? Was she not a good Christian woman? Did she not deserve it? 'I am well read, I [am] so intelligent, I longed for a home and [am] weeping bitterly now', she wrote. Her son, she said, had so wanted a house if he was spared to return.^[26] Regardless, in January 1918, the BPA informed the manager at Lake Condah that Eliza's rations were to cease at the end of the month, in view of the fact that she was receiving military pay. ^[27] Doubtless as a result of their experience of Eliza having proved her capacity to save enough money for a house, the BPA took this particular step in punishment. Given the Department of Defence declined to stop Eliza's allotment, the BPA restricted her access to state resources.

Unbowed, though by July 1918 burdened with rheumatism, Eliza reiterated her aim to buy a block of land near Lake Condah, Eliza was not aware that the Lake Condah land was scheduled to be broken up for non-Aboriginal returning servicemen. When the BPA referred the matter to the manager of Lake Condah, he recommended against supporting Eliza, as she was receiving her son's military pay and making arrangements to receive the old age pension; her request was duly refused.^[28] Sadly, Eliza lived to know that her son Chris had survived the war, but not long enough to welcome him back home. In December 1918, before his return, Eliza died in the township of Dunmore, near Lake Condah.^[29] In January 1919, Lizzie Crough contacted the Department of Defence to ask whether the Female Relatives' Badge for her brother's service, that normally would have gone to Eliza, should now go to her as Chris's closest living female relative.^[30] It was agreed that she should, indeed, receive the badge.

Two brief letters provide further insight into a situation that provided a similar predicament for the BPA, in which another Lake Condah woman, Agnes Carter, insisted that the Victorian state should honor its obligations to female relatives of servicemen. Agnes was born in 1857 and married William Carter at Lake Condah in 1878; she became the mother of twelve children. ^[31] During the war Agnes received payments for her nephew Robert Taylor, the son of her sister, Margaret, and brother-in-law Tommy Taylor. Robert enlisted and embarked for the front on HMAT *Anchises* that left Melbourne on 14 March 1916; he served as a private in the 31st Infantry Battalion and survived the war.^[32]

On 1 June 1918, Agnes wrote from Lake Condah to a Mr Collins of the Department of Defence, informing him that she was desperate to keep the allotment because the BPA had stopped supplying her with rations and clothing.[33] A long-term resident of Lake Condah, she had recently moved off the mission to live in Allandale, in country Victoria. In May 1919, she further explained her situation in a letter to the BPA. When the question arose of advising the termination of allotments, the BPA took the alternative path with Agnes, as they had eventually with Eliza Saunders. Rather than fighting the Department of Defence, the BPA reduced Agnes's material assistance, a measure which lay within its power. Agnes acknowledged that she received some rations and clothing through the BPA, but maintained that when she left Lake Condah she understood that the full range of possible assistance would be due to her 'under the Act of Aborigines [1886]', for the rest of her life. Although, she continued, 'I am receiving a military allotment from a nephew of mine who went away to the front to fight for King and Empire; I only receive £1-per week; and I cannot call that my own; I am only my nephew's trustee for his money which I am receiving just now; and out of it my nephew has allowed me 10/- per week ...' This amount was quite insufficient for her to live on. She concluded with customary civility: 'I am, yrs obidently [sic], Mrs A Carter'.[34] With the cessation of the war and the imminent return of her nephew, and therefore the ending of the allotment, this BPA decision threatened to leave Agnes nearly destitute. As such, the BPA decided to restore her support, as indeed was her rightful due.[35]

Two other mothers had their allotments cut and wrote in protest, with differing outcomes. One of the most prominent women affected by the BPA decision to recommend termination was Jemima Dunolly of Coranderrk, a reserve near Healesville, north-east of Melbourne. Born Jemima Burns in the mid-1850s in the Echuca district on the Murray River, Jemima was brought to Coranderrk upon its foundation as a young girl in the 1860s.[36] In 1875 she married Robert Wandin (also spelt 'Wandon'). They had ten children: Nina, who died as a baby, Robert, Ellen, Mary, Joseph, Frank, William, Jemima, James, and Martha Louisa. The couple became strongly involved in the furtherance of the reserve's fortunes as a viable Aboriginal community.[37] Notably, Jemima and Robert were key players in the protest about the dismissal of their respected manager, John Green, and signatories to the community petition to the Premier of Victoria that precipitated the parliamentary inquiry in 1881.[38] Jemima Wandin was a devout church member and parish worker, leading gatherings of women and girls in reading and prayer in her own home. She was 'a sincere, quiet and wise adviser to her own race',

the manager of Coranderrk reported, his right hand helper among the women. Her young daughters Martha and Mary helped her in her pastoral responsibilities, while her eldest son was a teacher in the Victorian state system.[39] Her husband Robert was also a valued church stalwart.



Group of Aboriginal residents at Coranderrk, 1903. Photographer: Stephens. Accession no. H141215. State Library of Victoria. Reproduced with the permission of the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Incorporated.

In 1910, two years after Robert died, Jemima married the widower Thomas Dunolly, another highly regarded supporter of Aboriginal rights at Coranderrk.[40] That year, Jemima came to the conviction that the family needed to move off the reserve. As her children reached adolescence they were obliged to leave for work elsewhere, away from the care of their parents. In a letter to the BPA, Jemima revealed clearly her conviction that as an Aboriginal person she deserved an allocation of land, as many other Aboriginal Victorians similarly believed.[41] 'I am of the opinion now that I would like a home of my own with the help of the Board for Protection of Aborigines for which I think I am now justly entitled to', she wrote in a remarkably forthright letter.

I have daughters rising into womanhood now and these I would like to be a little more under my control for when they go out to service it is the last control of mothers lost, for as you know that they are rarely allowed back again even for a holiday. For the sake of my girls I would like a home of my own and if the government would see their way clear to giving me a home I would feel greatly indebted for the favour and 3 years rations and clothing[.] Thanking you in anticipation, I am, yours respectfully, Mrs T Dunolly

[ps] I would like 50 acres to make a living as well.[42]

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The manager could only explain to the BPA that the 'half caste parents' did not like their children having to leave the reserves.[43] Jemima was sharply reminded by the BPA that the state's notion of 'charity' did not include such largesse. She remained at Coranderrk, but did not cede her campaign for her right to have her children stay with her.

Two of Jemima's sons, Joseph Wandin and her second youngest, James Henry Wandin, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF). Joseph enlisted as a twenty-nine-year-old school teacher on 18 August 1914, but was discharged less than two months later for undisclosed reasons. James, a twenty-one-year-old labourer at the time of enlistment in 1917, noted his mother Jemima as his next of kin on his attestation paper. Although he had previously been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's Service on the grounds of 'bad teeth', James embarked from Melbourne on the HMAT *Themistocles* A32 on 4 August 1917.[44] His earlier rejection may have been because it was discovered that Joseph was Aboriginal and as such, not substantially of European origin or descent, considering the early reluctance to accept Aboriginal people into the army. [45] Indeed, policies on enlistment became more flexible later in the conflict – particularly after the failure of the conscription referenda. For instance, from 1917 a national level Aboriginal people of mixed descent were allowed to enlist, though clearly many had enlisted before that date in Victoria. Subsequently, Jemima began to receive James's military allotment. [46] When in January 1918 she was notified by the BPA that the payment would cease, she immediately lodged a complaint directly with the Department of Defence. Jemima defended herself against the BPA charge of recipients wasting their money: she was using the money prudently, she affirmed, by sending her son parcels regularly and keeping the balance for her personal upkeep.[47] The Department of Defence consulted with the BPA, and swiftly reinstated her payments.[48] James survived the war, and Jemima Dunolly herself remained on the reserve to the end of her life, refusing to leave Coranderrk when it was officially shut down in 1924. Her grandson, another James Wandin, was the last Aboriginal child born at Coranderrk. He was born in 1933 in his grandmother's cottage. Jemima died in 1944, leaving many descendants as significant members of the Coranderrk community, including Auntie Joy Murphy Wandin, to carry on her advocacy.[49]

Bessie Rawlings, whom Reverend Hagenauer tried to put in her place in the 1890s, was still living in the Framlingham community in 1918 when her less successful exchange began with the BPA. Born Elizabeth Gorrie at Lake Condah around 1850, in 1870

Bessie married James Lancaster, with whom she had five children, four of whom survived childhood: George James, Walter Henry, Christina Rachel and Mary Elizabeth. After James's death Bessie married fellow Lake Condah resident, William Rawlings. They settled on the Framlingham Reserve, and raised three more children: William, Diana and Isabella.[50] Deeply concerned with the sustenance, employment and residence of her children and with rights to land, Bessie established a name for insisting on what she believed were her lawful entitlements. So much so that in 1898, the BPA went so far as to obtain an Order-in-Council to remove Bessie and her husband from Framlingham to Lake Condah, where they were confined for two years before they bravely declared that they would earn their own living off the mission.[51] They set up house in the vicinity of Framlingham, the condition of their release being the total severance of the help mediated through the mission. In 1904, Bessie nevertheless requested assistance when her husband became ill: 'he came home quite broken down after seeing our darling child how thin she looked[:] he can't get over it ...' The BPA should know, she wrote, that they had left the reserve only for their children's sake.[52]

Bessie Rawlings, unlike Jemima Dunolly, enjoyed no such ready reinstatement of her son's military allotment when she challenged the curtailment of her funds in early 1918. Her son, William (Bill) Reginald Rawlings, enlisted in the AIF in Warrnambool in March 1916, giving horse-breaking as his trade.[53] He joined the 29th Infantry Battalion and served in France.[54] Whatever Bessie's standing with the BPA might have been, she had white neighbours who supported her appeal for restitution. The local guardian, Mr William Johnstone, praised her in a letter to the Minister of Defence on 5 May 1918. Having known Bessie Rawlings for over forty years, he wrote: 'she never spends one shilling foolishly. She is a good living and respectable woman. [...] Mr Hall our Purnim Justice of the Peace will also testify to her good character and her economy in spending the money. ... I am sure if her son hears of it he will be very very sorry'. [55]

The letter had the desired effect: the BPA Secretary replied that they had recommended that the Department of Defence resume the payments. However, by 27 June, Bessie Rawlings had still not seen a single payment. She took up the cudgels once again in a letter to the Secretary of the BPA, all the more striking for her sturdy practical suggestions: 'To Mr Parker', she began:

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This is just a few lines to let you know that I haven't received my military pay yet. Mr Johnstone read me the letter he wrote you saying that the pay master should forward my pay to me but it has not come yet. So I wrote to the pay master and I told him to send my pay on to Purnim instead of banking it, for I can do that much myself as I have my own pass book. You know sir what little rations I get from the Board is not the worth of my dear only son's life of which he has gone to give up for king and freedom. So dear Mr Parker do please see that I get my pay, for you know sir that every mother's heart is with her son; my thoughts are always with my own. God bless our boys at the front.

Kindly oblige your humble servant,

Bessie Rawlings

Please excuse bad writing and a scanty bit of paper. [56]

Six weeks later, on 9 August 1918 at the Somme, twenty-seven-year-old William was killed in action, winning a Military Medal for exceptional bravery in battle. The citation read:

During the attack on enemy systems this soldier had the responsible position of first bayonet man in a bombing team which worked down the enemy C.T. [communication trench] , routed the enemy and established a block in the trenches. Private Rawlings displayed rare bravery in the performance of his duty, killing many of the enemy, brushing aside all opposition and cleared the way effectively for the bombers of his team. His irresistible dash and courage set a wonderful example to the remainder of the team.[57]

The Rawlings clung to Framlingham in the face of relentless efforts to dislodge them. After a school building burned down in 1919, taking also an attached shed in which the Rawlings lived, the BPA ordered them to leave Framlingham for permanent residence at Lake Tyers Mission Station in Gippsland. Bessie was the first signatory to a petition to the Victorian parliament, requesting that a new school building be erected on the site: 'the Aborigines are very desirous to remain at Framlingham and altogether opposed to removing to Lake Tyers Station,' the petition ran.[58] A good number of white neighbours and the local constable endorsed their wish. 'Mrs Rawlings, who is a very nice woman, and whose son Charlie [William] after gaining the MM., was killed in the war, has been to see me', Walter Ward wrote to the BPA Secretary. 'I would like to request the Board to give some sympathetic consideration to these matters'.[59] The following day Constable Harvey sent a similar plea: 'These people were born on the Camp and no doubt feel the position very keen... Perhaps they may be able to remain here'.[60]

Bessie Rawlings lived more than twenty years after her son, dying in June 1939 near the reserve at Framlingham at an advanced age, just before the outbreak of another world war.[61] The Warrnambool branch of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Association paid for a burial in

the Framlingham Reserve cemetery that befitted the mother of a decorated Australian soldier.[62] Bessie's son was remembered through the life of another Aboriginal soldier in World War II. Eliza Saunders' son, Chris Saunders, had married soon after he returned from the front in 1919 and he and his wife Mabel named their first son 'Reginald' after his lost friend, William Reginald Rawlings. Chris's son, Lieutenant Reginald Walter Saunders, distinguished himself in the World War II as the first Aboriginal serviceman to be commissioned in the Australian Army.[63] His younger brother, Harry Saunders, served with the 2/14th Australian Infantry Battalion before being killed in New Guinea on 29 November 1942.[64] The legacies of men such as William, and the women behind them, attest to the activism and advocacy of Aboriginal peoples in Australia's war efforts, as well as the additional pressures and obstacles that Aboriginal Australians faced by nature of their origins.



Private William Reginald Rawlings, son of Bessie Rawlings, circa 1916. AWM P01695.001.

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This paper has highlighted the subordinate position of various Aboriginal people under Victorian legislation, by drawing upon letters outlining a number of women's perceptions of the rights due to them as Aboriginal inhabitants of the land. There is, in this special year of the centenary of Gallipoli, an abundance of commemorations associated with soldiers' contributions and activities in past and in recent conflicts. Amid these events there have been increasing efforts to recognise the contributions of Aboriginal servicemen.[65] However, what remains missing from this revised narrative is a similar attentiveness to the many Aboriginal women who, at home, were courageously fighting for their rights and for the rights of their families.[66] We have traced just a few of these women's assertions of these rights in the face of, for the most part, the careless disregard of the authorities.

Particularly because these Aboriginal women had sacrificed their sons and grandsons to fight for the nation, they believed that they deserved to be treated with dignity and respect. Aboriginal women's letters to the BPA provide rare insight into some of their negotiations with the authorities, and add a personal and emotive element to studies of conflict and of race in Australia's past. Young Winnie Austin's Aboriginal friends died, as they believed, protecting Australia's freedom abroad, while their mothers lived to assert the freedom of their families and communities back home. The women aligned themselves with Australia's war effort, but also played their part in insisting that the country stood beside its own standards of lawful relations. Their efforts were similarly as brave and deserving of commemoration as were their sons' service and sacrifice.

Endnotes

[1] This paper was presented as part of a seminar held at Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) on 11 March 2015 to commemorate International Women's Day, organised by PROV in conjunction with the Victorian Committee of the Australian Women's Archives Project. We thank Elizabeth Nelson (University of Melbourne), Sandra Smith, Fiona Davis and Noah Riseman (Australian Catholic University), Samuel Furphy (Australian National University), and the two anonymous referees for their advice on this paper. Hannah Loney's research for the article was supported by funding from the ARC Linkage project, 'Minutes of Evidence'.

The archival sources referenced in this article are held in two archival collections. The National Archives of Australia (Victorian collection) holds the following records: CA 2013 Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines: B313/1 Correspondence files; B314 Minutes of meetings, single number series; B329 'Letter books' comprising:- (1) outward correspondence (2) nominal index to outward correspondence, single number series; B337/1 Aboriginal case files, lexicographical series; B356/0 Lake Tyers correspondence files; B2010 newspaper cuttings; CA 2791 Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station: B354/Lake Tyers Manager's files relating to administrative matters and record of personal details of aboriginal residents. Public Record Office Victoria holds the following records: VA 515 Board for Protection of Aborigines: VPRS 1694/P0 Correspondence Files; VPRS 926 Letter Book, Coranderrk; VA 475 Chief Secretary's Department: VPRS 3991/P0 Inward Registered Correspondence II; VPRS 3992/P0 Inward Registered Correspondence III. Other records were held by the State Library of Victoria, including: Bessie Flower, Letters, MS 12117, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection. For invaluable information on the above archives see: Australian Archives and Public Record Office of Victoria, *'My Heart is Breaking': A Joint Guide to Records about Aboriginal People in the Public Record Office of Victoria and the Australian Archives*, Victorian Regional Office, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1993 and the recently published follow-up guide, *walata tyamateetj: A guide to government records about Aboriginal people in Victoria*, Public Record Office Victoria and National Archives of Australia, North Melbourne, 2014, which can be accessed online as a PDF at <http://prov.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/walata-tyamateetj_web_final.pdf>, accessed 24 August 2015. The endnotes indicate not only the archival source but also page numbers in their publication in Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw (eds), *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867–1926*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2002. This collection is now available online at <minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/42073>, accessed 24 August 2015.

[2] Ada Austin, Purnim, letter to Mr Bailey, MLA, Port Fairy, 1918, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 106 (italics inserted); PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 8.

[3] Ada Austin, Purnim, letter to Mr Parker, Secretary BPA, December 1918, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 107; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 8.

[4] For discussion of restrictions to accessing veterans' benefits, see Noah Riseman, 'Enduring Silences, Enduring Prejudices: Australian Aboriginal Participation in the First World War', in David Monger, Katie Pickles and Sarah Murray (eds), *Endurance and the First World War: Experience and Legacies in New Zealand and Australia*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2014, pp. 188–191.

[5] See Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, pp. 315–329.

[6] See Mark McMillan and Cosima McRae, 'Law, Land and Dispossession – the Half-Caste Act of 1886 and Contemporary Legal Definitions of Indigeneity in Australia', in Zoe Laidlaw and Alan Lester (eds), *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism: Land Holding, Loss and Survival in an Interconnected World*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2015, pp. 233–244. See also: Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2005; John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2005; and Samuel Furphy, *Edward M Curr and the Tide of History*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2013.

[7] The formal title of the original Act was: *An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria*, 11 November 1869. The full title of the 1886 Act was: *An Act to amend an Act entitled "An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria"*. It was an extension and expansion of the Aboriginal Protection Act giving extensive powers to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines over residence, employment and marriage.

[8] For collaborative efforts to capture the history of these transactions, see: Jennifer Balint et al., 'The "Minutes of Evidence" Project: Creating Collaborative Fields of Engagement with the Past, Present and Future', in Leigh Boucher and Lynette Russell (eds), *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2015, pp. 203–224. For an international consideration, see Laidlaw and Lester (eds), *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism*.

[9] For discussions of Victorian Aboriginal women's assertion of rights, see: Patricia Grimshaw, 'Colonising Motherhood: Evangelical Reformers and Koorie Women in Victoria, Australia, 1880s to the Early 1900s', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 1999, pp. 329–346; Patricia Grimshaw and Elizabeth Nelson, 'Empire, the "Civilising Mission" and Indigenous Christian Women in Colonial Victoria', *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 36, 2001, pp. 295–309; Patricia Grimshaw, 'Federation as a Turning Point in Australian History', *Australian Historical Studies*, special edition, 'Challenging Histories', No. 118, 2002, pp. 25–41; Patricia Grimshaw, '"That we may obtain our religious liberty": Aboriginal Women, Faith and Rights in Early Twentieth Century Victoria', *eJournal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Vol. 2, May 2009, pp. 24–42; Patricia Grimshaw, 'Rethinking Approaches to Women and Missions: The Case of Colonial Australia', *History Australia*, Vol. 8, No. 3, December 2011, pp. 7–24; Joanna Cruickshank and Patricia Grimshaw, 'Women, Authority and Power on Ramahyuck Mission, Victoria, 1880–1910', in Russell and Boucher (eds), *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, pp. 165–182.

[10] For Friedrich Hagenauer, see: Felicity Jensz, *Collecting Cultures for God: German Moravian Missionaries and the British Colony of Victoria, Australia, 1848–1908*, Brill, Leiden, 2010; and Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1989.

[11] Friedrich Hagenauer, letter to Bessie Rawlings, 9 May 1891, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 40; NAA: B329, 5, p. 422.

[12] For discussions of jurisprudence and 'lawful relations' see Christine Black, Sean McVeigh and Richard Johnstone, 'Of the South', *Griffith Law Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2007, pp. 299–309. For an international consideration, see: Laidlaw and Alan (eds), *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism*. For details of the major study of the assertion of lawful relations by members of the Coranderrk community, see: the 'Minutes of Evidence Project', available online at <<http://minutesofevidence.com>>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[13] For a list and details of Aboriginal and Torres Strait soldiers, see Philippa Scarlett, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Volunteers for the AIF: the Indigenous Response to World War One*, Indigenous Histories, Canberra, revised edition, 2012. See also: Simon Flagg and Sebastian Gurciullo, *Footprints: The Journey of Lucy and Percy Pepper*, Public Record Office Victoria, North Melbourne and National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 2008.

[14] Hannah Loney, Biographical Notes in *Minutes of Evidence* [online] forthcoming 2015.

[15] Walter Christopher Saunders, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/education/walter-christopher-saunders/>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[16] Walter Christopher George Saunders, Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad, Australian Imperial Force, National Archives of Australia, available online at <<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/322160>>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[17] Joseph Crough, Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad, Australian Imperial Force, National Archives of Australia, available online at <<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/139183>>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[18] Kenneth Crough, Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad, Australian Imperial Force, National Archives of Australia, available online at <<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/142386>>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[19] Lizzie Crough to Mr Murray, Chief Secretary, 18 May 1904, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, pp. 259–260; NAA: B337/1, 196.

[20] For a selection of letters written to the BPA by Lizzie Crough see Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, pp. 116, 259–269; NAA: B337/1, 196; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, units 12, 4, 2, 6.

[21] Eliza Saunders to Secretary of BPA, 29 August 1917, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, pp. 139–140; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 3.

[22] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 141.

[23] W Johnstone, local guardian, Framlingham, to Minister of Defence, 5 May 1918, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 252; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[24] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 252; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[25] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 140; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 3.

[26] Eliza Saunders to Secretary of BPA, 1 September 1917, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, pp. 140–141; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 3.

[27] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 140; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 6.

[28] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 141; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 5.

[29] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 328.

[30] Walter Christopher Saunders, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/education/walter-christopher-saunders/>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[31] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 318.

[32] Robert Edward Taylor, RSL Virtual War Memorial, available at <<http://www.rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au/explore/people/346051>>, accessed 13 May 2015.

[33] Agnes Carter to Mr Collins, 1 June 1918, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 303; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[34] Agnes Carter to Mr Campbell, MLA, BPA, 1 May 1919, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 304; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[35] Agnes Carter, Lake Condah, to Mr Parker, Secretary, BPA, 1919, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 304; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[36] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 320.

[37] See Giordano Nanni and Andrea James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2013; Julie Evans and Giordano Nanni, 'Re-imagining Settler Sovereignty: The Call to Law at the Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve, Victoria 1881 (and Beyond)', in Laidlaw and Lester (eds), *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism*, pp. 24–44.

[38] See Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 320. See also: Nanni and James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country*.

[39] Janet Matthews, *The Story of the Manunka Aborigines' Mission Home, Forster, Murray River, South Australia, From January 1st, 1908, to October 31st, 1909*, cited in Patricia Grimshaw, 'Rethinking Approaches to Women and Missions: The Case of Colonial Australia', *History Australia*, Vol. 8, No. 3, December 2011, pp. 7–24.

[40] *Forty-Sixth Report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines*, 1910, Victoria, p. 5, available online at <http://aiatsis.gov.au/archive_digitised_collections/_files/archive/removeprotect/25367.pdf>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[41] See Joanna Cruickshank and Patricia Grimshaw, 'Indigenous Land Loss, Justice and Race: Ann Bon and the Contradictions of Settler Humanitarianism', in Laidlaw and Lester (eds), *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism*, pp. 45–61.

[42] Jemima Dunolly to Secretary of BPA, January 1912, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 136; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 3.

[43] Mr Robarts, manager, Coranderrk, to Mr Callaway, Vice Chairman, BPA, 27 February, 1911, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 60.

[44] James Henry Wandin, Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad, Australian Imperial Force, National Archives of Australia, available online at <<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/172608>>, accessed 11 May 2015; and James Henry Wandin, First World War Embarkation Rolls, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/people/rolls/R1800458/>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[45] Joseph Wandin, Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad, Australian Imperial Force, National Archives of Australia, available online at <<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/397052>>, accessed 11 May 2015; and Private Joseph Wandin, People Profiles, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/people/P10677992/#timeline>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[46] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 61.

[47] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 61–2; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] For further details of the history of Coranderrk told by William Barak's descendant, Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin, see the Culture Victoria webpage on her available at <<http://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/aboriginal-culture/contemporary-artists-honour-barak/aunty-joy-murphy-wandin-coranderrk/>>, accessed 20 August 2015; Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 320.

[50] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 327.

[51] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 128; PROV, VPRS 3992/P0, unit 944, item T700.

[52] Bessie Rawlings to Mr Murray, Chief Secretary, 26 January 1904, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 45; PROV, VPRS 3992/P0, unit 944, item T700.

[53] William Reginald Rawlings, Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad, Australian Imperial Force, National Archives of Australia, available online at <<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/179819>>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[54] Private William Reginald Rawlings, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/people/P10677085/>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[55] William Johnston to Minister of Defence, 5 May 1918, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 252; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[56] Bessie Rawlings to Secretary BPA, 27 June 1918, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 252; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 6.

[57] *Commonwealth Gazette*, No. 36, 14 March 1919, in P01695, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/collection/P01695.001>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[58] Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 129; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[59] Walter Ward to Secretary BPA, 9 October 1919, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 129; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[60] Constable Harvey, local guardian, Framlingham, to Secretary BPA, 10 October 1919, in Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw (eds), *Letters*, p. 129; PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, unit 7.

[61] 'Death of a Centenarian', *Advocate*, 3 July 1939, p. 7.

[62] Jan Critchett, 'Rawlings, William Reginald (1890–1918)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, available online at <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rawlings-william-reginald-8161>>, first published in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 11 May 2015.

[63] This point has been contested after Andrea Gerard discovered an Aboriginal commissioned officer from World War I named Hearps. However, the Australian War Memorial refused to officially recognise him; hence, Captain Reg Saunders is still attributed as the first commissioned officer. See Riseman, 'Enduring Silences', pp. 187–188. Captain Reginald Walter 'Reg' Saunders, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/people/P302/>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[64] Harry Saunders, Roll of Honour, Australian War Memorial, available online at <www.awm.gov.au/people/rolls/R1697924/>, accessed 11 May 2015.

[65] See, for example, Noah Riseman, 'Serving Their Country: A Short History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service in the Australian Army', *Australian Army Journal*, Cultural edition, Vol. x, No. 3, 2013, pp. 11–22.

[66] One of the only other sources to adopt this approach focuses on World War II: see Elizabeth Osborne, *Torres Strait Islander Women and the Pacific War*, Aboriginal Studies Press for Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, 1997.