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VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HONOUR ROLL
MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

The Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll captures the stories of Aboriginal people, past and present, who have made an outstanding contribution to our state.

With a further 15 inductees this year, the Honour Roll celebrates a total of 79 people, who through their efforts and energy, have made Victoria a better place.

Of the inductees this year, we recognise a historical leader, a master craftswoman, gifted musicians and performing artists, a world class graphic designer, along with passionate advocates and respected cultural leaders.

While these contributions are spread across different times and places, each individual has ensured our state is more cohesive, more cultured and more connected.

Through the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll, we pay the inductees the respect that is due and ensure their legacies are kept for many years to come.

I congratulate all the inductees past and present.

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
State of Victoria
The Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll is the only one of its kind in our country. Celebrating the breadth of achievement across Victoria’s Aboriginal community, the Honour Roll ensures these contributions are recognised and recorded for future generations.

This year’s 15 inductees are all exemplary leaders. Each inductee demonstrates the richness and diversity of contributions being made by Aboriginal people to their community and to the state of Victoria.

Their moving stories need to be shared more widely. That’s why each year the Honour Roll travels across Victoria, raising public awareness of the inspiring achievements of the inductees and encouraging nominations for future inclusion.

This touring exhibition gives communities across the state an opportunity to learn more about the contributions of the amazing inductees, before the Honour Roll returns to its permanent home at the Victorian Parliament.

I’d like to thank the Honour Roll Advisory Panel for carrying out the challenging task of making recommendations from the many nominations received.

I’d also like to thank the inductees and their families for allowing us to share their stories – they are an inspiration for us all.

Of course, many Aboriginal people in Victoria have made significant contributions that deserve to be recognised. I look forward to seeing these names and stories added to the Honour Roll for future generations.

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
ROBERT WANDIN  
(C1855 – 1908)

AN HISTORIC LEADER WHO FOUGHT FOR THE FUTURE OF HIS PEOPLE

Following in the footsteps of his Wurundjeri elders, Simon Wonga and William Barak, historic Aboriginal leader Robert Wandin (also known as Wandoon) fought to make a better life for his people.

Robert Wandin was the son of Borat, William Barak’s sister. He was born in the Steel’s Flat area of the Upper Yarra but there are conflicting stories about his infant years.

One such story is that he was rescued from drowning in the Wandin Yallock Creek by settler Robert Brierty and spent some time with the Brierty family. However, by 1863, at about the age of seven, he was living at the newly established Coranderrk Reserve, having come there with Scottish lay preacher (and first Superintendent) John Green and his wife.

Robert was well cared for by the Greens, stating later in life that John Green ‘took me when I was a baby, and looked after me as if I was one of his own sons.’ Robert’s mother also came to Coranderrk from Port Albert, but is believed to have died of tuberculosis around 1870.


The Wurundjeri and other Kulin tribes had been badly affected by the spread of colonial settlement in Victoria. Through the leadership of William Barak, and with the support and friendship of John Green and philanthropist Mrs Anne Fraser Bon, they established a productive community at Coranderrk.

The Kulin people managed to preserve their culture and heritage despite the interventions of the European administration and missionaries. To ensure his people continued to be well led, William Barak made it known that Robert and two others, Thomas Dunolly and Thomas Bamfield, could speak for him and write his words. They were trusted young men who would be the Ngurungaeta (leaders) of the future. Robert’s education from a young age gave him not only English language skills, but also the confidence to stand up for his rights.

Robert experienced many changes at Coranderrk, particularly after Superintendent John Green was replaced by the Reverend Frederick Strickland. Robert’s work at Coranderrk included stock-riding, mustering and butchering. He occasionally travelled to the Goulburn district to do shearing. However, the main crop produced at Coranderrk was hops which Robert spent a good part of his working life sowing and cultivating.

Like the other five missions and reserves set aside for Aboriginal people by the colonial government of Victoria in the 1860s, Coranderrk was under the control of the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines. It was located on the Yarra River flats near Healesville and covered 931 hectares (around 2,300 acres).
Although the conditions in many reserves were far from ideal, the people of Coranderrk were determined to remain on their reserve and have a degree of independence. Under the leadership of William Barak, they wrote petitions and sent deputations to the Victorian government during the 1870s and 1880s asserting their rights.

In 1881 the government decided to close Coranderrk. Barak led 22 of the settlement’s best men, including Robert Wandin, to Melbourne to appeal to the Chief Secretary for the right to remain on the land and for the reinstatement of John Green. Their actions led to the 1881 Parliamentary Inquiry in which Robert played an important role.

He was able to clearly express to those in authority the problems his people encountered and he was the only person called on to testify twice. He was vocal about the conditions at Coranderrk, pointing out, amongst other things, the lack of food rations for working men; the poor quality clothing that was supplied in the summer rather than in the winter when needed; and that payment for work was insufficient to cover the cost of meat or extra clothing. His concerns were often for his family rather than for himself. When asked if he had enough blankets to keep warm in winter he stated: ‘No, not half enough. I have to get up often and make a fire to warm the children.’

While his wife and children remained in good health, Robert himself suffered from rheumatic fever. However, when asked whether he would prefer to be at Lake Tyers where there was ‘plenty of hunting and shooting’, Wandin made it clear that he did not want to leave Coranderrk. He replied, ‘No, I would sooner be working … I have made it my home, I would like to stay’.

When Robert died of heart disease in January 1908 his loss was mourned by all at Coranderrk. John Mackie, the acting Manager of the time, stated:

‘I cannot omit referring to the loss the station has sustained by the death of Robert Wandin. He had been on the station from its very beginning, and for many years he had been an influence for good among the natives and a great assistance to the manager. His son Joseph, who is a State schoolmaster, is stationed at Mordialloc, and is a credit to the station.’

Robert Wandin’s fight for better conditions at Coranderrk provided an inspiring example for Aboriginal leaders who followed in his footsteps in years to come. His leadership set the foundations for later campaigns for Aboriginal land rights, justice and independence.

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1 Report of the Board appointed to enquire into and report upon the present condition and management of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, together with the Minutes of Evidence (1882).

A MUCH-LOVED ELDER AND MASTER CRAFTSWOMAN

Aunty Constance ‘Connie’ Hart (nee Alberts) is remembered as a dignified Gunditjmara woman who did not like a lot of fuss. In her quiet way, she ensured significant cultural and family knowledge was retained, shared and passed on to future generations.

Connie was born at Little Dunmore on Gunditjmara country in Western Victoria. Her grandfather, Henry Alberts, moved his family there to escape the restrictions of life on nearby Lake Condah Aboriginal Mission, where practising traditional language, beliefs and crafts was discouraged. Connie’s father, Angus, grew up at Little Dunmore. Her mother, Frances (nee Carter) grew up on the mission. There she learned it was best to hide traditional ways and adopt ‘white people’s ways.’

Like many Gunditjmara people, Connie moved to Melbourne looking for work in the 1930s. She lived in Footscray and later Carlton. During World War II Connie worked at the same Footscray ammunition factory as Margaret Tucker. Connie met and married Donald Hart at this time.

Connie was a talented pianist and played in concerts to raise funds for the Australian Aborigines League. She used her home in Melbourne as a welcoming base for visiting community members, including her brother, when he was on leave from active service during World War II. After the war, she worked at St Vincent’s Hospital and in a shoe factory.

Whenever she could Connie would return to Little Dunmore where her son, Don, lived with his grandparents, but also welcomed family members to Melbourne for holiday treats.

In the early 1960s, Connie returned to her country to nurse her elderly mother who was in poor health. After her mother died, she moved to Portland, working as a cleaner and providing...
loving care to her nieces, nephews and grandchildren. Well-known and respected by many in Portland, she made a point of passing on family knowledge to the younger generation.

Family members remember that she always made sure they knew who they were and where they had come from. Connie kept a photographic collection of the families and children associated with Lake Condah. When members of the Stolen Generations came home searching for their people, Connie was able to tell them where they belonged.

Connie kept quiet about her knowledge of weaving until she was in her sixties. She was frightened that if she shared this cultural knowledge with members of her family, their children would be taken from them. When her nieces finally persuaded her to teach them how to weave in the 1980s, she conducted the first classes behind locked doors, with the curtains firmly closed.

As she wove, she told stories. Her nieces spread the word about Aunty Connie’s skills and she gradually began to share her knowledge more widely, teaching the many people who flocked to her classes. Her nieces and great-nieces remember learning at her knee as she patiently shared her craft. They have fond memories of going out into the paddocks to find and pick the local Puung ‘ort grass to use for weaving.

Many galleries and museums in Australia have collected examples of Connie’s craft. Her work is greatly admired for its precision and order. She conducted classes and demonstrations for many cultural institutions.

Connie used her craft to revive valuable cultural knowledge of Gunditjmara practices thought to have been lost. Remarkably she was able to recreate from memory the traditional woven eel traps used by the Gunditjmara to farm eels on the swamps at Lake Condah. Historians have used her knowledge and traditional practices to better understand Gunditjmara history.

Connie did not slow down with age. She was in great demand as a teacher and craftswoman, but also served her own community. She was an inaugural board member of the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation and of the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the first such group established in Victoria. Sadly, Connie passed away long before Gunditjmara Native Title was officially recognised in 2007. She had helped to achieve this recognition by making sure members of her family and community knew their history. Until the end of her life Aunty Connie was loved and respected by many in the south-western Victorian community. Her legacy lives on, not only in the craft practised by members of her family, but in the wider cultural knowledge that she preserved and generously shared.
THOMAS JOHN ‘MASSA’ CLARKE
(1926-1990)

A DECORATED SOLDIER WHO LED BY EXAMPLE

Thomas John Clarke gave the best years of his life in service of his country, in three wars and several military campaigns where he earned 11 medals for his courage in battle.

Born in Bordertown, South Australia, in 1926, Tom was a Jardwadjali/Gunditjmara man. He was the youngest of the seven children of Emma Edna (nee Harradine) and John (known as Jack) Murray Clarke.

Emma was born at the Ebenezer Mission in the Wimmera and Jack was born at Framlingham Mission in South West Victoria. Tragically Jack drowned in the Wimmera River two months before Tom’s birth. Tom’s siblings were Laurence, Isobel, Eric, George, and twins Reginald and Irene.

Times were tough for the young family without their father. The older children looked after the younger ones while Emma supported them through domestic work. Tom completed his schooling at Lillimur near Kaniva but the family moved around, living at times near Red Cliffs, Dimboola and Lochiel.

In 1942 Tom joined the Citizen’s Military Force, giving his age as 18 although he was probably only 16 or 17. His older brother Reg, with whom he was very close, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in 1943 and Tom was keen to join him, transferring to the AIF at the same time.

The brothers soon found themselves engaging with the enemy in the jungles of Rabaul in New Britain (now Papua New Guinea) and both fought in the battle of Tarakan in Borneo. Tom stayed with the Army until February 1947 and served with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan. He was stationed in Nagasaki and was deeply affected by the destruction he witnessed there.

It is believed that Tom got his nickname ‘Massa’ (slang for Master) when he first joined the army as he had a commanding presence. In later years other soldiers he served with associated the name with his ‘massive’ chest as he always stood tall and proud.

He rejoined the Army in July 1951 and again saw active service in the Korean War with the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR), before being discharged in February 1953 and returning to Australia.

Tom tried his hand at many types of work during the 1950s, including cane cutting in Innisfail, bagging grain near
Bordertown, working on the railways at Mildura and Dimboola and also harvesting salt at the Pink Lake near Dimboola.

Tom always gravitated back to his family in the Bordertown and Dimboola areas whenever he could, but he missed army life and signed on again in September 1961. He was actively engaged for two years in Malaya and Sarawak, Borneo, during the Indonesian Confrontation. Soon after Australia entered the Vietnam War (1962-75) and Tom was again on active service, attached initially to the 1st Battalion, and later to the 4th and 7th Battalions of the RAR.

Tom rose to the rank of Lance Corporal, but according to his family he was ‘promoted and demoted more times than you could count’. His love of army life did not extend to an appreciation of the strict chain of command and he was often disciplined for insubordination. While he’s been described as a ‘natural leader’, he was happiest amongst the ranks leading by example rather than according to his stripes.

Some perspectives on Tom’s personality are gained through an account of his Company’s experience on Operation Coburg, a three day battle fought during the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam.1 His skill in the field, particularly in the bush, was undisputed. ‘He could smell, hear and see things long before anyone else did’ and was reputed to have a charismatic effect on many young diggers serving with him.

He was wounded in February 1968, during Operation Coburg, when shrapnel from a rocket-propelled grenade ripped through the bridge of his nose. Tom was air-lifted to the US Army hospital at Long Binh but ‘when they pulled him off the chopper they thought he was dead.’ Fortunately, as he was being tagged, ‘he let out a loud bellow and sat up’ and was rushed to the operating theatre. After recovering from the injury he was returned to Australia.

Tom served out his army days at the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, Queensland, and was discharged in September 1979. He remained in Canungra at the Training Centre, working in the stores, until his retirement around 1987. On ANZAC Day Tom would always lead the march.

According to his nephew Frank Clarke and niece Kerry Clarke-Hunt, Tom had a great sense of humour and loved to entertain. ‘We always had good times when he was around.’ His passion in life was music, particularly country music, and he could play the guitar, accordion and mouth organ, and could easily extract a tune from a gum leaf. He was also a great swimmer. Frank Clarke recalls that ‘Uncle Tom saved me from drowning in the Mitchell dam.’

Not surprisingly, given the amount of active service he had seen, Tom suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. His family believe he was probably affected by PTSD from the time of the Second World War and his experience in Japan, but managed to cope with it in his own way. Through his courage and resilience Tom inspired his nieces and nephews to be proud and strong in their culture. Sadly, Tom ‘Massa’ Clarke died of cancer in 1990.

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1 All Day Long the Noise of Battle by Gerard Windsor (2011).
RITA WATKINS
(BORN 1929)

A RESPECTED ELDER WHO BUILDS BRIDGES BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Rita Watkins does not seek accolades for her many years of dedicated work for her community. Throughout her life she has overcome her natural shyness to speak out on behalf of others and reclaim community and family history for the benefit of future generations.

A Gunai Elder, Rita was born at Lake Tyers, the first of eight children to Gwendoline (nee Pepper) and Lesley Hudson. Although the family lived in Bairnsdale, Rita’s mother Gwendoline chose to return to her family home at Lake Tyers where her aunt, Julia Thorpe, who was a skilled midwife, could assist with Rita’s birth.

Rita’s early years were spent in Gippsland, in close contact with cousins, aunties and uncles. She has fond memories of accompanying the adults as they picked beans or peas to supplement the family income. The children were settled on a rug with a picnic and told firmly not to wander or touch the plants while their aunties went about their work.

As well as their own children, Rita’s parents cared for one of her young cousins, who was in danger of being removed from the family by the welfare authorities. They moved from place to place, often leaving in the middle of the night to avoid being found. The authorities eventually caught up with the family and took the child away. Rita’s cousin was not able to reconnect with his family until he was an adult, many years later.

Rita’s mother eventually settled the family in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, where other Pepper family members, including Rita’s grandfather, had made a home. Money was in short supply and Rita left school at the age of 10 to help her mother support the younger children. She tried to continue her education by buying and reading second hand books and keeping notebooks in which she would ‘scribble’ thoughts, verses and ideas.

Rita recalls the strong sense of community that developed in Aboriginal Fitzroy during the 1940s and 1950s. Her family regularly attended Pastor Doug Nicholls’ church in Gore Street and met other Aboriginal families and friends at informal picnics in the Fitzroy Gardens on Sunday afternoons.

She recalls that the Elders were strict, keeping a close eye on the movements of young men and women. Though times were very tough, Rita remembers
her mother regularly opening her home to those in need of accommodation, including young men who travelled down from country communities to play football in the city.

A neighbour introduced Rita to the art of ballroom dancing and escorted her to dance studios in Melbourne, where her skills quickly earned her a job as a dance teacher and demonstrator. It was at a dance studio in Bourke Street Melbourne that Rita met her future husband, Tommy Watkins. She was so shy she declined his first invitation to go out for lemonade. Rita remembers her shock when Tommy first called at her home to take her to a dance. He was the first person she knew who actually owned a car.

After they were married, Rita and Tommy moved to Healesville where Tommy opened a hairdressing salon. There they raised three children, Glenys, Wayne and Gary. Despite her natural shyness, Rita followed her mother’s example of helping those in need. When she discovered that Aboriginal children at the local school were taunted with racist names, she confronted the offenders and made them apologise.

A community-minded person, Rita trained in emergency response with the Red Cross and earned an award for her outstanding service. As her children grew older, she became involved with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS). Established in Fitzroy in 1973, VAHS was the first Aboriginal community-controlled health service in the state.

At VAHS, she helped the organisation with book work and trained as an Aboriginal community health worker at Koorie Kollij. Rita also recalls helping to provide bathing facilities for the ‘parkies’ – the name given to homeless Aboriginal people who gathered in the park on Gertrude Street in Fitzroy.

As one of the early Aboriginal Liaison Officers at the Royal Children’s Hospital, Rita also spoke out against discriminatory practices when she saw them; advocating for Aboriginal patients and reassuring children that someone in the hospital was from ‘their mob’. Rita later moved back to her home town of Bairnsdale where she worked as one of the first managers of the Aboriginal Elders Hostel.

Rita was among a small group of Gunaikurnai Elders who worked to achieve Native Title over Gunaikurnai traditional land in Gippsland, a long and difficult process. When the Federal Court of Australia recognised the Gunaikurnai claims on 22 October 2010 and the Victorian Government entered into an agreement with the Gunaikurnai under the Victorian Traditional Owner Settlement Act, Rita spoke at the formal ceremony marking the historic occasion. She went on to serve on the Gunaikurnai Elders’ Council and designed the logo for the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Association Registered Aboriginal Party.

Rita’s concern that Aboriginal people should know their own history led her to collaborate with the Public Record Office Victoria and the National Archives of Australia to publish a groundbreaking book and touring exhibition. *Footprints: The Journey of Lucy and Percy Pepper* was based on the lives of her grandparents and their family. The book and exhibition used family and government records to demonstrate how Aboriginal families can survive and care for each other no matter what obstacles are placed in their way.

A modest woman, Rita considers herself to be just an ordinary person. Her achievements, however, tell a different story. They reveal a tireless campaigner for fairness and equality with a life-long commitment to her people and community.
NOEL TOVEY AM
(BORN 1934)

A RICHLY TALENTED PERFORMING ARTIST WHO TRIUMPHED OVER ADVERSITY

Noel Tovey AM enjoys the distinction of being Australia’s first male ballet dancer of Aboriginal heritage. He has led a remarkable career spanning 60 years as an actor, dancer, singer, director, choreographer, designer, writer and teacher in Australia and Europe.

Born in 1934, Noel’s childhood in the inner suburbs of Melbourne can only be described as tragic. It was not unusual for children of working class families in Melbourne to live in poverty during the Depression of the 1930s, but Noel’s young life was punctuated with abandonment and abuse.

While Noel admits that he was in denial of his Aboriginal heritage for about 30 years because he was made to feel ashamed of it when he was young, it is through a connection with this heritage that he attributes many turning points in his life.

Family history research by Noel in recent years revealed that his father, Frederick Morton, was of African-Canadian and French-Creole heritage and that his mother, Winifred Ann Tovey, was Aboriginal. Noel’s great-grandmother, Margaret Carmody, was a Ngarrindjeri woman from South Australia.

Noel believes his talent in the performing arts stems from his father’s side of the family. Frederick Morton was a member of a musical performing act, known as the Royal Bohee Brothers, set up by his grandfather and great uncle in London in the 1880s. Despite his musical talents, Morton became addicted to alcohol and cocaine and as a result Noel and his four siblings grew up in extreme poverty.

In the early 1940s, Noel and his sister were sent to the Royal Park Welfare Depot for Children before being put into the care of a man who submitted them to prolonged sexual and physical abuse. Noel escaped this situation when he was admitted to the Far West Children’s Hospital in Manly, New South Wales, for treatment for a knee condition. After completing this treatment he was reunited with his mother.

Given the circumstances of Noel’s childhood it was not surprising that his schooling was patchy, and by the age of 12 his formal education was over. For a few years Noel lived off his wits on the streets, but he loved to read and continued to educate himself through newspapers and books. It was as a 15 year old, working in the Collins Book Depot in Melbourne, that he went to see the ballet Les Sylphides at the National Theatre. This inspired him to begin ballet classes with Jean Alexander at the National Theatre Ballet School. He went on to study with Madame Borovansky and then joined the Ballet Guild where he danced in En Cirque and The Sentimental Bloke.

In time, theatre attracted Noel as strongly as dance, and he appeared in amateur and semi-professional productions. He made his professional debut in Paint Your Wagon in 1954 and subsequently appeared in Bells are Ringing, Salad Days, Witness for the Prosecution, Once upon a Mattress and Music Man at the Princess Theatre in Melbourne. He also performed in many revues with comedian Mary Hardy with whom he had a close friendship. Recognising his need for
stronger professional experience, Noel convinced the legendary actor-director Hayes Gordon to take him on as his student and set his sights on a career abroad.

As an impressionable young man, striving for a place in 1950s Melbourne theatre life, Noel was drawn into a bohemian lifestyle. It was a time in Australia when homosexuality was repressed and driven underground. Due to unfortunate circumstances Noel was imprisoned and convicted for something which is no longer considered a crime. This conviction was a blight on his life for many years and further motivated him to move abroad. Before leaving Australia he married Barbara Hickling, with whom he has a daughter, Felicity.

In 1961 Noel became a principal dancer with The Sadler's Wells Company in London and then made his singing debut in On The Level a musical by Australian Ron Grainer. Noel’s career as a choreographer was launched in 1966 with a production of Sandy Wilson’s The Boyfriend. The show was a resounding success and toured Britain and Australia in 1968. Noel went on to direct and choreograph many theatre productions in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1970, Noel met David Sarel who would be his life and business partner for 16 years. Together they opened L’Odeon, a decorative arts gallery, and this proved to be a very successful venture until Sarel’s death in 1986.

Noel returned to Australia in 1991 and set up a performing arts course at the Eora Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Sydney. He also continued to direct many theatre productions with standouts being A Midsummer Night’s Dream with an entirely Aboriginal cast, for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Arts Festival of The Dreaming. He also directed The Aboriginal Protesters which was performed in Germany. Alongside his work in the arts, Noel actively campaigned for Aboriginal rights, with a particular interest in deaths in custody.

Noel’s autobiography Little Black Bastard (2004), for which he received the 2000 Indigenous Writing Fellowship, was inspired by a tram ride through Melbourne seeing many familiar and traumatic places from his childhood. He wrote and performed a one-man play of the same name. The play gained considerable acclaim in Australia and at the Edinburgh Festival in 2010, where he was nominated for the World Amnesty Award. It was also performed at the London Origins Festival in 2011.

Noel has served on many arts-related organisations and boards, including the Australia Council, the NSW Arts Council, the 2000 Olympic Arts Festival, the Aboriginal Arts Reference Group and the AIDS Trust of Australia. In recent years he set up scholarships for two recipients from socially disadvantaged backgrounds – one Indigenous, one non-Indigenous – to attend the Flying Fruit Fly Circus School.

Noel was recently awarded the Uncle Bob Maza Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award for outstanding contribution to Victorian Indigenous theatre (2014). In 2015 he received an Order of Australia.

Now in his senior years, Noel is strongly focused upon nurturing and mentoring young Aboriginal actors and performers. His Scholarship Foundation, along with his personal courage, are providing guidance and inspiration for future generations.
A CHAMPION FOR FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE

Aunty Pat Ockwell is a respected Elder and proud Wurundjeri woman who has served her community through her work in hostels, housing and justice.

Patricia Wilma Nicholson was born on 17 September 1937 in Carlton, the first of 16 children. Pat’s father, Patrick Nicholson, was of Irish heritage and served in the RAAF during the Second World War. At the time of Pat’s birth her parents, Martha and Patrick were living with her maternal grandmother, Jessie Jemima Wandin Terrick, in Collingwood but there was a strong connection to country in the Healesville area. Jessie was the daughter of Robert and Jemima Wandin of Coranderrk.

As a youngster, Pat recalls going to Coranderrk where her grandmother showed her the hop kilns and taught her how to fish and collect berries for jam. As a consequence, Aboriginal culture and heritage was a big part of Pat’s early life. She has vivid memories of her grandmother protecting her and her siblings from welfare authorities, telling them to ‘get under the bed, hide in the bush or climb up the trees’.

Pat went to schools in many different places including Healesville, Toolangi and Warburton, but lost a lot of schooling because of the need to help her mother with her younger brothers and sisters. Pat was an extremely good runner, and while living in Toolangi she was approached to train for the 1956 Olympics. Unfortunately her family circumstances prevented this.

As a teenager Pat lived with her grandmother in Healesville and also in Collingwood but there was a strong connection to country in the Healesville area. Jessie was the daughter of Robert and Jemima Wandin of Coranderrk.

At the age of 15 Pat joined the workforce. She and her Aunty Gloria (only 18 months older) worked together at Dowd’s lingerie factory in Healesville in the 1950s. It was around this time that Pat enjoyed a short modelling career.

In 1958 she married Ted Ockwell, a farmer from Woori Yallock. The couple lived in Healesville for some years, where four of their children (Jenny, Edward, Karen and Margaret) were born, and then in Wangaratta where their last two children (Patrick and Michael) came into the world.

While Pat was aware from a young age of the struggles of Aboriginal people, it was not until the 1960s that she became politically active. One of her first experiences of activism was travelling to Canberra with a protest group organised by Geraldine Briggs. Pat was also actively involved in protest groups at the time of the 1988 Bicentennial.

It was the influence of elders such as Geraldine Briggs, Uncle Doug Nicholls, Kevin Coombs, her Aunty Winnie and other leaders from Fitzroy and Collingwood that set Pat on a path of community involvement and activism. ‘I always wanted to make sure things were right for our people, that we were getting a fair go too, not be put down all the time just because of our skin.’

In 1977 Pat joined the Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative
and has served on its board at various times and also been Chairperson. The Co-operative was set up to assist and support Aboriginal people in health, housing, employment, education and general welfare. In the 1970s Pat also began working at Aboriginal hostels, first in a domestic capacity at the Roy Harrison (Gunai) Hostel in Dandenong, but soon progressing to managerial roles.

The hostels were largely set up to house and assist young Aboriginal people from country areas coming to the city for training and tertiary education. Within a number of years Pat had become a trouble-shooter for the hostels and was sent to many parts of Victoria to sort out problems. Her workplaces included the William T Onus Hostel in Northcote, the Harry Nanya Hostel in Mildura and the Lionel Rose Centre in Morwell.

While working at the Morwell Hostel, Pat established a good relationship with local police. When Aboriginal people got into trouble the police would contact Pat. This usually resulted in an informal hearing held in the cell, with the offender released into Pat’s care at the hostel until they needed to appear in court.

Through this procedure, Pat was able to keep young offenders out of prison and help them to get their lives back on track. For those who had served their time and were due for release, Pat established an arrangement for them to come to her at the William T Onus Hostel in Northcote for the final 28 days of their sentence. There she helped them to get jobs and make the transition back to community life.

She introduced the same arrangement at the Dandenong Hostel, with the Corrections Department allowing released Aboriginal prisoners to work in the hostel gardens under Pat’s supervision. It was a natural progression then for Pat to become a sitting member of the Koori Court system when it was established in the 1980s. Pat currently attends Broadmeadows Koori Court, the Magistrates’ Koori Court and Children’s Koori Court in Melbourne and the Children’s Koori Court at Dandenong.

For over 30 years Pat has also played a major role with the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria, (now Aboriginal Housing Victoria) serving on its board and various committees and assisting with policy matters. Pat recalls that while she was working at the hostel in George Street, Melbourne, she got into trouble for finding homes for all the occupants and leaving the hostel empty. Nevertheless, Pat laments that many Aboriginal families still need to wait up to 10 years for subsidised housing.

Pat is currently Vice Chair of the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES), an organisation committed to maintaining services for elderly members of the community. Pat is actively involved in overseeing the maintenance and expansion of facilities at the ACES East Brunswick property. It is important to Pat that ‘the sick and elderly are warm and happy and well cared for’ and she encourages young members of the community to visit and engage with their Elders.

Pat is a Senior Elder and Life Member of the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council.

Now in her seventies, Aunty Pat’s passion and commitment for her community is undiminished. She continues to work tirelessly for fairness and justice and provides inspiration for all.
A COMPASSIONATE ELDER WHO LEADS BY EXAMPLE

Catherine ‘Cath” Solomon has devoted her life to supporting the Aboriginal people of Victoria’s Gippsland region. Her untiring efforts to improve community health and resilience have earned the respect of the whole community and touched the lives of many people.

Born in 1939 in Bundaberg, Queensland, Cath is proud to belong to the Tribelang Bunda clan of the Gureng Gureng people. Although she remembers a happy childhood, her family’s poverty also left an enduring impression. One of eight children, she walked barefoot to school, even in winter. The memory of her disappointment one Christmas when her parents could not afford presents for the children has never left her, inspiring her to be generous to others, particularly children.

Cath's father worked as a canecutter and the family’s frequent moves to follow the work meant her formal education ended before she reached high school. Gifted and enthusiastic about all kinds of sport, Cath remembers improvising hockey sticks from branches found in the bush and scrounging empty tin cans to use as balls.

In 1957 Cath married Max Solomon, a Manero man from Victoria, and moved with him and the first of their five children to Orbost in East Gippsland. Lonely and isolated at first in Orbost, she fell into bad habits, but was inspired to change and improve herself when she joined the Salvation Army. She taught Sunday school and began a long association as a leader in the organisation.

Cath encouraged her own children to play sport; finding that participation in the town’s sporting activities helped to overcome racist barriers. Her no nonsense approach to racism continued when the family later moved to Bairnsdale. She became the first Aboriginal person to play squash in Bairnsdale and was determined not to let racist attitudes stop her from enjoying the sport at which she excelled. Cath also won acceptance through her quiet focus on good sporting conduct.

In Bairnsdale Cath accepted a position with Kilmany Family Care as a cottage parent, caring for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. Over six and a half years, she cared for more than 80 children in the home. She continued in this role when the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative
(GEGAC) assumed management of the cottage home. Today Cath is a GEGAC Board member.

Cath’s ability to understand how alcohol could fill the ‘emptiness of life’ led to her next position as a Drug and Alcohol worker for GEGAC. Over a 15 year period she counselled Koorie women suffering from alcohol dependency, offering classes in sewing and cooking, an empathetic ear and referrals to the Winja Ulupna Women’s Recovery Centre in St Kilda, Melbourne.

In her efforts to help women help themselves, Cath was prepared to drive clients to Winja Ulupna at all hours of the day and night. She also extended her work in drug and alcohol by implementing education programs in local primary and secondary schools designed to prevent alcohol and drug dependency.

Cath has also played an important role in improving justice outcomes for Aboriginal people in her region. She has served as an honorary probation officer and as an Elder in the Koorie Court in Bairnsdale since its inception. She has long been a point of contact for local police and is often called upon by them to help young people, sometimes bringing them back to her home to care for them.

Cath was also an initiator of the Lakes Entrance New Year’s Eve Koorie Marshalling program. Over several years this successful program has used voluntary Koori Marshals to ensure good relations between police and Aboriginal revellers during New Year’s Eve celebrations in Lakes Entrance.

For over a decade Cath has been employed by the Baptist Union of Victoria providing pastoral care for Aboriginal children and youth. One of the programs she has implemented in this role is Koori Kids Church, which operates two days a week for children aged from seven to 14. This program includes a project to raise awareness of family violence in the community.

The respect Cath has earned for her work in breaking down barriers has been recognised by several awards. In 2006 she received the East Gippsland Shire Australia Day Award for Citizen of the Year. In 2011 she received the Victorian NAIDOC Community Award.

Today Cath continues to tackle the impact that poverty and disadvantage can have on young people. Guided by her Christian faith, she dedicates much of her own time preparing gifts to send to disadvantaged children overseas, while quietly advocating for the rights of those who live in her community.
CLIVE ATKINSON
(BORN 1940)

A GIFTED ARTIST WITH A PASSION FOR LEARNING

A Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung man, Clive Atkinson has combined careers as a successful graphic designer, artist and educator. He has used his considerable skills to celebrate and promote Aboriginal culture in his own community and to the wider world.

Clive was born in Mooroopna in 1940, a year after his parents, Clive and Iris (nee Nelson), joined with others in walking off Cummeragunja Mission to protest its restrictive rules and poor living conditions. Like many who left the mission, the family settled on the Mooroopna river flats, living in humpies which often flooded in heavy rain.

Clive’s father, a shearer by trade, was determined that his five children would have a better education than his generation had been allowed. He found work in Echuca and moved the family there when Clive was seven years old.

Clive attended Echuca State School, where teachers encouraged his natural ability to draw and paint. Iris also nurtured her son’s talents and entered his paintings in local art shows, which he frequently won. Teachers at Echuca Technical College further supported Clive’s artistic talents, arranging a scholarship so that he could continue to study art at the school.

Though his teachers hoped Clive would become an art teacher, he was drawn to a career in commercial art and pursued this dream after finishing Year 10. After a short stint in Melbourne working as a commercial artist for Myer, Clive started an apprenticeship with the Riverina Herald in his home town. Along with learning the printing and linotype trade, he contributed cartoons and caricatures to the paper.

Clive’s lifelong interest in learning from those around him led him to London and then Canada when his apprenticeship finished. Overseas he gained work experience with large commercial presses and completed a Diploma in Advertising and Marketing in Vancouver. Keeping in mind his mother’s advice not to ‘try to be better than anyone, only try to be equal’, Clive seized every opportunity to learn.

After six years overseas Clive felt the call of home and returned to Australia, working with companies in Melbourne before establishing AdverType, a graphic design studio, with a partner in South Melbourne. AdverType serviced advertising agencies and within a few years, was employing 24 people.
In the 1980s Clive sold his share of the business to his partner and went on to form Atkinson, Palmer and Associates, based in Prahran, which performed work for a range of corporate and advertising clients. Clive’s reputation as Victoria’s only Aboriginal graphic artist saw him designing logos and branding for a range of Aboriginal agencies across Australia, at a time when their numbers were expanding.

He recalls that, at the time, many simply adapted the Aboriginal flag as a design emblem. Not content with this approach, Clive created logos and branding based on well-researched rationales. One of his greatest achievements was designing the corporate branding for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) when it formed in the early 1990s. His memorable design managed to represent two different cultures, bringing the varied elements and symbols together in a coherent and meaningful way.

Clive has designed branding and images for many Aboriginal organisations around Australia. He has also designed campaigns, images and posters for a number of government and corporate bodies, including several series of postage stamps for Australia Post. He was also a co-designer of the Bunjilaka Galleries at the Melbourne Museum in the late 1990s and provided designs for the Australian National Museum’s Indigenous galleries.

In addition to his graphic design work, Clive is a gifted painter and sculptor, exhibiting internationally as well as around Australia. His murals have been commissioned by bodies such as Parks Victoria and Victoria University.

In 1995 Clive realised a long-held dream to move back to his traditional country near the Goulburn and Murray Rivers with his wife Judy and their infant son. Together with Judy he formed Mirrimbeena Aboriginal Education Group, a registered Adult, Community and Further Education agency.

Among its programs, Mirrimbeena offers training in the construction of bush furniture, the only such course available in Australia. Its guiding philosophy is based on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working and sharing together with a common interest in education and employment.

It is this philosophy which has seen Clive become actively involved in community projects in the Echuca-Moama area. He is a member of the steering committee for additions to the Echuca Hospital and is also involved in the Bridge Arts Project to create an outdoor art installation on the Murray River which will portray the history of the Murray-Goulburn region.

When Judy secured an area of the Echuca Cemetery as an Aboriginal resting place, Clive assisted with the design and layout of the Indigenous section, the first of its kind in Victoria. They followed this achievement with the design of a similar Dreamtime precinct in the Ballarat Cemetery, offering a place where Wadawurrung people can be laid to rest in their own country.

Over his long career, Clive has always valued learning from and working in collaboration with others. He does not seek accolades, and believes that hard work brings its own rewards, but adds that professionalism is all important. ‘Whether you’re designing for the local little flower show or some big organisation, you always treat the project at the same level’.

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A SOURCE OF WISDOM AND STRENGTH FOR HER COMMUNITY

Aunty Nancy Carol Harrison is a respected Wotjobaluk Elder from the Wimmera-Mallee region of north-west Victoria. She is actively engaged in unifying her community through her cultural knowledge, her artwork and her spirit of good will.

Born in Horsham in 1941, Nancy grew up with her seven siblings at Antwerp, a former mission reserve near Dimboola. Her parents were Margaret Kennedy, a Wotojobaluk woman, and Athol Harrison, a Gunai/Kurnai man. Nancy’s mother, along with her siblings, was born on the river bank between the reserve and the Ebenezer mission. While the mission had closed in 1904, the reserve was kept for those who remained in Antwerp, but most of the old people moved to Lake Tyers, Dimboola and elsewhere.

On her mother’s side, Nancy’s great great grandfather Jungunginnyook, was well known for his tracking skills and his involvement in finding the lost Duff children near Horsham in 1864. He was also a member of the first Aboriginal cricket team which toured England in 1868.

Nancy recalls a happy childhood at Antwerp where her father worked for the railways and in his ‘holidays’ harvested salt at Pink Lake near Dimboola and also worked on the vegetable gardens there. Nancy’s parents were very resourceful. Her father built the family a house with ‘a big vegie garden down near a billabong, heaps of chickens and three cows’. Her mother bottled fruit, made jam and sewed clothes on her treadle machine, all thanks to the Weekly Times newspaper.

Nancy and her brothers and sisters walked the three miles to the Antwerp State School where their teachers treated them well and taught them to stand up against racism. Nevertheless, the children were warned that if they went to Dimboola they should ‘always go up with someone’, never by themselves, as three of Nancy’s cousins had been ‘taken by the welfare’.

In 1950s Nancy’s family moved to Burrumbeet near Ballarat, where her father believed they would find employment. Nancy went to Ballarat West High School and, after completing Year 10, began work as a shorthand-typist at the Royal Insurance Company in Ballarat. She worked in the insurance industry for nearly 10 years in Ballarat and Melbourne. She then moved to the State Electricity Commission and worked in various accounting and secretarial roles for 12 years.

In her fifties, Nancy decided to retire but soon became bored. Her retirement coincided with a time when the Department of Defence was offering jobs to Aboriginal people, so Nancy joined the administrative team with the Royal Australian Air Force in St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Before moving to Seymour, Nancy transferred to the Army and worked at the Puckapunyal base. She finally retired 13 years later.

In 2003 Nancy moved back on to her traditional country at Dimboola and immersed herself in community
activities associated with her Wotjobaluk heritage. She became deeply involved with native title negotiations, alongside her brother Rocky (Samuel) Harrison, particularly in providing her knowledge of the continuing connection with the land. The land under negotiation included Antwerp and other reserves, as well as parts of the Little Desert and Wyperfeld National Park near Jeparit.

Nancy was Chair of the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation when they gained their Native Title Determination in 2005. This was the first time the Federal Court had recognised native title in Victoria. To ensure she had the necessary skills to lead the Land Council, Nancy completed a governance course at Swinburne University. In her leadership role Nancy is particularly skilful in working across clan groups and connecting with a range of organisations and communities.

She also takes an active role in addressing lateral violence concerns, working to overcome negative behaviours within the community. Nancy also became involved with Monash University in the revival of the Wotjobaluk Wergaia language.

Nancy is often called on to speak to school children, at both primary and secondary level, about Aboriginal art and culture. Her warmth and personality is appreciated by the students she has mentored either individually or through group projects. She generously volunteers her time to help children reach their potential and has been an active participant in the Department of Education’s Koorie Education Workforce. Nancy also gives talks to university students who are learning about the natural and cultural history of the Grampians/Gariwerd National Park and Mt Arapiles areas. She has been actively involved in archaeological digs at Ebenezer mission and in local Landcare projects.

Nancy is a talented artist and proud to have her artwork used by local company Mt Zero to package their pink salt products. Nancy has also worked with other elders on the Possum Skin Cloak Project, an artwork produced for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. The cloak represented the stories of the traditional owners of the land, past and present. Nancy recalls her father was also an artist and made boomerangs using a heated wire to inscribe designs. Nancy’s drawings also feature in the locally published book Yanga Track - Wanjab, Gadjin and Murnong, a collaboration with other artists and writers, including her nephew Louie Rigney.

Nancy’s interests are not limited to those of the Aboriginal community. She is also a valued member of the Country Women’s Association (CWA) and often contributes to CWA shows and competitions with her cooking and artwork.

As a well-respected Wotjobaluk Elder Nancy is often called on to give the Welcome to Country at ceremonies and events. Her most memorable Welcome was delivered at the Spirit of the Bush music festival in 2007 where she addressed 20,000 people.

Now in her seventies, Nancy’s involvement in community life remains undiminished. She continues to be a source of wisdom, strength and inspiration for her family and her people.
GEORGINA LOVETT-WILLIAMS
(BORN 1943)

A TENACIOUS CAMPAIGNER
FOR LAND RIGHTS AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE

Aunty Georgina Dulcie Lovett Williams, a Gunditjmara woman, has dedicated her life to the welfare of her people, fighting for land rights and for social justice.

Born in Carlton, Melbourne, in January 1943, Georgina’s family home was in Fitzroy. She was the youngest of the five children of Gertrude Christina Lovett (known as Gertie) and Alfred (Tom) Egan, both Gunditjmara people. Her siblings are Victor, Dorothy, Thomas and Edward.

Georgina’s father, Tom, was recognised as one of the first Aboriginal men to play football at VFL (now AFL) level for Carlton, Richmond and North Melbourne.

Most of Georgina’s life was spent in Fitzroy or surrounding areas, but her mother, Gertie, would constantly pack up the family, for various reasons, and return to her and Tom’s traditional country. Georgina spent extended periods of time in the Lake Condah-Portland area where she attended school, got to know her relatives and learned Aboriginal customs and stories. This ensured that she retained a sense of belonging and understanding of her traditional country which, she recalls, ‘was always on Mum’s agenda’.

Georgina’s grandfather, Ebenezer James Lovett (known as Ebon) came to Melbourne from the Western Districts in the mid-1930s to agitate for his people, bringing his daughter Gertie and her baby son, Victor, with him. Ebon, a Gunditjmara leader, was dissatisfied with the general treatment of Aboriginal people. While five of Ebon’s younger brothers served in the First World War and some also in the Second World War, for Ebon the war was ‘right here’ in Australia, not on foreign shores.

Ebon was one of the founders of the Australian Aborigines League in Melbourne. He was also a member of the Communist Party and he always stated clearly that within the Communist Party he was treated as an equal and given a voice. Tragically he was run down by a car in Fitzroy and died on his way to St Vincent’s hospital in 1941.

From a young age Georgina was aware of the struggles of her people and her family’s comparative poverty, but looks back on her young life without bitterness. Her happy childhood was wholly due to the efforts of her gentle and kind mother who was not only a great protector, but also an excellent cook. In later life, Georgina realised that Gertie often moved houses to make it difficult for welfare authorities to track them down. Gertie passed away when Georgina was just 15 years old and her father, Tom, followed soon after. The family always stayed together owing to the efforts of Georgina’s eldest brother Victor and sister Dorothy.

As a teenager Georgina was keen on sport – her brother Victor was a professional boxer and she too loved to get the gloves on and have a spar in the gym. After leaving school she worked in various jobs in shops and factories in inner Melbourne. At the age of 20, Georgina married Jack Williams and the couple had two children, Shelley and John.
Georgina enjoyed being a full-time mother and it was not until her children were at school that she chose to look at career options. With the encouragement of the late Dr Alf Bamblett, she studied social work and gained a degree.

Georgina’s social work qualifications as well as her no nonsense, ‘get things done attitude’ led to jobs or advisory roles with many Aboriginal welfare organisations. She has been involved with organisations such as Brotherhood of St Laurence, Aboriginal Housing Board, Aborigines Advancement League, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS), Marg Tucker Aboriginal Hostel, and the Children’s Protection Society.

In the 1980s Georgina spearheaded negotiations between the Gunditjmara and State and Federal governments for the return of traditional lands in the Lake Condah area. For Georgina this meant dealing with competing tribal interests and spending many hours on the road. In 1987, after lengthy negotiations, the claim was successful. It resulted in 53 hectares of land being vested in the Kerrup-Jmara Elders Aboriginal Corporation (now administered by the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Cooperative). It was a small area of land but a big victory for the Gunditjmara people, opening the doors for many other claims. Georgina then went on to work for the re-flooding of Lake Condah to restore the original wetlands; a project that was brought to fruition by fellow tribal member, Damien Bell.

Georgina was also on the committee that established the Minajalku Centre, a former church and house in Thornbury. ‘It was a big space, but they had nothing’ recalls Georgina who could see the potential for a community meeting place. The centre is now run under the auspices of VAHS and used for counselling, drug rehabilitation, art therapy, language classes and cultural events.

Georgina has been an Elder representative on the Children’s Koori Court since it began in 2005 and recently began doing the same work with the Magistrates’ Koori Court. She also sits on the Elders council at Deakin University which is an advisory body to the University’s Institute of Koorie Education.

Georgina is currently the chairperson of the Weeroona Aboriginal Cemetery in Greenvale, having originally served on its Trust. In 2010 Georgina was engaged in the repatriation of Aboriginal remains from Melbourne Museum to the Cemetery. Her work, which includes dealing with State government departments, the local council and stakeholder groups, is undertaken on a purely voluntary basis. She has successfully campaigned for new facilities, including a chapel, while maintaining and improving the grounds. She also negotiated with Corrections Victoria for the cemetery to be a work site for those on community correction orders.

Aunty Georgina has an indomitable spirit and continues to achieve gains for her people through determination and persistence.
A CHAMPION FOR HEALTH, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Jill Gallagher AO has never hesitated to seize opportunities to support her community in the pursuit of better health, community autonomy and reclamation of the traditional culture and society of Aboriginal Victorians.

A Gunditjmara woman, Jill was born in the Australian Capital Territory as her parents travelled looking for work. She was one of 10 children. Her mother, Frances (nee Winter) grew up at Framlingham in south-west Victoria. Jill’s father, of Irish descent, was accidentally killed when she was a baby.

Jill spent her childhood in Gippsland, where her mother, like many Victorian Aboriginal people of the era, found seasonal work picking vegetables. This was a time before the emergence of Aboriginal organisations and there were few supports for women, particularly Aboriginal women. The seasonal camps in which the family stayed became their community. An abiding memory for Jill is of a campsite by a river in the evening, dotted with the glow of dozens of campfires.

Jill’s family moved to Collingwood in 1963 when she was eight and her mother found work in a box factory. They had very little. Jill, who had by then attended 19 different primary schools, finished her primary education at George Street Primary School, but only had a short time in secondary education at Fitzroy Girls School. Rebellious and disobedient, she clashed with teachers and left school at the age of fourteen to find factory work.

In her early twenties, Jill regretted her lack of education. Now with a child of her own, she wanted more from life than factory work and realised that education would help her to support her family.

Jill was fortunate to come across a training scheme for Aboriginal young people, introduced by then Victorian Education Minister Joan Kirner. She was thrilled to be accepted and began training at the Museum of Victoria. She took advantage of access to the professional development offered there and later took up a position at the Victorian Archaeological Survey. More importantly, she grasped the opportunity offered by the Museum’s collections to reclaim knowledge of traditional culture, language, stories and people that had been impacted by white settlement and the devastation it left on Aboriginal people.

She saw an opportunity to rediscover truths about Aboriginal society before European settlement and to pass this knowledge on to young people. Jill became a firm advocate of the importance of Aboriginal voices in the collection and management of their heritage, maintaining this passion in a further role as manager of the Heritage Branch of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

Jill was and is still is very passionate about the repatriation of Aboriginal cultural property, and the return of ancestors for reburial, being very active in this field since its beginnings in the 1980s. She worked at the Museum of Victoria when the Aboriginal Legal Service fought to have the Murray Black collection of Aboriginal remains returned to Victoria from institutions such as the University of
Melbourne and the National Museum of Australia. Although she moved out of the Aboriginal heritage field in 1998, Jill remained passionate about its importance. For many years she continued to serve on the National Committee for the Repatriation of Skeletal Remains.

In 1998 Jill’s commitment to Aboriginal community control saw her take up a position at Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), a peak body advocating for the many community controlled Aboriginal health services in Victoria.

Jill was aware that these organisations had been founded to offer meeting places where Aboriginal communities could be visible once again in the landscape. She reinforced VACCHO’s role in supporting its member organisations to stay true to their community beginnings. She also refined and modified their practices to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

Since 2000, VACCHO has offered training for Aboriginal Health Workers via its status as a Registered Training Organisation. Constantly seeking ways to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians, VACCHO now collects and analyses data collected by its member organisations in order to strengthen their services.

As the CEO of VACCHO since 2001, Jill has seen the organisation grow significantly with current staff numbers at 75. VACCHO has developed innovative preventative and educational health programs, including the Well Person’s Checklist, the Koori Maternity Services Program, and a successful diabetes education initiative.

One of Jill’s proudest achievements was gaining bipartisan support for the vital ‘Statement of Intent’ signed by the Victorian Premier in August 2008 on behalf of the State government. This statement pledged to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.

In 2010 Jill was inducted to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women. In 2013 she was awarded an Order of Australia in recognition of her strong and effective leadership in Aboriginal health.

Jill cites her early career mentors, such as Jim Berg of the Koori Heritage Trust and Terry Garwood of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, as great influences on her life, inspiring her with the confidence to believe in herself. But most of all she continues to be inspired by her mother’s determination and resilience in the face of everything she endured.
A POWERFUL VOICE FOR THE VULNERABLE

Ruby Hunter was an acclaimed songwriter and performer who used music to champion the rights of Aboriginal women and children. A nurturing soul, she rose above the tragedy of being a member of the Stolen Generation to give a voice to the vulnerable and offer strength to those who needed it.

A proud Ngarrindjeri woman, Ruby was born in 1955 near the Murray River in the Coorong region of South Australia. She was eight years old when she and her four siblings were taken from their family. She remembered that the authorities simply arrived one day in a big car, promising to take the children to the circus. She was soon separated from her sisters and brothers at the Seaforth Children’s Home in Adelaide, before being placed in a series of institutions and foster homes. At the age of 16 Ruby was finally released to make her own way. With no idea of where to go, she made her home on the streets of Adelaide.

While she was homeless in Adelaide Ruby met Archie Roach, also a member of the Stolen Generations, who had drifted to Adelaide from Mildura across the Victorian border. Living together on the streets of Adelaide, they formed an enduring bond that would last for the rest of Ruby’s life.

It was a hard life, however, characterised by dependence on alcohol to ease the pain. Ruby nurtured Archie as he began to translate his experience of despair and homelessness into music that would eventually resonate across the nation. She also drew on her childhood experiences in caring for vulnerable children and young people, as well as in her own music.

Moving to Victoria with Archie and their two children, Ruby worked for a time at the Margaret Tucker Hostel which provided supported accommodation for homeless Aboriginal girls and women. Together with Archie, she cared for up to 14 children at a time in a family group home run by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency in Thornbury. Later she and Archie made their own home a welcoming haven for homeless and disadvantaged young people. Ruby was also a tireless worker on behalf of the Winja Ulupna Women’s Recovery Centre, a rehabilitation service for Aboriginal women in St Kilda.
Ruby began writing songs in secret, putting down on paper reflections of her experiences as a homeless young person. Her talents came to light when Archie, by then an acclaimed songwriter and performer, discovered her song *Down City Streets* and recorded it on his first album, *Charcoal Lane*, in 1990.

On the strength of *Down City Streets* Ruby was offered her own recording contract, becoming the first Australian Aboriginal woman to sign with a major recording label.

In 1994 Ruby released her first album, *Thoughts Within*. Her second album, *Feeling Good*, earned her the Best Female Performer of the Year at the Deadly Awards in 2000. In 2003 Ruby was recognised for her outstanding contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music.

In 2004 Ruby and Archie collaborated with Paul Grabowsky on the production of *Ruby’s Story*, which won the Deadly Award for excellence in film and theatrical score. Ruby was also a driving force behind the formation of Black Arm Band, a company of leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous performers from around Australia. *Black Arm Band* tours and presents contemporary Indigenous performances at major festivals in capital cities and in remote Australian communities.

Despite the pressures of successful musical careers, Ruby and Archie continued to give back to the community. They toured remote Indigenous communities to present song writing workshops in schools.

Ruby’s skills as a songwriter and performer were complemented by her ability to nurture and support others, particularly the young.

Ruby passed away in 2010, leaving a legacy that endures in her music, her beloved family and the countless others whose potential she recognised and encouraged.
Judith Cue-Ahmat (born 1961)

A Community Leader with Passion and Vision

Judith Cue-Ahmat is a proud Gunditjmara woman and respected community leader who has made an important contribution to the Wodonga Aboriginal community in the fields of health, justice, education and community services.

Born in Warrnambool in 1961, Judith grew up on farming properties around the Mortlake area of Victoria.

Her grandparents were Mary Elizabeth Fuller (known as Maisie) and George Winter McDonald (known as Joe). Her grandfather was born in 1890 at Lake Condah mission. At the age of 24 he joined the AIF but did not serve overseas, being discharged as medically unfit in 1916. The couple had eight children: Mervyn, Claude, Helen, Walter, Nowell, Thelma, Margaret and Robert.

Judith’s grandmother Maisie McDonald was only 40 years old when she died in 1933. As a result, Judith’s mother Helen and her siblings were sent to the Geelong and Western District Protestant Orphanage against the wishes of their father. After leaving the orphanage Helen McDonald worked as a cook for a well-to-do family at Ceres, near Geelong.

In 1943, during the Second World War, Helen enlisted in the Australian Women’s Army Service at the age of 21. It was while she was in the army that Helen met Murray Powell at a dance in Bacchus Marsh. The couple were married on Murray’s return from service in New Guinea. They had six children, Jean (stillborn) then Graeme, Philip, Heather, Lindsay and Judith.

Judith began her education in 1966 at Mortlake State School in Western Victoria and then attended two other schools in Victoria: Mannibadar and Pleasant Street in Ballarat. She then attended Ballarat High School, completing year 9 before joining the workforce at the age of 16.

Judith enjoyed sport and played netball, hockey, softball, basketball and tenpin bowling. As a young person she aspired to be a physical education teacher, but this was not to be. Judith worked in hospitality and retail jobs until she married Kelvin Cue. By the time Judith was 26 the couple had brought four daughters into the world.

In the late 1980s, as her children were growing up, Judith was looking for a change and enrolled in a two year certificate course in Social Sciences (Aboriginal Welfare) at the Ballarat School of Mines. This course gave Judith the opportunity to work at the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative.

In 1991 Judith and Kelvin packed up their family and moved to Wodonga so she could take a job in Juvenile Justice with Community Services Victoria. In 1992 she enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work degree at La Trobe University Wodonga. She completed the degree by juggling full time work in Juvenile Justice with full time study at the weekends, while raising her four daughters. Judith graduated in 1995 and was the first person in her family to attend university and complete a degree.
Soon after settling in Wodonga, Judith realised there was a lack of services for Aboriginal families. She was informed that this was because most Aboriginal people lived in Albury. Undeterred, she sent a message around the schools in Wodonga and set up an Aboriginal Student Support Parent Awareness group.

This led to the establishment of a homework centre to help children and families struggling with education. From there Judith worked on other projects and programs related to health, welfare and education.

In 1994 she was one of the co-founders of Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation, the first Aboriginal community-controlled organisation in the Wodonga area. Mungabareena provides support and services in the diverse areas of justice, education, health, housing and financial planning, as well as being a hub for social and cultural activity.

In 2000 Judith considered returning to study. This had grown out of her concern for the number of Aboriginal families and children she saw being diagnosed with depression. She believed there was an underlying reason for this which did not fit the diagnosis of clinical depression.

Unfortunately her study was put on hold due to her husband Kelvin becoming terminally ill. Judith cared for her husband until he passed away. In 2006 Judith enrolled in a Masters of Social Work by research and began a journey which she describes as bringing many challenges, opportunities and privileges.

Judith’s thesis topic was ‘The Intergenerational impacts of Government Policies and Administrations on a Gunditjmara Family: Loss and grief’. Her thesis gave her the opportunity to look at the effects of colonisation on her own family group and to explore the impact of grief as it is carried through the generations.

Judith felt honoured to be able to capture the story of her uncle Wally (now deceased) who at the time was the oldest living Gunditjmara man in Victoria, as well as three generations of the McDonald family.

From 2011 to September 2015, Judith worked as the Hume Region Aboriginal Health Partnership Manager at Mungabareena. Her role was to work with mainstream health services and Aboriginal community-controlled health services and provide culturally appropriate ‘best practice’ service delivery standards to community members in the Hume Region (East).

Judith is currently Senior Project Officer for the Goulburn area on the Department of Health and Human Services Taskforce 1000 Project. This work is close to her heart as it seeks to improve the outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care.

In February 2015 Judith married Ray Ahmat Senior. Between them they have 12 children, 29 grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

As a highly regarded leader, Judith continues to play an active and important role in the Wodonga Aboriginal community and the region as a whole.
A MAN OF MANY TALENTS WHO PROVIDES INSPIRATION TO ALL

Richard Joseph Frankland is a Gunditjmara man who inspires through his writing, his films and his music.

Born in 1963 Richard is the third youngest of six children, and grew up mainly in Portland in south-west Victoria. His father, also named Richard, was a farmer and court clerk of European descent who died suddenly when Richard was six. As a consequence his mother, Christina Saunders, and her family have had the biggest influence on Richard's life.

Christina comes from a long line of Gunditjmara warriors. Her father, Chris Saunders served in the First World War and her brothers Reg and Harry Saunders served in the Second World War. Reg was the first Aboriginal to become a commissioned officer and went on to see active service in the Korean War. Harry, who was killed on the Kokoda Trail, was the inspiration for one of Richard's early films.

Christina herself fought her own battle at home: in the 1970s she and Lorraine Onus prevented Alcoa from building a smelter on Gunditjmara land, taking the case all the way to the High Court of Australia.

At the age of 13 Richard dropped out of school and lived on the streets of Melbourne for a few months before finding work in an abattoir, then as an apprentice glazier. After a stint with the Army Reserve he enlisted in the Regular Army in the early 1980s. In 1988 he was appointed as a field officer for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Over the four years he worked in this role, he was deeply affected by the families he met and the stories he heard.

Richard drew on his experiences as a field officer to make the 1992 documentary, Who Killed Malcolm Smith? It received the Australian Film Institute's Best Documentary award – the first of many Richard has since received for writing and directing. Other work inspired by his Royal Commission experience includes the television drama No Way To Forget (1996) which was nominated for four AFI awards and won two. He also wrote the play Conversations with the Dead (2001), which played at the United Nations, as well as producing six albums of songs and over 400 poems.

The diversity of Richard’s work is demonstrated through films such as Harry’s War (1999), which he wrote and directed. Based on his uncle’s Second World War experience, the play explores the idea of what it is to be Australian and the relationships between black and white soldiers. In his other documentaries such as The Innocents (2003), Richard tells of the experiences of children affected by war and violence in Palestine and Mexico. During his prolific career he has produced over 50 films and documentaries.

Richard’s work in film is not restricted to serious topics. His sharp sense of humour shines through in the film Stone Bros which he made in 2009 – a ground breaking Indigenous comedy within the ‘road movie’ genre.

Music is also a big part of Richard’s life. His first band, Djambi, supported Prince on his 1991 Australian tour and since 2000 he and guitarist Andy Baylor have
formed *The Charcoal Club*. Richard’s music features on the soundtracks of many of his films.

When he is not writing plays, making films or music, Richard is closely involved with land rights and Aboriginal affairs generally. In 1994 he founded the Mirimbiak Nations Aboriginal Corporation, a body set up to represent and assist community groups to lodge native title claims in Victoria. Richard’s strong connection to his traditional lands is expressed in his 2006 documentary *The Convincing Ground*, which looked at the effects of land development on a site near Portland which is sacred to the Gunditjmara.

Richard’s dissatisfaction with the Howard government’s abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) led him to form the political party *Your Voice* for which he stood as a Senate candidate in 2004.

Since 2011, through Koorreen Enterprises, Richard has been running workshops for community, business and government groups on lateral violence and cultural safety. Having seen what years of oppression have done to many Aboriginal communities, his workshops aim to facilitate better problem-solving, as well as encouraging freedom of cultural expression. This work has been recognised by the Australian Human Rights Commission and Richard now trains others to undertake these workshops.

In 2014 Richard collaborated with the Melbourne Theatre Company on a production about his own life. Titled *Walking into the Bigness*, the production was a celebration through stories of Richard’s life as an activist, writer, filmmaker and musician.

Despite leaving school at the age of 13, Richard has notched up many academic achievements. In 2007 he completed his Master of Arts at RMIT University with a thesis entitled ‘The Art, Freedom and Responsibility of Voice’ and in the same year published his first novel, *Digger J Jones*. The book, which is partly autobiographical, tells of a young Koori boy growing up in 1967 at the time of the Referendum which gave Aboriginal people citizenship rights. He has also written another children’s book, *The Naming of Yellow Hair*, which addresses the diversity of Aboriginal skin colour.

In 2015 Richard was appointed Head of Curriculum and Programs at the Wilin Centre, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne. He is now embarking on a Higher Doctorate Degree at the University of Melbourne, focusing on Australian Indigenous peoples’ cultural and community foundations.

When Richard Frankland is not teaching, mentoring, writing, directing, filming or singing, he lives with his partner Steph Tashkoff and his two children Nakaya and Taram near Portland. His mantra ‘We are not a problem people, we are people with a problem and that problem was colonization,’ continues to inspire and motivate him.
**KUTCHA EDWARDS**  
(BORN 1965)

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**A SONG MAN WITH A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND UNDERSTANDING**

Kutcha Edwards uses music to create connections across cultures, generations, and spaces. With an innate ability to communicate, he uses his talents to nurture understanding and self-knowledge amongst all those with whom he has contact.

A Mutti-Mutti man, Kutcha was born in 1965 near the Murrumbidgee River in Balranald, New South Wales, the ninth youngest of Mary and Nugget Edwards’ 12 children. He is one of the Stolen Generations, removed, along with five of his siblings, from his family when he was 18 months old.

Separated from his siblings in a Melbourne institution, Kutcha’s earliest enduring memory is of being alone, frightened and distressed in a cot in a darkened room. He was later moved to Orana Methodist Children’s Home where he was reunited with his older sisters and brothers. Though only children themselves, Kutcha’s older brothers and sisters did their best to protect and nurture him within the institutional environment. It was only after so many lost years of separation that he was able to return to live with his mother Mary and his three younger siblings who were, by then, living in Gippsland.

As an eager young man, Kutcha moved back to Melbourne to train as a community health worker at Koori Kollij in Collingwood. There he made contact with inspirational teachers such as Aboriginal activists Bruce McGuinness, Denis Walker and Gary Foley, who sharpened his awareness of his Indigenous history and heritage. He also found inspiration in Elders such as Aunty Alma Thorpe, a founder of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, and Jock Austin, who established the Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Youth Club Gym.

Kutcha has never forgotten how these astute elders looked beyond themselves and tried to improve life for their people. Over the years since, Kutcha has lived by Jock’s philosophy that he has a responsibility to try to make a difference for others.

Kutcha remembers dabbling with writing poetry and lyrics while still at school but it was not until after his time at Koori Kollij that he would go on to perform professionally, singing with Melbourne Koorie band *Watbalimba*. Through most of the 1990s he was lead singer of the Melbourne-based band *Black Fire*, which released two albums and toured internationally. Following the
example of pioneering Aboriginal band, *Hard Times, Black Fire* gave back to the community when it could, volunteering its services at community fund-raising events.

In 2000 Kutcha went on to become a solo artist.

In 2006 Kutcha became one of the founding members of *Black Arm Band*, a company of Indigenous and non-Indigenous performers from around Australia which presents contemporary Indigenous performances at major festivals and also tours remote Australian communities.

As a performer, Kutcha believes he has a responsibility to engage with communities beyond his formal performances. He likes to ‘get to know the mob’, rather than simply walk in and out to perform his shows. It is important for him to get to know local communities and to act culturally and adhere to protocols.

Kutcha regards himself as a song man, not simply a songwriter. He draws on a profound sense of all those who have gone before him on this land, along with his own life experiences, to help his audiences understand their own experiences, reconnect with their culture and promote cultural understanding. He draws strength from his family, country and his inheritance of a culture that stretches back over thousands of years.

Kutcha’s experience of profound loss as a member of the Stolen Generations, along with the examples set by inspirational elders; have motivated him to ‘give back’ to the community in other ways beyond his music. He has great empathy for those who have been institutionalised and for decades has presented workshops in prisons, juvenile justice centres and schools. Through the experience of song writing and music, he aims to help those who are somewhat lost to find themselves, and gain hope for the future.

Since 2002, Kutcha has co-presented *Behind the Bars*, with community radio station 3CR. Broadcast during NAIDOC week, the program gives a voice to Indigenous men and women in Victorian prisons and correctional facilities. In 2004 the broadcast was awarded a Human Rights Award.

In 2003 Kutcha helped to initiate an annual Black Harmony Concert in Melbourne. Held during Cultural Diversity Week, this annual concert brings together artists from Indigenous and refugee backgrounds to celebrate racial harmony and cultural identity. Kutcha has been recognised with many awards, including a National Indigenous Persons Award and Deadly Award (both in 2001) and a Victorian Indigenous Performing Arts Award in 2004. However, just like his mentor Jock Austin, he does not do what he does for the accolades. Drawing inspiration from all of the Elders that have gone before him, he believes that ‘work is not work if someone is benefiting from what you do.’
“The range of green leaves represent the diversity of Traditional Owners throughout Victoria and the shields that float inside them represent the resilience of our people over thousands of generations that we have been here.

The concentrated line work represents our unique symbolism that we use to explain our connection to country here in Victoria. The wavy blue lines represent the ocean and inland waterways that surround and run through Victoria.

The subtle arcs that run through the water bodies represent the importance of water and our relationship and responsibility to it.”

Our Culture, Your Culture

Mick Harding
### Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll

#### Inductees

**2011**
- Dr Alf Bamblett
- William Barak
- Geraldine Briggs AO
- Albert ‘Alby’ Clarke
- William Cooper
- Lester Marks Harradine
- Merle Jackomos OAM
- Melva Johnson
- Johnny Mullagh or Unaarrimin
- John Stewart Murray OAM JP
- Sir Douglas Nicholls KCVO OBE JP
- Lorraine ‘Bunta’ Patten
- Dorothy Peters
- Elizabeth Pike
- Archie Roach AM
- Joan Robinson
- Lionel Rose MBE
- Nessie Skuta OAM
- Alma Thorpe
- Joan Vickery AO

**2012**
- William ‘Bill’ Onus
- Lady Gladys Nicholls
- Reginald Saunders MBE
- Henry ‘Banjo’ Clarke
- Iris Lovett-Gardiner AM
- Mollie Dyer AM
- John ‘Sandy’ Atkinson AM
- Eleanor Harding
- Mary Atkinson
- Reg Blow
- Kevin Coombs OAM
- Ivy Bell
- William ‘Lin’ Onus AM
- Robert ‘Wally’ Cooper
- Linda Twite

**2013**
- Margaret Tucker MBE
- Harold Blair AM
- Albert Mullett
- Hyllus Maris
- Fay Carter
- Alfred John Henry Lovett
- Leonard Charles Lovett
- Frederick Amos Lovett
- Edward McDonald Lovett
- Herbert Stahle Lovett
- Laura Bell
- Herbert ‘Jock’ Austin
- Beryl Booth
- Valmai Heap

**2014**
- Simon Wonga
- Henry ‘Harry’ Thorpe
- William Reginald Rawlings
- Jack Patten
- Edna Brown
- Alice Thomas
- Alfred ‘Boydie’ Turner
- Winnifred Evelyn Quagliotti
- Bessie Yarram
- Margaret ‘Dharrul’ Wirrpanda
- Beverley Peter
- Walda Blow
- Robert ‘Jumbo’ Pearce
- Graham Atkinson
- Phillip Cooper