

Yarra Bend Park



Aboriginal History

Yarra Bend Park has a rich Aboriginal past, and once included the locations of the Yarra Aboriginal Protectorate Station and the Merri Creek Aboriginal School. The Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council Inc., Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and Parks Victoria have installed signs marking the location of important Aboriginal places in the Park.

The confluence of Merri Creek and the Yarra River has been important to Aboriginal people both before and after European settlement in Victoria. The traditional landowners were the Wurundjeri balluk, who were part of the Woiwurrung language group.

The location served as an important camping ground, and large ceremonies and gatherings were held there. The Koori Garden, created by local Aboriginal people in 1990, commemorates this former gathering place.

Today the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council Inc. are the Aboriginal custodians of the area.

The Yarra Aboriginal Protectorate Station

In 1835 Europeans settled at the site of Melbourne, then known as Port Phillip. By the 1840's they had occupied most of the country belonging to the Wurundjeri.

The Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate was established to 'protect' Aboriginal people from frontier violence by encouraging them to move to government stations. From 1843 to 1847, the headquarters for the Melbourne or Western Port district of the Protectorate was a small hut located on a bluff overlooking the Yarra River (in the vicinity of W.J. Cox Oval). At this location Assistant Protector William Thomas distributed rations, and conducted school classes and religious services for Aboriginal people.

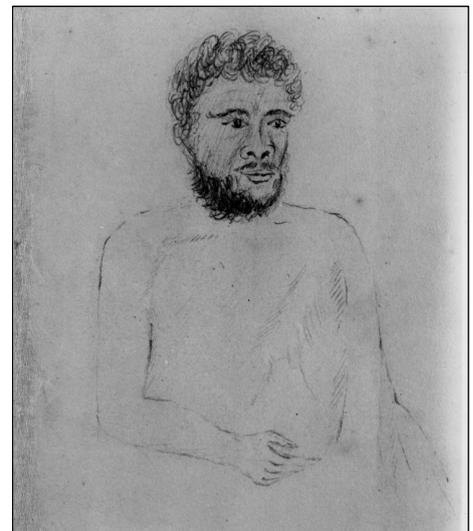
The Native Police Corps were also stationed at this locality between 1843 and 1844. The Corps consisted of Aboriginal men under the leadership of Captain Dana and were involved in dealing with disputes between Aboriginal and European people across Victoria.

They were also the first police on the goldfields and acted as guards at Pentridge Prison in Coburg.

The Merri Creek Aboriginal School

The Merri Creek Aboriginal School was located beside the Merri Creek, close to what is now the Eastern Freeway.

The school was established in 1846 by the Collins Street Baptist Church. While the School received some government support, its early success relied on Billibellary, an important Wurundjeri *ngurungaeta*, or spokesperson. He sent his children to the school and urged other parents to do the same.



Billibellary, a ngurungaeta or spokesperson of the Wurundjeri balluk (La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria).



For further information

Parks Victoria
Information Centre

Call 13 1963

or visit the

Parks Victoria website

www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Caring for the environment

Help us look after your park by following these guidelines:

Please take rubbish away with you for recycling & disposal

All native plants & animals are protected by law.

Please do not disturb them in any way

Dogs are permitted in the park, but must be kept on a leash within on-lead zones. Call the office for information on dog zones

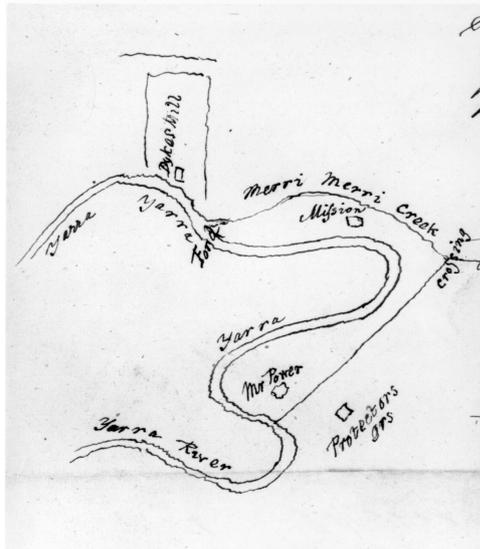
Portable solid fuel barbeques or ovens are not permitted in the park.

Portable gas barbeques are allowed

No fires, including barbeques, may be lit on a day of Total Fire Ban

The Merri Creek Aboriginal School began in a house consisting of five rooms. Boys were taught spelling, grammar, arithmetic, and carpentry, while girls were instructed in needlework, cooking and other domestic activities. After their classes and on weekends, the pupils tended crops and grew vegetables.

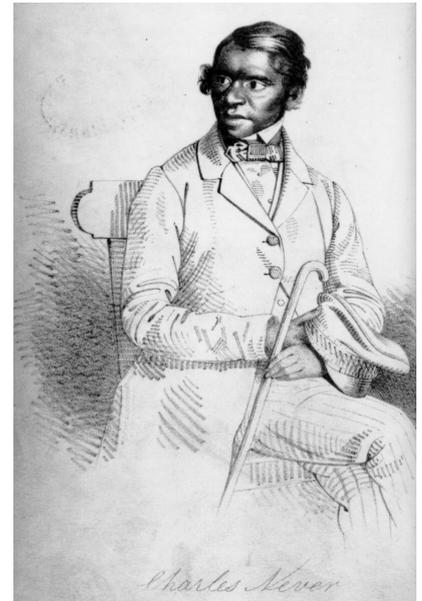
After the death of Billibellary in 1846, many Aboriginal people left the area and numbers at the school dwindled. In 1849, boys at the school constructed a bridge over the Merri Creek on which they collected a toll from people crossing. However, a flood in 1850 destroyed the bridge, and washed away the vegetable and flower gardens around the school.



1847 sketch map showing location of the 'Mission' or Merri Creek Aboriginal School and 'Dykes' or Dights Mill. The Creek Crossing and 'Protectors Quarters' are also shown (PROV, VPRS 11, Unit 10, Item 658. Reproduced with permission).



Billibellary's wife and child (La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria).



Murrumwiller or Charles Never was one of the Pupils at the Merri Creek Aboriginal School (La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria).

The Wurundjeri people's resistance to the separation of children from their culture led to the closure of the school in 1851.

Later in 1865 (only 14 years after the school closed) Lucy Edgar, the daughter of a teacher at the school, recalled:

"Our pleasant little valley was like the bush again, of the school-house not a stick was left; and of our dwelling all that remained was a small pile of broken bricks".

Drawing on the strengths of a rich culture, Aboriginal people survived the devastating effects of European settlement.

For further information see:

Clark, I. and Heydon, T. 1998 *The confluence of the Merri Creek and Yarra River. A History of the Westernport Aboriginal protectorate and the Merri Creek Aboriginal School*. Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Melbourne.

Lemon, A. 1983 *The Northcote Side of the River*. Hargreen, North Melbourne.

Produced with the assistance of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, and in consultation with representatives of the Wurundjeri community.

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