

Behind the Mulga Curtain and beyond the Grave: Mary Montgomerie Bennett's Leadership in Aboriginal Affairs, 1930–1961

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Abstract: Historians who specialise in twentieth-century campaigns to achieve justice for Aboriginal Australians recognise the contribution of Mary Bennett to this field of human endeavour. She is, however, almost completely unknown to those outside this specific field. This chapter takes as its starting point a female model of leadership that is about empowering others in the task of reshaping society. While Bennett's early advocacy in the 1930s has been recognised, it is her influence on her Aboriginal students and on a later generation of activists that provides the strongest evidence that she displayed a leadership which showed imagination, courage and a faith in a more inclusive future for the Aboriginal people whom she loved and respected.

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‘At the back of beyond, behind the mulga curtain anything can happen.’¹

When Mary Montgomerie Bennett decided to devote the rest of her life to working for justice for Aboriginal Australians she was middle aged and recently widowed. She had left her London home to work as a teacher in a remote Western Australian mission on the edge of the desert. This was in the 1930s when communication from the mission, Mount Margaret, to the rest of the world was by letter. All of these factors – gender, age, the times, geography and the intensity of her advocacy for Aboriginal people – would, taken together, suggest the unlikelihood of applying the term ‘leader’ to this woman, but her ability to envisage a different future, her passionate determination and a dedication to the task overcame these obstacles.

The study which follows is of Mary Bennett's leadership in developing, popularising and implementing a set of ideas concerning the human rights of Aboriginal Australians. Her first attempt at changing the status of Aboriginal people living under Western Australian laws in the 1930s was not successful. However, as a teacher of Aboriginal children in the 1930s and as an advocate and guide for the Aboriginal rights movement that developed in the 1950s,

Mary Bennett was imaginative and ethical. The question for us to consider here is was she a leader? And if so, how was her leadership expressed?

Mary Montgomerie Christison was born in 1881 and grew up on Lammermoor Station, a large pastoral property on the Queensland Downs that her father Robert had developed in the 1860s. Her mother disliked station life in Queensland and moved with her children between England, which was still home to her, and Australia. As a young woman Mary enjoyed the benefits which came from a family sure of both its distinguished Scottish social standing and its economic power as a pastoral enterprise. She studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, was presented to King George V and Queen Mary and enjoyed the other privileges of her class. When she was thirty-three, just after the outbreak of war with Germany, she married Captain Charles Bennett who enlisted in the Royal Navy. The war years were years of personal turmoil: Robert's European investments were lost, the family home was sold, her father died and her mother and sister returned to Australia.² In 1921 her husband, twenty-five years her senior, retired and soon after Mary began work on her first book, *Christison of Lammermoor*. While it was ostensibly a biography of her most admired and successful pastoralist father it shows her increasing engagement with the unspoken issue. Her father was known for his kindness to the Dalleburra people who lived on the land that became Lammermoor, but Mary Bennett knew the family wealth was built on their dispossession and loss. Three chapter titles include the question 'What to do about the Blacks?'

As soon as she had finished her first book she began writing her second, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*. When her much loved husband, who had supported her in her writing and advocacy, died in November 1927 she began to consider more direct engagement in finding a solution for those 'most wronged at our hands'.³ Her sister later referred to this decision as Mary getting 'her call'.⁴ Mary told the secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (ASAPS) that she felt her work was among the Aborigines. She would leave London for Perth, having over a number of years established a broad network which included the ASAPS, the British Commonwealth League (BCL), the International Labour Organisation, the League of Nations and the Aborigines Protection Society of South Australia. Regardless of where she was, she would use this network and add to it to ensure that information and her ideas were disseminated in the cause of justice for Aboriginal people.

From her arrival at Fremantle docks in 1930 until her death in 1961 she used her mental and material resources in an effort to secure a better future for Aboriginal Australians. This included agitation for the repeal of unjust, discriminatory laws, teaching Aboriginal children at Mount Margaret Mission on the Eastern Goldfields, campaigning for basic rights such as old age

pensions and unemployment benefits for many of the local Wongutha people in Kalgoorlie, writing and speaking to challenge the attitudes of the mainstream community and supporting disadvantaged Aboriginal people emotionally and materially in court, and providing food, when governments refused to provide it. One of her former pupils has written that she was not a leader in the usual sense of the word but she was ‘a great advocator for the underprivileged and the underdog’. This same student, now a woman in her eighties, recalled how in the 1930s, in a remote schoolroom a thousand miles from Perth, Mrs Bennett (as she was to the Aboriginal children) told the class about Booker T. Washington, Dr James Kwegyir Aggrey and Dr George Washington Carver as examples of ‘African Negroes who made good for themselves and were respected’.⁵ This inspired one student to write to Carver, who replied. Mrs Bennett had the reply framed and it hung in the schoolroom as an inspiration to those whose innate skills Bennett was intent on developing.

In an essay in this collection Amanda Sinclair has argued that a consideration of women’s leadership ‘must interrogate and contest received wisdom about leadership’ while shifting public images and imagination about what good leadership is. The story of the letter to Washington Carver and his reply is just one example of a form of leadership which is about empowering others by engaging their imaginations as to what is possible. As we will see later a number of the pupils who read Washington Carver’s reply went on to become leaders in their communities as adults. When Mary made the decision to leave London for direct work with Aboriginal people in Western Australia, she knew that the work of empowering others applied also to the activists and advocates she had been working with in London who were focused on stimulating a community conscience about Aboriginal conditions. She saw her task as continuing to share her vision of a humane Australian society that educated Aboriginal people, respected their family life and recognised their rights as human beings. Sinclair quotes Eva Cox’s view that ‘the essence of leadership is making up your own mind and then being able to take other people with you’ and it is this pared down definition of leadership which I want to use in this chapter to examine Mary Bennett as more than ‘a tireless agitator’, rather as a leader who empowered others and made social change possible.⁶

This driven, single-minded woman believed she understood what was required to change relationships between Aboriginal and other Australians in the cause of freeing the former from colonial bondage. She knew both the powerful forces at work that opposed reform and the disempowered condition of the Aboriginal people who had been crushed by the pastoral and mining enterprises established on their traditional lands. Her work as an educator of the Wongutha people in the 1930s and the legacy of this which future teachers

built on, and her later work in the 1950s influencing a new generation of activists and encouraging them to take an international perspective in their work, provide us with two case studies of successful leadership. By contrast I will argue that the form of her advocacy in the 1930s, while superficially successful in that it did lead to the setting up of a royal commission to enquire into Aboriginal conditions, did not lead to any enduring change. First I want to consider her 1930s advocacy, which, of all her work, has been most closely scrutinised by historians.⁷

An ‘urgent and desperate’ attempt to stimulate ‘an enlightened national conscience’

In the late 1920s, while she was still living in England, Mary Bennett met a number of women active in the humanitarian movement who were attempting to awaken a conscience regarding the position of Aboriginal people in Australia. One of these was Mrs Constance Cooke, a member of the Australian delegation to the 1927 BCL conference, a women’s organisation to which more than fourteen Australian women’s societies were affiliated.⁸ Bennett was impressed by Cooke’s advocacy and through her learned of attempts in Australia to help awaken public opinion concerning the treatment of Aborigines. Cooke introduced Bennett to the ASAPS which she joined and for which she became a very active correspondent.⁹ In the pages of the society’s journal, *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines’ Friend*, Bennett learned of a punitive massacre of at least eleven Aboriginal women and men following the spearing to death of a white man in the Kimberley.¹⁰ Moreover, she learned that the Royal Commission established to investigate, many months after the killings, acquitted the two police officers charged with the murders due to insufficient evidence. She read Commissioner Wood’s explanation, that ‘a conspiracy of silence’ existed throughout the locality, and that a settler had asked the police to ‘go out and deal drastically with the natives’. Wood understood this to mean ‘by bullet and fire’. The two policemen were, nevertheless, reinstated.¹¹

The following year Bennett read in *The Times* of a further outrage, another reprisal killing by police after the murder of a white dingo hunter, at Coniston station, north of Alice Springs. This sent her into a frenzy of activity.¹² She wrote to six newspapers presenting an argument for a return of a portion of the land that had been taken from Aboriginal people so that they could support their families. She wrote of their right to manage their own affairs along their own lines and to be given a chance of working out their own destiny. Her letters, signed ‘British-Australian’ were not published, but undeterred Bennett asked Travers Buxton, secretary of the ASAPS, for help in getting her letters published. The Aborigines question is ‘urgent and

desperate' she told him and 'an enlightened national conscience here as well as in Australia is much needed'.¹³ She set out to stimulate that conscience through writing and speaking, cautioned by Buxton about 'alarming the papers'.¹⁴ Her research intensified as she gathered papers from ASAPS, communicated with missionaries in the Australian outback and followed events in Australia through the newspapers to which she subscribed as she worked on *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*. At this time she also met Anthony Fernando, an Aboriginal protester in London, and was moved by his statement: 'If you want to help my people, you must be quick, for there are not many left. When the stations are wired in my people die.'¹⁵ She was by this time in contact with the Aborigines' Protection Society in Adelaide, of which Cooke was a member, and supported this society's ideas about developing a 'model Aboriginal state'.¹⁶ She was influential in encouraging both the ASAPS and the BCL to focus on the status of Aboriginal Australians in their meetings. In 1929 she addressed the BCL conference in London, condemning the present system in which the police were both the 'protectors' and the prosecutors of Aboriginal people. She spoke directly about the prostitution of Aboriginal women as resulting from the loss of hunting lands. Bennett later referred to her awareness of what she felt was 'a hostile element' in the audience especially among Australians present.¹⁷ It was a hostility which would grow and become more overt in its expression after her return to Australia in October 1930. She had begun to challenge the power of 'squatterdom', as she called the powerful pastoral lobby, which, she would remind readers, she well understood from her childhood growing up on the Queensland tablelands.¹⁸

On her arrival in Australia she strengthened her connections with local women's organisations such as the Women's Service Guilds, working closely for a time with the president, Bessie Rischbieth. Her accusations became more focused on the sexual slavery of women; the *West Australian* quoted almost the entire text of an article she wrote for the Australian Board of Missions' *ABM Review*, under the heading 'Whites and Natives: Allegations of Slavery'.¹⁹ Bennett described a world in which Aboriginal people were deprived of human rights, dispossessed and threatened by extermination. Her directness expressed her moral indignation and preparedness to puncture taboos such as when she told readers that she 'knew a lot about the police because she had to teach their [unacknowledged] half-caste children'.²⁰

The Chief Protector of Aborigines, Auber Octavius Neville, described Bennett's assertions as 'somewhat sweeping'. Another correspondent to the *West Australian* claimed that she defeated her own ends by painting too black a picture of the whites and too white a picture of the blacks. Journalist and friend to the pastoralists, Ernestine Hill, valorised the pastoralists of the north as 'the only true pioneers we have left in Australia', fundamentally

disagreeing with Bennett's assessment and arguing that as the Aboriginal race was doomed, a laissez-faire attitude to them was the most practicable one to take.²¹ Bennett annoyed the Western Australian establishment when her 1933 British Empire League paper on 'The Aboriginal Mother in Western Australia', read by supporter Mrs Ruby Rich, made headlines in London papers. This adverse publicity came just after the Western Australian Parliament had voted to request the British Parliament to permit secession from the Australian Commonwealth.²² Bennett's argument was that Aboriginal women were property for patriarchal disposal and that 'free women' – that is the listening audience – were responsible for the continuance of these evils, 'because we are not sharing our light with our Aboriginal fellow women'.²³ The Women's Service Guild in Perth, which included socially prominent citizens as members, supported Bennett's stand with enthusiasm.

In 1934 Mary Bennett gave extensive evidence to the royal commission which was set up in part to investigate her well-publicised assertions of slavery and unjust treatment. While getting a royal commission was an achievement for Bennett and the Woman's Service Guild members who also gave evidence, as historian Geoffrey Bolton has pointed out her crusade was from every point of view a forlorn hope.²⁴ Royal Commissioner Henry Moseley concluded that Mrs Bennett 'really provided nothing specific into which I could inquire'. He argued that 'greater good could be accomplished by people who protest that they have the interests of the natives at heart' by bringing the matter to the attention of state authorities. He gently chastised her for reporting ill treatment of Aborigines in London.²⁵ Moseley expressed support for Mount Margaret's policy of keeping children with their mothers but the *Native Administration Act*, passed in 1936, a year after Moseley's report, made the Chief Commissioner the legal guardian of all native children under twenty-one, thus increasing the power of A.O. Neville. Bennett's concern to protect the Aboriginal family and prevent children being taken from their mothers was not a government priority.²⁶

Over the last twenty years historians researching the role of women's organisations, particularly Alison Holland, Marilyn Lake and Fiona Paisley, have analysed Bennett's contribution as an advocate for Aboriginal Australians between the wars in the context of women in Britain and Australia who worked through bodies such as the BCL, the Women's Service Guilds and the Australian Federation of Women Voters. As they point out, both humanitarianism and a feminist concern for the rights of women and mothers motivated Bennett and the women who worked with her for reform. There are differences in the positions they take with regard to Bennett; for example, Holland argues that Bennett's perspective is not a purely feminist one, while Lake is interested in exploring feminist thought within the Australian colonial

context as well as issues of power, race and culture in women's advocacy. These historians recognise Bennett's ideas as having an authority which came from an intimate personal knowledge of Aboriginal life from her childhood experience and a broad consideration of the position of colonised native peoples in other parts of the British Empire. In the 1930s, she was the most forthright critic of Western Australian Government legislation in Aboriginal affairs and of its implementation under Chief Protector (later Commissioner) Neville and was prepared to publicly question his views – such as that marriages between Aboriginal people should be arranged so as to 'absorb' the mixed-race offspring of inter-racial unions into the general population.

While the work of these historians has shown the important role played by feminists, and by Bennett in particular, in the 1930s in raising awareness of the plight of Aboriginal women on the frontier, the humanitarian women's campaign failed in the short term. Peter Biskup has argued that the campaign failed because the women's organisations were not united.²⁷ Certainly, Mary Bennett fell out with Bessie Rischbieth during the Moseley Commission inquiry. Rischbieth reportedly questioned Bennett's 'native witnesses' to the commission, asserting that they did not support Bennett's charges. Bennett described the 'Women's Societies' as being 'too smug and self-seeking to attempt to reform the conditions of life for Aboriginal women.'²⁸ This is, however, only a part of the explanation of the failure of the women's 1930s campaign: Bennett's style and the unpreparedness of the community to consider change are other factors. As a number of critics have pointed out, Bennett weakened her case both by overstating it and by her unfounded attacks. For example she stated that government Aboriginal policy deliberately supported Aboriginal polygamy so that Aboriginal men could trade their wives with white men in the north. She simplified the politics in secessionist-driven 1930s Western Australia by referring to an unholy alliance of church, state and vested interests. In fact, the Chief Protector had his own difficulties with the pastoralists who used Aboriginal labour. A.A. Coverley, the member for Kimberley, in supporting his white constituency accused Neville of persecuting northerners who were trying to make a living. While Neville and Bennett differed on what should be done about the abuse of Aboriginal women, Neville's motives were also humanitarian in essence. Bennett's criticism of his 'official smashing of native family life' led to Neville describing Bennett as obsessive and fanatical.²⁹

A further factor which militated against Bennett's and the Women Service Guilds' effectiveness in the mid 1930s was the social climate. The onset of the depression put a halt to Neville's attempts to develop Aboriginal reserves and to reform the pastoral industry's use of Aboriginal labour. His budget was cut, which led to the dismissal of his only travelling inspector. Aboriginal labour was essential to the northern pastoralists who showed little

interest in reassessing the position of Aboriginal Australians within mainstream society. Instead, pastoral lobbyist Coverley moved in the Legislative Assembly for the appointment of the Royal Commission which Moseley would conduct in order to 'have the names of the residents of the north cleared from stigma'.³⁰ In the towns, Aboriginal camps were feared as places where disease spread unchecked. Within schools, parents and citizens' associations expelled Aboriginal children whose hygiene was found wanting and there was little money to address this problem. Neville told the Moseley Royal Commission that while the government spent £64 5s 10d on the maintenance of each prisoner at Fremantle Gaol, the annual expenditure on each inmate at Moore River Native Settlement was only £9 13s.³¹ The only humanitarian organisation to form in the 1930s was the Australian Aborigines Amelioration Association (AAAA), comprising a few compassionate individuals.³² A more popular approach to race relations at the time is found in Ernestine Hill's *Sunday Sun* article commemorating the Coniston massacre, entitled 'Murray – The Scourge of the Myalls: Man Whose Gun Keeps White Men Safe in the Wilds'.³³ Bennett described herself during these years as having 'no natural prudence', and certainly hostility within the community combined with her lack, at this time, of a political sense would lead to the conclusion that while she had publicised the Aboriginal question through her direct accusations this was not the beginning of a movement for change.³⁴

Educational leadership: 'My great joy and privilege to be working among them again'

When she appeared before Commissioner Moseley in March 1934 Mary Bennett was working at Mount Margaret Mission, 350 kilometres north-east of Kalgoorlie. She had arrived on Christmas Eve 1931 after spending most of the day on the train that stopped at the dying towns that had sprung up during the rush for gold at the turn of the century. The neat, ordered, isolated village of Mount Margaret, with the goats munching on the mulga scrub, must have been a strange and welcoming sight after the long trip through the red earth and the grey saltbush, the mullock heaps and the abandoned mine sites that had put an end to the centuries-long lifestyle of a people adapted to their arid environment. She was welcomed by Rod Schenk and his wife Mysie who had established the mission a decade earlier.

She had already spent a year researching the situation in Western Australia, visiting and volunteering at missions from Gnowangerup, south of Perth, to Forrest River in the Kimberley, with her ears open and her mouth shut, as she put it.³⁵ A condition of her volunteer work, imposed by Chief Protector Neville, was that she would not publish while she was there; recognition surely of her power to influence public opinion.³⁶ She reported to

the ASAPS that ‘unless you came here you could not realize the brutality’ adding that the Western Australian Governor, Sir William Campion, has been ‘pocketed by the pastoralists’.³⁷

She would later explain that she went to Mount Margaret Mission because she believed the people from this region – ‘the broken and embittered remnants of the tribes on the deserted goldfields’ whose lives had been turned upside down when Paddy Hannan discovered gold in 1893 – were the most desperately in need.³⁸ Here Mary, initially with a six-month contract, began teaching spinning and weaving to the women. She told Bessie Rischbieth, ‘I am so happy and encouraged to find them taking up spinning and weaving with enthusiasm, and doing both ever so much better than I can already’.³⁹ The mixed descent population of Western Australia was increasing and it was this group that Chief Protector Neville was keen to see educated; nevertheless, the children of full descent were also welcomed in classes at Mount Margaret. When Neville came on a tour of inspection the children of full descent were told to go bush for the day.⁴⁰ Neville’s policy of absorption for children of mixed descent privileged them over their classmates of full descent. His view was that mixed race children could find their way within the mainstream of white Australian society while those of full descent were doomed to die out.⁴¹

The Aborigines Department, not the Education Department, was legally responsible for Aboriginal education, but it did not support education provided by missions. Mary Bennett used her own private means to buy books, pencils, pens and crayons. The Education Department’s Correspondence School refused to supply course materials to Aboriginal students at Mount Margaret so Bennett had to acquire these from the mothers of white children. These secondhand materials became the basis of the program that Bennett developed. Not having had the experience of school herself, as she was taught by governesses, she had few preconceptions about formal schooling but a great enthusiasm to learn.⁴² Up to seven levels of teaching were provided and, because of limited staff, classes went for, on average, two hours. She took no more than a dozen students at any one time. She developed an educational approach that was way ahead of 1930s’ educational practice, adapting Montessori methods to her situation. Her teaching was action-centred and involved students in their own learning. She solved the teacher shortage by giving the older children experience teaching the younger ones, thus ensuring that both the student-teachers and their charges gained from the class. She ensured that the activities were both varied and fun using flash cards and number boards adapted from shipboard games, and children were rewarded for their effort with oranges and other fresh fruits, rare delicacies in this remote desert environment.⁴³

Twice a year the children sat the Western Australian annual and half-yearly tests in arithmetic, dictation, geography, history and English with

remarkable success: almost all students passed and a number achieved full marks.⁴⁴ Bennett kept detailed records of the children's progress, frequently pointing out in school reports that despite their short instruction periods their achievements were above the state average. Sixty years later, some former pupils of Mrs Bennett (as they still called her) shared their memories of her with me. They recalled the open days when their work was on display for bush native parents who knew little of European education. They would come in to the classroom decorated with the writing, drawing, sewing, weaving and carpentry created by their children. The children would serve them with dishes they had prepared themselves. For these parents who had chosen to leave their children at Mount Margaret the experience must have been an affirming one. Certainly for the children there was no doubt about their teacher, Mrs Bennett. 'She gave us the best education she could imagine at the time' one of her former pupils told me and another added as evidence 'you got into trouble if you confused the cheese knife with the butter knife'. They were being taught to take their place as educated, equal citizens in Australian society.⁴⁵

Mary Bennett educated herself about teaching, subscribing to a British educational journal *Child Education* and establishing contacts with educationists in Australia.⁴⁶ She maintained an active correspondence with Anton Vroland, a progressive educationist in Victoria who regularly sent teaching materials to her and discussed teaching methods and assessment. He visited Mount Margaret and reported that 'in spite of very great and discouraging difficulties quite extraordinary progress has been made due to great enthusiasm, untiring energy applied with much judgement'. He recognised that her plan of working classes as shifts meant she could give undivided attention to students.⁴⁷

Bennett saw education as preparation for life in the world of white people. Her *Teaching the Aborigines* illustrates most clearly her educational philosophy.⁴⁸ Being economically self-sufficient was important, so children had to be taught skills that would make them employable. Speaking English, not pidgin, would allow children to avoid 'their lurking consciousness of inferiority' which, she held, outback white people wanted to be maintained. She described pidgin English as 'an implement of serfdom' which boosted the lie of white supremacy.⁴⁹ She promoted Christian marriage because through it a woman is freed from 'property status' and able to choose her life partner. The battle between 'the old polygamists' and young women was never easy at Mount Margaret. They were set free only after 'a long tough mental fight', Bennett reported.⁵⁰

With the world at war again when Mary Bennett wrote her report for the year ending June 1940, she could no longer maintain the objective measuring of success that was a feature of earlier reports. Her 1939 report detailed

numbers of pupils at each level, numbers of hours of instruction and successes at the examinations and work completed from the correspondence program, the papers of which she pointedly noted were still not supplied by the government. A number of students received full marks for most of the exercises tested. Her 1940 report argued strongly for legal compulsion as necessary to prevent parents removing children from school before their training was completed. After eight years of unrelenting effort with no support from the Western Australian Government she could not hold back explaining:

Teachers spend their vitality unstintingly to help these children towards maintaining themselves in a civilized manner, and adjusting themselves with dignity in what is their native land twice over and it is not fair that their work should be undone merely because the Legislature refuses that protection to native education which white education could not survive a day without.

Her awareness of colonial educational programs in African countries and a long consideration of the responsibilities of empire led to an impassioned plea buried in this report:

Meanwhile the laws of survival require us to take note that those countries that have not freely shared their benefits are those very countries whose grip is growing feeble and futile. Trusteeship has become the key test for justifying white control of the earth's riches. It is earnestly to be hoped that Australia will awake to the appalling degree of unalleviated child illiteracy in its borders. For how is it possible to guarantee fair conditions for European children, while Western Australian native children continue to be excluded from education?⁵¹

Her calls for education to be free and compulsory for Aboriginal children as for all other Australian children, and her views of trusteeship as a test for justifying what she identified as 'white control of the earth's riches', are as essential and relevant today as they were when she penned her report over seventy years ago.

A number of Bennett's pupils achieved quite remarkable success, attesting to the depth and breadth of the education she offered them. She recognised the deeply human needs of children abandoned, as had happened to those with white fathers, and the crucial importance of self-confidence which comes from ongoing love and support. One former student described the missions as being 'like refugee camps ... where we were educated and guided'. We need to understand the context of this statement, made about thirty years ago when children of mixed descent were hunted down and forcibly taken to Moore River Aboriginal Settlement. Mrs Sadie Canning meant that Mount Margaret provided refuge where there was 'voluntary placement of full blood children by their parents and they were always accepted'.⁵² Bennett referred to 'my precious Gladys [Vincent]', one of her star pupils from Mount Margaret who was teaching at a mission school in the 1940s. Gladys had trained as a teacher and was assessed as doing a fine job,

but as a 'native teacher she was not under the *Education Act* so was overloaded with washing to do as well, consequently school had to start late on washing days'.⁵³ In 1948 Bennett alerted her former allies in the Women Service Guilds to Miss Vincent's demonstration of her teaching methods with Aboriginal children.⁵⁴

Another pupil, Sadie Corner, chose nursing as her career but had to travel to Bethesda Hospital in Melbourne to train. No hospital in Western Australia would accept her, because she was Aboriginal. A third, May Miller, also became a teacher and rose to the position of Superintendent of Aboriginal Education in Western Australia. A fourth, Dora Quinn, trained as a kindergarten teacher and taught in mission schools for many years. These women have all attested to the quality of Mary Bennett's education, with Sadie writing that she provided education in all areas: academic, social, spiritual and physical.⁵⁵ It was this holistic approach that prompted one former student to acknowledge: 'we knew that she loved us'.⁵⁶

These women and others became effective role models for the next generation. Sadie Corner would be the first Aboriginal matron in Western Australia, appointed to Leonora Hospital in 1956. She helped set up community schools and has encouraged young Aboriginal women to take up nursing. She was awarded an MBE in 1963 for her leadership, while May O'Brien's (né Miller) many achievements as both educator and children's author were recognised with the award of a British Empire Medal in 1977. And Dora Quinn and Gladys Vincent were teachers throughout their working lives. The statistical improbability of these results coming from a tiny remote Aboriginal mission school in the 1930s with no government support speaks for itself. Bennett was, in historian Peter Biskup's opinion, one of the outstanding Aboriginal educators in Australia.⁵⁷

Guiding the next generation of activists

The Australia to which Bennett returned, after spending some of the war years in England, was becoming more open to the world than in the 1930s when she first sought to stimulate a national conscience regarding Aboriginal Australians. A.O. Neville had retired and his proposed solution, biological absorption, or 'breeding out the colour' as it was known, through controlling the marriages of people of partial Aboriginal descent, was no longer proposed as an answer to what was described as 'the growing half-caste problem'. The Holocaust had provided a tragic example of the dangers of creating racial hierarchies and using them for political and social ends. Mary Bennett must have felt hopeful when she learned of the ratification by the General Assembly of the United Nations of a Declaration of Human Rights in December 1948. A declaration that identified the rights of all humans could

be appealed to when governments ignored or overrode the rights of minority groups. As she had used article 23 of the Covenant of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation's Forced Labour Convention in the 1930s to argue for the inherent rights of 'native inhabitants', so she would use the more explicit statements coming from the newly-formed United Nations Organisation. Bennett was still a member of the ASAPS in London and in contact with her fellow activists from the 1930s but she now sought out new organisations, aware of the need to align herself with the forces for change.

The Council for Aboriginal Rights in Victoria, which was formed in 1951 to 'plan, conduct and organise the widest possible support for a campaign to obtain justice for all Australian Aborigines', was one of these.⁵⁸ Within a few months of this body having been established Bennett was in contact with the secretary and had joined up, meeting a nucleus of younger activists who would drive the national movement for Aboriginal rights and justice for almost the next twenty years. She met Stan Davey at the inaugural conference of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) in Adelaide in 1958. Davey, who was the general secretary of this first national activist body for Aboriginal rights, described her as having a tremendous influence on his thinking and as one of the first ever to publicise information about Aboriginal culture. Davey recalled that she spoke about the need to respect Aboriginal cultural structures and the importance of land to Aboriginal people.⁵⁹ His discussions with her led him to re-evaluate his thinking about the nature of his responsibility to assist Aboriginal communities. Another FCAA executive member, Dr Barry Christophers, president of the Council for Aboriginal Rights, described Bennett as the 'spiritual leader' of his generation of activists. To Shirley Andrews, honorary secretary of the Council for Aboriginal Rights and a FCAA committee member, Bennett was a remarkable woman who had an understanding of the place of Aboriginal people in the human race.⁶⁰ Bennett's ideas and approaches would continue to influence the thinking of this generation of activists and others after her death.

The power of her ideas, and a broad international outlook coupled with strong, longstanding engagement with the Wongutha people of Kalgoorlie and surrounds, meant Mary Bennett was well placed to influence the thinking of the next generation. When the Council for Aboriginal Rights decided to produce a book, *The Struggle For Dignity*, to set out a picture of Aboriginal life on a nationwide scale they asked Bennett to write the chapter on Western Australia. In this chapter she demonstrated conclusively that the *Native Welfare Act 1954* and the regulations under it infringed human rights. For example, section eight of the act was used to remove children who were *not* neglected or delinquent from their parents while neglected or delinquent children were removed in the same way as other children, by charging parents and having the case heard in the children's court. Similarly, she pointed out

that the act prevented Aboriginal people from crossing the twentieth parallel south supposedly to ‘limit the spread of leprosy within the state’ but no such requirement existed in the *Health Act*. After 1959 the *Social Services Act* provided benefits to Aboriginal workers unless they followed a mode of life which was ‘in the opinion of the Director-General, nomadic or primitive’, in which case benefits were withheld.⁶¹ White itinerant workers were not barred from unemployment benefits so as in the earlier cases it would seem that legislation was still used directly to discriminate against Aboriginal applicants. Bennett’s paramount concern was the destruction of the Aboriginal family, the most important question being the separation of children from parents. She argued, as she had decades earlier, that such forced separation affected the development of children’s personality and character.⁶² She died before *The Struggle for Dignity*, which was dedicated to her, was published. To her co-authors she was a ‘great crusader’ who devoted her life to Aboriginal emancipation.⁶³

In 1954 Bennett took up the case of one child removed from his parents and, with the aid of Shirley Andrews, campaigned for the child to be restored to his family. John Tjantjiga and his wife Fanny Baninya and child Peter had come in, starving, from the desert to Cundalee Mission, 160 kilometres east of Kalgoorlie where Bennett was teaching at the time. The parents left their son there while they found a place to live. Traditional animosities with other tribal groups at Cundalee meant that the parents travelled west, finding accommodation near Kalgoorlie and then applied, unsuccessfully, to have their son returned to them and to be educated at Kurrawang Mission nearby.⁶⁴

Bennett drew on old and new networks to publicise the dispute between the parents and the Western Australian Government. The government supported the Kurrawang missionaries who insisted that it was in the child’s interests for him to remain under their care, despite the wishes of the parents. Bennett sought the support of the Western Australian Native Welfare Council, the Women’s Service Guild, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, and the ASAPS. She also wrote to Shirley Andrews who took up the case directly with Western Australian and Federal politicians and bureaucrats, as Bennett did herself. Under section 8 of the *Native Welfare Act* the Commissioner was the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children under the age of twenty-one.⁶⁵ In the process of advocating for the rights of parents, as in the 1930s when she was pressing for the rights of women, she ensured, through her combination of passion and reason, that this breach of human rights was widely publicised.⁶⁶ She wrote:

There is no provision for native parents to appeal to a magistrate, or if, like Peter’s parents, they cannot speak English, there is no provision for them to have their case presented for them by one whom they could call their friend. The result to the desert Aborigines of being under this law and not knowing English,

is that they lose their Human Rights: for State Departments deal with the native community IN THE MASS, but human beings suffer INDIVIDUALLY. They suffer the oppression and frustration of discriminatory laws which infringe more than one Human Right, and they suffer their personal tragedies, of which Peter's case is an example. The point is that native children are held – not like the children of other races, by the decision of a judicial body, but – by order of an executive official who can take away the perfectly well-behaved children of perfectly well behaved parents, and the parents have no opportunity to state their case.⁶⁷

The campaign failed because the mission authorities and the administrators had the law on their side, but in the process of campaigning Bennett publicised the injustice and deepened Andrews' engagement with the victims of unjust laws.⁶⁸ In the years following Bennett's death, Andrews, along with Davey, Christophers and others would continue to campaign for the removal of state laws which took away people's human rights.⁶⁹

Perhaps one of Bennett's most enduring contributions to the national Aboriginal rights movement was her exhortation that activists use the declarations and conventions of international bodies as political weapons. Australians saw themselves as living in a democracy and yet Bennett demonstrated that six of the articles of the Declaration of Human Rights did not apply to Aboriginal Australians. In her last published work, the booklet *Human Rights for Aborigines: How Can they Learn without a Teacher?*, she detailed how Australian governments dishonoured the declaration when it came to Aboriginal Australians. Articles 16, 17, 23, 25, 26 asserted the individual's rights to a decent standard of living, to education, to work and benefits and to family life protected by the state. Article three, that 'everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of the person', like the others was contravened by state laws such as Western Australia's *Native Welfare Act (1905–1954)*. Each chapter of this booklet graphically contrasted Aboriginal lived reality with the upright words of the declaration to which Australia was a signatory.⁷⁰ Shirley Andrews, invited by Bennett to contribute a final chapter 'The Future' to this booklet pointed out that a survey by Dr Charles Duguid, the South Australian activist who shared Bennett's concern about the destruction of the Aboriginal family, showed that no less than nineteen of the thirty articles excluded Aboriginal people. In 1957 most Aboriginal people in Australia led 'a narrow and restricted existence on the fringes of society', Andrews reminded readers.⁷¹

In 1957 the International Labour Conference had adopted convention 107, 'Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries'. As a result of Bennett's proposal to FCAA conference organisers, including Shirley Andrews and Stan Davey, this convention was made the basis of discussion at the second annual conference of FCAA. The conference called on the federal

and state governments to implement the provisions of ILO Convention 107 so that the Commonwealth Parliament could ratify the convention. Resolutions were passed at the conference that emphasised respect for culture and language, the need for vocational training and equal education facilities, a right to land, a right to fair conditions of employment. The idea of ‘integration’, which was seen as allowing more cultural negotiation for Aboriginal people joining the mainstream than was implied by the term ‘assimilation’, was taken up by the advancement associations and leagues such as FCAA and the Victorian Aborigines’ Advancement League.⁷² Over the following years the FCAA would support rights to language, to culture and to land, ideas set out by Bennett in the 1930s.⁷³ In the introduction to *Struggle for Dignity*, her role in promoting this convention as the basis for FCAA work was acknowledged.⁷⁴

In 1960, the year before her death, deeply saddened by the plight of her Wongutha friends, Bennett appealed to Shirley Andrews. She had already warned Andrews: ‘I may not be here, so I want you to have all the facts and I do pray you to protect our children. I feel you will.’⁷⁵ Now more than facts were needed as she told Andrews that, for her, living in Kalgoorlie was like ‘watching people drown and being pushed under. I think some of us must be condemned hereafter for just this.’⁷⁶ She took small family groups into a photographic studio in Kalgoorlie for professionally posed photographs, the sort of photographs that middle-class white families reserved for weddings and special family groupings. One was of Mrs Lulu Bilson, who Mary had met almost thirty years earlier in Kalgoorlie hospital after Lulu had lost her arm, with her grandchildren. Another of Norman Bilson, an old man refused the pension because he had no birth certificate. The Maher parents look poor but optimistic with their two babies. Bennett’s spidery writing under the photograph explained that they got no child endowment, but if the parents relinquished their children the receiving mission would get the endowment. Daisy and Angel Imari were elderly station workers. Bennett wrote under their photo: ‘It happens that they are not always paid and there is no redress.’⁷⁷

Shirley Andrews had just accepted responsibility for a FCAA subcommittee on Aboriginal wages and employment when she received these photos. She was conscious of how the law was used to exclude, for example through the amended *Social Services Act* with an added clause, 137A, which stated that if an Aboriginal person followed nomadic or primitive habits such a person would be ineligible for unemployment benefits. As Andrews argued such a clause was unnecessary as those very few people still living nomadically would not be appearing at government offices in towns asking for benefits. They would not speak English and would know nothing of the system. Andrews argued that such a clause was inserted to give administrators

the power to refuse benefits to Aboriginal, but not white, itinerants. As convener of the FCAA Wages and Employment committee she wrote a booklet, *Yinjilli Leaflet*, with Rodney Hall, convener of the publicity committee, which gave Aboriginal potential claimants information about the how, when and where of applying for benefits. The Commonwealth Government had amended the Act but nothing had been done to inform those most affected. No doubt she had Mary Bennett's Wongutha friends from Kalgoorlie in mind as she wrote.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Mary Montgomerie Bennett died, after a short illness, on 6 November 1961. Many, many Wongutha people attended her funeral in Kalgoorlie to mourn the passing of their true friend. Six months later in Adelaide, speaking at the fifth annual FCAA conference, Shirley Andrews made a strong presentation that effectively launched a nationwide campaign for equal wages and employment conditions for Aborigines. She paid tribute to Mary Bennett in this speech:

One of the foundation members of this Federal Council, the late Mary Bennett, recognized these truths [that Aboriginal mission workers should receive award rates] over 30 years ago. I don't think enough credit is given Mrs Bennett for her extraordinary clear-sightedness. Many ideas that people who are interested in Aboriginal affairs are just accepting now, were put forward by Mrs Bennett many years ago.⁷⁹

Since the publication of *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being* in 1930, Bennett had consistently argued that the human rights of Aboriginal Australians must be upheld. She held governments responsible for the provision of education and housing to make possible Aboriginal inclusion in society as workers and active citizens. As I have argued here, Bennett's ideas, such as a right for people to raise their children, were accepted by the 1950s but were challenged in 1930s Western Australia. Meanwhile, Bennett prepared her students for future citizenship, recognising the need for Aboriginal adaptation as well as adaptation by the broader society. In the 1950s, when Bennett was in her seventies, she recognised that the national movement for Aboriginal rights and justice provided an opportunity for change. She ensured her ideas were heard and took steps to see that they were realised. Her *Human Rights for Aborigines* applied the principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to Aboriginal Australians. The relationships she cultivated with the younger generation of activists ensured these ideas and the strategy to implement them by continuing to remind governments of their responsibilities under international conventions, became the basis for real reform. Bennett's leadership was ethically based and

grounded in her love and respect for Aboriginal people. Her ideas were sound, and her dedication was unwavering. Her former pupils and the activists who stand on her shoulders provide the evidence of her leadership.

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¹ Mary Bennett to Shirley Andrews, 12 May 1954, MS 12913/4/6 Council for Aboriginal Rights papers (CAR), State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

² Helen Cameron Roberts to Reverend F.H. Griffiths, 21 November 1961, in the author's possession.

³ Dr Ramsay Smith, Commonwealth Year Book for 1909, quoted in M.M. Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being* (London: Alston Rivers, 1930).

⁴ Roberts to Griffiths, 21 November 1961.

⁵ Letter from Dora Cotterill to the author, 4 April 2012.

⁶ G.C. Bolton and H.J. Gibbney, 'Mary Montomerie Bennett', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol.7 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 1979); Amanda Sinclair, 'Not Just "Adding Women In": Women Remaking Leadership', *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities*, ed. Rosemary Francis, Pat Grimshaw and Ann Standish (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2012), 15–34.

⁷ Over the last two decades Alison Holland, Fiona Paisley and Marilyn Lake have collectively written over eighteen articles, books and theses which examine Mary Bennett's work in the 1930s from a feminist perspective. Some of these are: Alison Holland, 'Wives and Mothers Like Ourselves: Exploring White Women's Interventions in the Politics of Race, 1920s–1940s', *Australian Historical Studies* no 117 (2001): 292–310; Alison Holland, 'Feminism, Colonialism and Aboriginal Workers: An Anti-Slavery Crusade' in *Aboriginal Workers*, special issue of *Labour History*, ed. Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins, no 69 (November 1995): 52–64; Marilyn Lake, 'Colonised and Colonising: The White Australian Feminist Subject', *Women's History Review* 2, no 3 (1993): 377–86; Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), chapter five; Fiona Paisley, "'Unnecessary Crimes and Tragedies": Race, Gender and Sexuality in Australian Policies of Aboriginal Child removal' in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Antoinette Burton (London: Routledge, 1999); Fiona Paisley, *Loving Protection? Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights 1919–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000). See also Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003); Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998); Anna Haebich, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900–1940* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1988); Sue Taffe, *Black*

and White Together: FCAATSI, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Brisbane: Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2005).

⁸ These were the Australian Federation of Women Voters, the New Settlers League of NSW, Feminist Club (Sydney), Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia, Women's Non-Party Association of South Australia, Victorian Women's Citizens' Movement, Queensland Women's Electoral League, Queensland Citizenship League, United Associations of Women (Sydney), Women's Non-Party Association of Tasmania, National Council of Women of Tasmania, Women's Reform League of NSW, Women's Union of Service of NSW, St Joan's Social and Political Alliance (Australian branch). See Alison Holland, "'Saving the Aborigines': The White Woman's Crusade: A Study of Gender, Race and the Australian Frontier, 1920s–1960s" (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 1998), Appendix B.

⁹ Mary Bennett to Travers Buxton, 22 August 1928, Brit Emp s.22, D2/21 Anti-Slavery Society papers, Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, Oxford, UK.

¹⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend* (October 1927): 109. See Neville Green, *The Forrest River Massacres* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995) for a detailed account and analysis of these killings.

¹¹ Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, 68–9.

¹² 'Raid by Blacks in Australia', *The Times*, 5 September 1928, 11. This incident was later referred to as the Coniston Massacre. Official records put the number killed at thirty-one. Historians have estimated the number to be sixty. See Andrew Markus, *Governing Savages* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990); John Cribben, *The Killing Times* (Sydney: Fontana 1984); C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1970).

¹³ Bennett to Buxton, 25 Aug 1928, Brit Emp s.22, D2/21, Anti-Slavery Society papers.

¹⁴ Bennett to Buxton, 7 September 1928, Brit Emp s.22, D2/21, Anti-Slavery Society papers.

¹⁵ Bennett to Cooke, 26 March 1929, GRG52/32/25, Cooke papers, State Records of South Australia, Adelaide; See Fiona Paisley, *The Lone Protestor: A.M. Fernando in Australia and Europe* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012) for an account of Fernando's life and activism.

¹⁶ Bennett to Buxton, 5 September 1928, Brit Emp s.22, D2/21, Anti-Slavery Society papers.

¹⁷ Mary M. Bennett, 'The Conditions of the Aborigines of Australia under the Federal Government', British Commonwealth League, Report of Conference, June 1930, 38–9 British Commonwealth League papers, Fawcett Library, London; Buxton to Cooke, 7 June 1929, Brit Emp s.22, D2/21, Anti-Slavery Society papers.

¹⁸ Mary Bennett to Bessie Rischbieth, 19 December 1931, MS2004/5 Rischbieth papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

¹⁹ 'Whites and Natives: Allegations of Slavery', *West Australian*, 17 May 1932, 12.

²⁰ 'Treatment of Aborigines: Criticism of Police', *West Australian*, 11 December 1933, 16.

- ²¹ A.O. Neville, 'Whites and Natives: Mission Allegations – A Government Denial', 19 May 1932; Henry Drake 'Whites and Natives', 30 May 1932; Ernestine Hill, 'Whites and Natives: The Position in Kimberley', *West Australian*, 26 May 1932.
- ²² G.C. Bolton, 'Black and White after 1897' in C.T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1981), 147.
- ²³ M.M. Bennett, 'The Aboriginal Mother in Western Australia in 1933', a paper read at the British League Conference, London, June 1933, British Commonwealth League papers.
- ²⁴ Bolton, 'Black and White after 1897', 147.
- ²⁵ H.D. Moseley, *Report of the Royal Commissioner appointed to Investigate, Report, and Advise upon Matters in relation to the Condition and Treatment of Aborigines* (Perth: Government Printer, 24 January 1935); See also Bolton, 'Black and White after 1897', 147–8.
- ²⁶ The Aborigines Act was amended in 1936 to enlarge the definition of those who might be classed as Aboriginal and to tighten rules about employment and consumption of liquor.
- ²⁷ Peter Biskup, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens: The Aboriginal Problem in Western Australia 1898–1954* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1973), 80–1.
- ²⁸ Bennett to John Harris, 20 October 1935, Brit Emp s. 22, G378, Anti-Slavery Society papers; see also Lake, *Getting Equal*, 130.
- ²⁹ Neville to Chief Secretary, 21 February 1938, DNM cons 993, 1936/0166, State Record Office of Western Australia, Perth.
- ³⁰ Haebich, *For Their Own Good*, 326.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 310.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 318.
- ³³ Markus, 47.
- ³⁴ Bennett to Olive Pink, 18 December 1937, MS2368, mF(a) 2 (4), Pink papers, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.
- ³⁵ Bennett to Rischbieth, 9 December 1930, MS2004/5, Rischbieth papers.
- ³⁶ Bennett to Buxton, 6 December 1930 (typed letter), Brit Emp. series 22, D2/22 Anti-Slavery Society papers.
- ³⁷ Bennett to Buxton, 6 Dec 1930 (handwritten letter), Brit Emp s22, D2/22, Anti-Slavery Society papers.
- ³⁸ Bennett to Rischbieth, 6 March 1932, MS2004/12/23, Rischbieth papers.
- ³⁹ Bennett to Rischbieth, 1 February 1932, MS2004/30, Rischbieth papers.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Jessie Evans, Kalgoorlie, 19 May 2008; Margaret Morgan, *Mt Margaret: A Drop in a Bucket* (Lawson, NSW: Mission Publications of Australia, 1986), 213.
- ⁴¹ See Pat Jacobs, *Mister Neville* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990) for details of Neville's thinking on this matter. See also *Aboriginal Welfare – Initial Conference of Commonwealth Authorities held at Canberra, 21–23 April* (Canberra: Government Printer, 1937); Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 177–80.

⁴² Record of interview with Mysie Schenk, Australian Dictionary of Biography files for entry on Mary Montgomerie Bennett, Australian Dictionary of Biography office, Coombs Building, ANU, Canberra.

⁴³ M.M. Bennett, *Teaching the Aborigines: Data from Mount Margaret Mission, WA* (Perth: City and Suburban Print, 1935); R.S. Schenk, *The Educability of the Native* (Perth: Service Printing Co., 1936).

⁴⁴ United Aborigines Mission Mount Margaret Station Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1938, June 1939, June 1940, in author's possession. Report for June 1937, MS2368, F (a) (2), Olive Pink papers.

⁴⁵ Interviews by the author with Violet Graham, Laurel Cooper, Dora Cotterill, Maisie Harkin, Olan Dimer, Jessie Evans, Bessie Dimer, Lorraine Griffiths, Kalgoorlie, 19 May 2008.

⁴⁶ Notes from interview with Mysie Schenk, Mary Montgomerie Bennett file, Australian Dictionary of Biography office, ANU.

⁴⁷ A. Vroland, 'A Visit to Mount Margaret School', 1939, MS3991/11, Vroland papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁸ Bennett, *Teaching the Aborigines*.

⁴⁹ Bennett to Andrews, 20 February 1954, MS12913, CAR papers.

⁵⁰ Bennett, *Teaching the Aborigines*, 30.

⁵¹ Annual Report of Mount Margaret Mission, June 1940, 3, copy provided to the author by May O'Brien

⁵² Sadie Canning, 'Stories from Mrs Canning (Matron, Leonora Hospital)', given to the author by May O'Brien, n.d. but 1980s.

⁵³ Bennett to Wardlaw, 17 February 1952, MS12913/4 CAR papers.

⁵⁴ Bennett to the Secretary, Women's Service Guilds, 14 September 1948, MS2004/12/134, Rischbieth papers.

⁵⁵ Canning.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jessie Evans, Kalgoorlie, 19 May 2008.

⁵⁷ Biskup, 132.

⁵⁸ Constitution of the Council for Aboriginal Rights, MS12913/9/6, CAR papers.

⁵⁹ Stan Davey interviewed by Francis Good, October 1986, NTRS 226, TS462, Northern Territory Archives Service, Darwin.

⁶⁰ Sue Taffe interview with Shirley Andrews, 26 September 1996, and Barry Christophers, 27 September 1996, Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Oral History Project, AIATSIS.

⁶¹ Section 137A of the *Social Services Act*, No 57 of 1959, Commonwealth of Australia.

⁶² Mary M. Bennett and Barry E. Christophers, 'Western Australia' in *The Struggle for Dignity: a Critical Analysis of the Australian Aborigine Today, the Laws which Govern Him and their Effects*, ed. William Murray (Melbourne: Council for Aboriginal Rights (Vic), March 1962).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Council for Aboriginal Rights correspondence, MS12913, boxes 1, 4, State Library Victoria, Melbourne; see also Lake, *Getting Equal*, chapter five.

⁶⁵ Section 8, *Native Welfare Act*, number 14 of 1905, as amended by no. 60 of 1954, Western Australia, 1954.

⁶⁶ Bennett wrote directly to the Western Australian Minister for Native Affairs, the Superintendent of Cundalee Mission, the District Officer of Native Affairs, H.A. McCulloch, MLA. She also contacted Shirley Andrews of the Council for Aboriginal Rights Victoria, the Anti-Slavery Society in London and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. All these bodies took up the issue and wrote to politicians and bureaucrats in Western Australia and federally. See MS12913/4/8, CAR papers.

⁶⁷ Bennett to Andrews, 27 March 1954, MS12913/4/6, CAR papers.

⁶⁸ Ada Bromham, 'Peter, the Story of a Clever Aboriginal Boy', *The White Ribbon Signal* (Woman's Christian Temperance Union journal), (April 1954); Shirley Andrews, 'Aboriginal Child Kept Away from his Parents', Council for Aboriginal Rights *Bulletin* (April 1954): 1–3.

⁶⁹ In 1962 Andrews' comparative chart 'The Australian Aborigines: A Summary of their Situation in all States in February 1962' was circulated, making clear for the first time how different state laws limited Aboriginal citizenship. MS12913/11/3, CAR papers.

⁷⁰ M.M. Bennett, *Human Rights for Aborigines: How Can they Learn without a Teacher?* (Brisbane: 'Truth' and 'Sportsman' Ltd, 1957).

⁷¹ Charles Duguid, 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights as it relates to the Aborigines of Australia', 24 November 1952, MS12913/8/4, CAR papers.

⁷² See Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 200–1 and Russell McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011), 101–4 for useful discussions of the interpretations of 'assimilation' and 'integration' by activists at this time.

⁷³ See Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, 135; Taffe, *Black and White Together*, chapters one and six.

⁷⁴ Introduction in Murray (ed.), *Struggle for Dignity*.

⁷⁵ Bennett to Andrews, 10 October 1953, MS12913/4/6, CAR papers.

⁷⁶ Bennett to Street, 8 September 1960, MS 2683, Street papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁷⁷ Photographs held in MS12913/12/6, CAR papers.

⁷⁸ S. Andrews and R. Hall, *A Yinjilli Leaflet* (Melbourne: Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement, 1963).

⁷⁹ Shirley Andrews, Wages and Employment of Aborigines Report, Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement, Action program arising from the 5th Annual General Meeting held in Adelaide on 22 and 23 April 1962, MS12913/10/9, State Library Victoria, Melbourne.