



Lake Tyers in 1895. All the old cottages have now been replaced by modern homes.

The History of Lake Tyers

MERLE JACKOMOS

Lake Tyers Mission was founded in 1861 by John Bulmer, an Englishman who came to Victoria in 1849 at the age of 16.

For a while he worked on the goldfields but without much success. On his return to Melbourne he attended a church meeting at St Mark's, Collingwood, where Thomas Hill Goodwin spoke about a plan to set up a mission at Yelta on the River Murray and made an appeal for someone to go with him to help. John Bulmer offered his services and was accepted as an assistant, and in May, 1855, he left with Goodwin for Yelta. After working hard there for five years he was asked to set up a mission station in Gippsland.

In June, 1861, Bulmer set out for Buchan Station, then under the care of John McLeod, the "Aboriginal Protector", but he did not stay there very long after he discovered that the lakes area south of Buchan was an ideal site for a mission. He shifted his possessions to Lake Tyers where he was to spend the next 50 years in an isolated and remote settlement. At the end of 1861 he returned to Melbourne to be married and the couple made their home at Lake Tyers.

On May 18, 1863, an area of 2,000 acres was reserved for the station and in 1889 this was increased to 4,000 acres. By late 1864 a number of huts had been erected and by 1866 Lake Tyers Station began to take a definite form.

The fine wooden church of St John's was erected in 1868. Previously Bulmer had held services in the school. The church seated 120 people and is still standing, having been restored this year. Bulmer was not an ordained Minister and had to rely on the visits of local clergy, although he took many services. He was particularly proud of the Aboriginal choir which at times sang before congregations in other churches.

During the 1880's, the Lake Tyers people became known for their sporting ability and in 1885 a team of Aborigines defeated a European team in a cricket match at Cunningham (now Lakes Entrance).

By 1906 many Aboriginal people had been shifted from Ramahyuck Station, also in Gippsland, to Lake Tyers and the closing of Ramahyuck and the increasing age of John Bulmer made it necessary to appoint a manager for Lake Tyers.

After many years as a teacher and friend, John Bulmer was ordained a priest in 1904 and became the station missionary. After being associated with Lake Tyers for over 50 years, he died on August 13, 1913, and was buried at Lakes Entrance Cemetery. With his death an era came to an end.

Mr Bruce Ferguson, who served for many years at Cummeragunja, was appointed manager of Lake Tyers in 1917 and remained there until 1935. Managers who followed included Mr George Baldwin, Captain Newman, Major Glenn, Mr Len Rule, and Mr Tom Miles. My husband, Alick Jackomos, was Officer-in-Charge until December, 1967, when the Welfare Board ceased to exist.

During the 1930's, the Lake Tyers men shone in the sporting field, particularly in football. In 1938 Lake Tyers beat Orbost in the Grand Final (18-6). In a match against Nowa Nowa in 1950, Lake Tyers scored 43 goals to Nowa Nowa's 11, with Ron Edwards kicking all the goals — an Australian record.

Sporting heroes in local athletics included Ralph Hayes, who won races at the 1937 Lindenow sports, and veteran Charlie Green, who trained Albert Hayes to run in the 1938 Stawell Gift. Noel Hood took a triple at the



Some of the residents in 1895. Left to right, back row: Mr (later Rev.) John Bulmer, Andrew Chase, Big Joe, Mary McRae, Bill Johnson, Edward McDougall, Ted Moffatt, Mrs Jennings, Mrs Ted Foster, Teddy O'Rourke, Billy Hayes, John Rivers, Ned O'Rourke; front row: Mrs O'Rourke with Edwin, Cathrine Chase, Ellen Hood with Malcolm Rivers, Maggie Johnson with Bob, Caroline Hayes with Harry.

1938 Lindenow Sports, winning the Lindenow Gift and followed this up in 1939 with a win in the Buchan Gift.

Within a few months of the outbreak of the Second World War, 17 young Aborigines from Lake Tyers had joined up. Recreational facilities increased, the gum leaf band being a popular feature on visitors' days, when boomerang throwing was demonstrated and baskets, boomerangs and other objects made by the residents were sold.

In 1962 it was announced by the Aborigines Welfare Board and the Government that the Lake Tyers Station would be closed down. Opposition to this was led by Pastor Doug Nicholls and a protest march was held by Lake Tyers and Melbourne Aborigines. There was also strong opposition from past and present Board members,

Trade Union organisations, churches, members of the public and others directly concerned with Aboriginal affairs.

As a protest, Pastor Nicholls resigned from the Welfare Board. He said the plan was contrary to the wishes of the people and declared that the Board's failure to improve conditions and its refusal to allow residents to travel freely in and out of the Reserve had virtually coerced them against their will. He protested that the plan was a "crude, heartless attempt to get rid of an embarrassing social and political problem" and later advised the Lake Tyers people to sit tight and refuse to leave.

A former resident, the late Mr Laurie Moffatt, also opposed the Government's decision and with Eric Onus, Pastor Nicholls, Charlie Carter and other Aborigines from

Farm sheds designed by Bruce Ferguson (in white coat). These buildings were dismantled by later managers.



Lake Tyers and Melbourne, led a protest march to Parliament House in Melbourne.

Pastor Nicholls asked the Government for social, economic and cultural development of Aboriginal groups and the raising of their living standards. He wanted the transfer of the Lake Tyers title to the people and called for a consultation between the Government and the people. Not long after this, a petition was presented to Parliament by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Clive Stoneham. Signed by 160 Aborigines, the petition asked for a Department of Aboriginal Affairs to be set up.

The announcement of the intended closure of Lake Tyers naturally affected the people there. There were 65 children attending school in 1962. Three years later, when the petition for a Department of Aboriginal Affairs came before Parliament, the population of Lake Tyers stood at 56 and by that year's end only 40 people remained. The biggest losses were in 1962, when 33 people left, and in 1963 when 51 went away. The few people left included Charlie and Phyllis Carter, some pensioners and their children. Charlie Carter stood firm in his fight to retain Lake Tyers and would not leave. Sadly, his wife Phyllis died a few days before the handing over of the title deeds on July 24 this year.

During 1967 a new approach was begun. The Welfare Board commissioned the Lake Tyers Project Committee

to examine and make recommendations on the running of the station. Plans were outlined to make Lake Tyers self-supporting and profit-making through activities such as farming and timber marketing. The Projects Committee also felt that if the people were to develop pride and interest in Lake Tyers they would need to be given better housing and more education opportunities. A housing programme was started and a few families moved into new homes but other features of the report did not take effect because the whole idea of the Welfare Board was under review.

On January 1, 1968, the Welfare Board was replaced by the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. Mr Reg Worthy, who had previously gained experience in the Northern Territory, became Director of the Ministry in March, 1968. His policies contrasted in many ways with those of the old days.

A Lake Tyers Council was formed and it revealed a growing desire on the part of the Lake Tyers people to help themselves and develop a community spirit. New homes were erected for all the families and they no longer had to live in sub-standard cottages. The old communal bathroom, which stood some hundred yards away from the residential area, was demolished as all the new homes had modern facilities. The gate on the boundary fence was removed, as were the signs warning visitors to keep out, and from then on the residents could have relatives or visitors call on them without permission. The Lake Tyers

Lake Tyers Football Club Premiers, 1938. Left to right, back row: Cliff Hayes, Bob Andy, Len Harrison, Ted Millett, Con Edwards, Alf Harrison; centre row: Eugene Mubourne, Fred Johnson, Charlie Logan, William Wandin, Ron Edwards, Harold Hayes, Noel Hood; front row: Sam Rankin, Joe Wandin, Alf Carter, Albert Hayes, Stan Harrison, Wally Taylor, Mascot, Peter Wandin.





The Service of Thanksgiving for the restoration of St John's Church, built in 1868. The service was held by the Bishop of Gippsland, the Right Reverend D. A. Garnsey.

people were also allowed to own their own vehicles.

Over the past four years the area has undergone a complete change. The old cottages, broken fences, cattle wandering between the houses, and the hopelessness of the residents have all disappeared. Today, Lake Tyers is primarily a farm consisting of 1,000 cleared acres and 3,000 acres of forest cleared and sown with grass. New fences have been erected and the road from Prince's Highway widened and improved. All this has been done by the men of Lake Tyers.

In December, 1970, just 100 years after it first opened, the school was closed at the request of the residents and the children were transferred to the nearby State school at Nowa Nowa, to which they travel each day by bus.

When Sir Rohan Delacombe presented the title deeds of Lake Tyers to the people, Charlie Carter said: "This is our land and we are proud of it. After all, you white fellows weren't the first to discover Australia — we were here first."

Pastor Doug Nicholls, Senior Vice-President of the Aborigines Advancement League and a member of the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee, said the granting of the Lake Tyers title deeds had opened the door to land rights for all Aborigines.

"This is the biggest thing in the history of the Aboriginal people of Australia," he said. "It will have a big impact on the other States. We have fought for this with bitter experience but the winds of change are blowing. Now we have the chance to prove ourselves by working for our own destiny. We are forgetting the past and beginning the future — and the future lies with you."

STRADBROKE DREAMTIME

Kath Walker

In this collection of delightful short stories for children, Kath Walker recaptures the gay and sad episodes of her childhood as a member of her Aboriginal family on Stradbroke Island and in the second half of the book returns to her heritage of traditional Aboriginal folklore, which she recalls hearing as a child. Her style is refreshingly sensitive in its simplicity and realism as she relives her early life.

Illustrated with line drawings throughout.



ANGUS & ROBERTSON
Australia's Largest
Publishers
