WARNING
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication contains images of people who have passed away.
# Contents

4  
**Message From the Premier**  
The Hon Dr Denis Napthine MP  
Premier of Victoria  

5  
**Message From the Minister**  
The Hon Jeanette Powell MP  
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs  

6–27  
**Inductee Profiles**  
- 6 Margaret Tucker MBE(C)  
- 8 Harold Blair AM  
- 10 Albert Mullett  
- 12 Hyllus Maris  
- 14 Fay Carter  
- 16 The Lovett brothers  
- 20 Laura Bell  
- 22 Herbert ‘Jock’ Austin  
- 24 Beryl Booth  
- 26 Valmai Heap  

29  
**Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll**  
Inductees
The Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll provides a great opportunity for us to celebrate Aboriginal people who have helped to shape our State.

Acknowledging the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians is an important part of reconciliation. The Honour Roll raises awareness of the history and culture of Aboriginal Australia, and recognises the significant contribution Australia’s First Peoples have made to our society.

I am proud to have the Honour Roll permanently displayed in Victoria’s Parliament House as a reminder of the accomplishments of Aboriginal Australians.

This year’s inductees have between them served in two world wars, campaigned for Native Title rights, and worked tirelessly in Aboriginal health, education and welfare. I encourage all Victorians to pay respect to these outstanding individuals and to be inspired by their example.

The Hon Dr Denis Napthine MP
Premier of Victoria
Now in its third year, it is encouraging to see the Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll gaining prominence and being warmly embraced by the Victorian community.

It is also pleasing to see that this year, for the first time, the Honour Roll inductees include not just inspirational individuals, but a family group who have made an important and unique contribution to the community and in the service of their country.

Each of the inductees on this year’s Honour Roll has positively influenced outcomes for their communities in the fields of education, health, sport, arts, military service and social justice.

The values of equality, justice, and freedom, which have motivated these Aboriginal heroes, are shared by all Victorians.

By celebrating their lives and achievements, the Honour Roll will ensure that Victorians, now and in the future, will be able to understand and acknowledge the challenges they faced, the sacrifices they made and the opportunities they have grasped.

Through their stories it is my hope that others in Aboriginal communities will be inspired and will continue their trailblazing work.

My thanks go to each inductee and their families for allowing us to share their remarkable stories.

I would also like to acknowledge the work done by the Honour Roll Advisory Panel. I appreciate their difficult task in selecting and recommending this year’s inductees from the many worthy nominees.

Congratulations to all of this year’s inductees, we pay tribute to your contribution.

The Hon Jeanette Powell MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
She and her sisters learnt about traditional customs and language from their mother and great grandmother, although mission rules prohibited any overt expression of their culture.

At the age of 13 years, Margaret and her sister May were taken against their mother’s wishes from Moonacullah Mission to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls in New South Wales. Many, like Margaret, were placed in homes and trained for a life of domestic service. It would be years before Margaret would see her family again.

After three years at Cootamundra, 16-year-old Margaret began several years of domestic work. She suffered abuse at the hands of her first employer and was subsequently placed with a more compassionate family. After attempting to run away, Margaret was sent to a sheep station near Walgett, where she remained for three years.

In 1925, Margaret was released from service and moved to Melbourne. The Depression years saw people flock to the city in search of work. There was little to be found. Margaret was among the first Aboriginal people from rural missions and reserves to settle in inner city Fitzroy and its surrounding suburbs. Together they established a social and political centre from which many important Aboriginal organisations and community leaders emerged.

Margaret married Phillip Tucker and together they had a daughter, Mollie, in 1927. Margaret made a living working in factories. At the same time, she became an Aboriginal rights activist alongside other ex-Cummeragunja residents, including William Cooper, Bill and Eric Onus and Sir Douglas Nicholls. In 1932, she was a founding member and treasurer of the Australian Aborigines League, one of the first Aboriginal-run organisations in Australia. It campaigned in support of citizenship rights for Aboriginal people.

As the push for equality gained momentum, Margaret dedicated herself to the cause. On Australia Day in 1938, as the nation celebrated 150 years of settlement, she joined League members and others in organising a ‘National Day of Mourning’ in Sydney. Its intention was to highlight the impact of European arrival on those people to whom the land had belonged. In more recent times, the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) has developed this idea into a week-long national celebration of Aboriginal culture.

In 1939, when 200 residents at Cummeragunja Mission walked off in protest against the conditions there,
Margaret ran a campaign to raise money for food and blankets, which she delivered to those camped defiantly on the riverbank near Barmah Forest.

With the advent of the Second World War, the community’s priorities shifted. Margaret’s husband was a serviceman and she threw herself into the war effort. She worked at a Footscray rope maker and then at a munitions factory. She also organised concerts to raise money for the Red Cross. Admired for her beautiful singing voice, Margaret entertained servicemen at a military hospital in Heidelberg. All the while, she continued to support local families in and around Fitzroy.

It was Margaret’s idea to hold the first Aboriginal Debutante Ball in 1949. It became an important annual fundraiser, as well a source of dignity and pride for young Aboriginal girls. The tradition she established continues to empower young Aboriginal women to this day.

By the 1950s, Margaret was a highly respected and influential community leader, who delivered rousing speeches to crowds gathered under the Morton Bay fig in Carlton Gardens.

She became a valued member of the Aborigines Advancement League, the successor to the Australian Aborigines League she had helped establish. After the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) was established in 1958, Margaret was a fixture at its annual conferences and encouraged participation among others. She was also invited to America to speak about Aboriginal issues in 1957.

Margaret proved adept at working constructively with government. In 1964, she became the first woman to be appointed to the Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board. In 1968, she was the first Aboriginal woman to join the Commonwealth’s Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. She also served on the Aboriginal Land Council of Victoria and the Victorian Government’s Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee. Margaret worked alongside her sister Geraldine Briggs to form the Victorian Aboriginal and Islander Women’s Council towards the end of the 1960s. It went on to become a national body, led by Geraldine (Geraldine Briggs was among the first group of 20 Aboriginal Victorians to be inducted to the Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll in 2011).

In 1973, Margaret’s leadership and support played a vital role in establishing the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. She was also a patron of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, which was established by her daughter, Mollie, just one of the many people for whom Margaret was a role model. Vulnerable young Aboriginal women have found refuge at the Margaret Tucker Hostel since 1983.

In 1968, Margaret was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil). In 2001, she was inducted to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women, among the first to receive the honour. Published in 1977, her autobiography, *If everyone cared*, is seen as an important account of the early policies of child removal. Margaret also featured in the acclaimed documentary *Lousy Little Sixpence*, broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). She passed away in 1996.

Despite the challenges and hardships she faced, Aunty Marg focused her energies on creating a more equal and understanding society. Whether through her own actions, or those of future generations inspired by her life, she undeniably succeeded. 😊
Harold Blair’s beautiful voice captured the imagination of the Australian public. His unprecedented achievement as the nation’s first Aboriginal tenor opened the door for future generations of Aboriginal artists, and he used his high profile to demand better treatment for his people.

Harold was born at Cherbourg Mission in Queensland in 1924. His mother, Esther Quinn, was 14 years old. She and Harold were later transferred to Purga Mission, near Ipswich, where Harold spent his childhood, much of it without Esther, who worked as a domestic.

From an early age, Harold loved to sing, and would spend hours listening to records on the mission’s wind-up gramophone. A born entertainer, his talent for mimicry delighted his peers. Harold attended the mission school until the age of 13 years. Several years of farm work followed, although the mission received most of Harold’s wage.

In 1942, 18-year-old Harold was one of hundreds of Aboriginal men sent to work in the cane fields as part of the war effort. While in Fairymead, Harold’s singing caught the attention of his employer and he was soon performing regularly at local events. Then came a fortuitous encounter with a union man named Harry Green.

From the moment he heard Harold sing, Green was convinced of his potential. He insisted that Harold relocate to Ipswich and take singing lessons. He then arranged an audience with the soprano Marjorie Lawrence, who was impressed by Harold’s raw talent. Her insistence that Harold be professionally trained was widely reported at the time. However a campaign to send him to a top music conservatorium was initially unsuccessful.

The breakthrough came after Harold sang on a radio talent show in 1945. His performance attracted a record number of votes from listeners, and within months he was accepted at the Melba Conservatorium of Music in Melbourne. Despite his limited mission education, Harold impressed with his hard work and commitment. The consensus was that he could be a tenor of world renown. Study was stressful, but Harold played cricket to unwind.

The novelty value of an Aboriginal opera singer meant that Harold attracted significant publicity. He began to make public appearances and perform recitals. He also attracted praise from a visiting American baritone, Todd Duncan, who invited him to study in the United States.

In 1949, Harold graduated with honours, becoming the first Aboriginal person to achieve a Diploma of Music. The same year he married Dorothy Eden, a fellow student with whom he had fallen in love. They went on to have two children, Nerida and Warren.

To raise money for his study trip to America, Harold toured Australia extensively, delighting audiences wherever he went. He went on to
spend 18 months in America, where he was struck by the progress that had been made by the African American population compared to his own people. Following a triumphant performance at the New York Town Hall, he returned to Australia in 1951 determined to see change. He began to use his unique position to speak publically about Aboriginal disadvantage, as well as the importance of education for Aboriginal children.

Whilst in America, Harold accepted an invitation from the ABC to join a major national tour marking Australia's jubilee. He saw the tour as an honour and returned home before his studies were complete. Harold received standing ovations night after night, in towns and cities around the country, but the gruelling schedule took its toll on his voice. Although his voice recovered, his ABC contract prohibited him from singing professionally for three years. With his appearances limited to private functions and occasional benefit concerts, Harold took a job at a hardware store.

In 1956, Harold began teaching part-time at the Melba Conservatorium and released his first and only recording. Despite positive reviews for a local production, *Of Mice and Men*, the momentum that should have propelled him to international stardom had waned. Increasingly Harold's focus was on Aboriginal rights. He campaigned alongside other prominent community leaders and was regularly invited to speak on social issues. Harold was elected to the Aborigines Welfare Board and, upon returning from a year-long tour of Europe with his family in 1958, became an active member of the Aborigines Advancement League.

Following a run in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1962, Harold arranged for a group of Aboriginal marching girls from Cherbourg to perform at Melbourne's Moomba festival. The success of the visit led to the creation of the Harold Blair Holiday Project. For more than a decade, hundreds of Aboriginal children from country areas of Australia were treated to trips to Melbourne.

In 1964, while his wife ran the family business, Harold ran as a candidate for the seat of Mentone in the Victorian state election. He was narrowly defeated after the distribution of preferences. Following a brief period in South Australia, Harold returned to Victoria and became a music teacher. He taught at schools in Sunshine and Ringwood, earning praise for his “near genius as a choirmaster.”

Harold returned to the stage in 1973 for a performance of the Aboriginal opera *Dalgerie* at the newly opened Sydney Opera House. The same year he was appointed to the Commonwealth Arts Board.

In 1976, Harold was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in recognition of his service to the arts. Sadly, he passed away following a heart attack the same year. He was posthumously inducted to the Live Performance Australia Hall of Fame. In addition, each year the Melba Opera Trust awards an Aboriginal student the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship. The Federal Lower House seat of Blair in Queensland, created in 1998, was named after Harold. He is also the subject of a published biography and a documentary.

As an opera singer, Harold challenged long held misconceptions about what Aboriginal people were capable of. Whether in concert halls or at rallies, he moved audiences with the power of his voice. It is a voice that continues to resonate.
Albert Mullett
[1933– ]

AN ADMIRE Dt STORYTELLER, ACTIVIST AND CRAFTSMAN

Uncle Albert Mullett is a Gunai Elder whose many years of service to the community have earned him widespread admiration. His devotion to his culture, his people and his country is expressed through significant contributions in areas such as education, land rights and cultural heritage.

Born in Melbourne in 1933, Albert was raised by his mother, Rita Maude Mullett, and her extended family, including his maternal grandparents, David Mullett, a Gunditjmara man, and Maude Stevens, a Gunai woman from the Tatungalung clan. Albert had six brothers, two of whom were taken by the authorities in 1934. Sadly, both passed away before Albert had the chance to meet them.

Albert’s family were removed from Lake Tyers Mission when Albert was an infant. Albert’s earliest years were spent on an island across the lake and included clandestine visits by night to relatives that remained on the mission. Later the family divided their time between East Gippsland and the south coast of New South Wales, often camping wherever seasonal employment could be found. These campsites were social places that provided Albert with a sense of belonging in his youth.

During the Second World War, Albert lived with his family in Melbourne, before moving to Jackson’s Track near Drouin. Albert attended school intermittently, but was more interested in the teachings of his older relatives. He particularly cherished the days spent learning traditional woodcraft techniques from his great uncles.

As soon as he was old enough, Albert left home to travel the countryside. He fondly refers to this period as the ‘bumma’ years — a colloquialism used at the time to describe nomadic young Aboriginal men.

Albert roamed from South Gippsland to the Monaro region of New South Wales in search of work. Jobs included picking crops and cutting wood.

As soon as he was old enough, Albert left home to travel the countryside. He fondly refers to this period as the ‘bumma’ years — a colloquialism used at the time to describe nomadic young Aboriginal men.

He attended dances for fun and, when he had no relatives to stay with, he slept in the bush. Albert often met Aboriginal Elders there, who shared traditional stories and songs around the campfire. At the same time, the treatment Aboriginal people received from the authorities left a lasting impression on him.

Albert spent many years as a bean picker. The work was hard and the hours long, but he developed a reputation as a ‘gun’ — even setting a record for most bags filled in a day. The job became a family affair following Albert’s marriage to his childhood sweetheart Rachel Mongta. The couple, who have been together more than 50 years, even honeymooned in a bean paddock. Albert would pick beans from spring until autumn, and then work in sawmills around Gippsland or in the bush felling trees, for the rest of the year. He looks back on his time in the timber industry with great affection.

Eventually, Albert, his wife and their eight children settled in Bairnsdale. In 1980, Albert’s life abruptly changed direction. Struck by the absence of Aboriginal history in his children’s curriculum, he volunteered to teach students at Bairnsdale Primary School about Aboriginal culture.
Such was the success of his lessons, held in a renovated bike shed, that the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated made Albert a spokesperson for Aboriginal education. Straight-talking Albert became a fixture on committees promoting Aboriginal interests at all levels of education, from primary to tertiary and TAFE. He was also employed as a community councillor at the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education. Among his achievements, Albert helped establish the first Aboriginal Studies course in Victoria, at Monash University’s Gippsland campus and successfully lobbied for additional university places for Aboriginal students. His work in schools over the years, such as organising camps and dance groups, has helped strengthen identity and cultural awareness among young Aboriginal people, and has promoted reconciliation within the whole community.

For many years, Albert has been committed to the preservation and celebration of Aboriginal culture. He was among a dedicated group who pushed for legislative changes that allowed local Aboriginal communities to have more involvement in the management of culturally significant sites around Victoria. As a result, hundreds of Aboriginal people have been trained and employed in cultural heritage roles. Closer to home, Albert helped establish a ‘keeping place’ in Bairnsdale. He has brought a wealth of experience to a number of significant cultural and heritage bodies, including the Australia Council’s Aboriginal Arts Board, the Australian Archaeological Association, and a federal taskforce on Australian cultural collections overseas.

As an elected councillor to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Albert served three years as chair of the Yangenook Regional Council. A heart attack in 1992 only temporarily slowed him down. In the late 1990s he was a key negotiator between Aboriginal land councils, Traditional Owner groups, and the international company that constructed the Eastern Gas Pipeline. He has subsequently served as an advisor to several government, private sector and community-run organisations on matters of land use.

For more than 15 years, Albert led his people’s fight for native title recognition. On 22 October 2010, the Federal Court of Australia recognised the claim of the Gunaikurnai people over much of Gippsland. On the same day, the Victorian Government entered into an agreement with the Gunaikurnai people under the Victorian Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010. It was a momentous occasion for Albert, who has since taken a prominent role on the Gunaikurnai Elders’ Council.

Uncle Albert remains a respected master-craftsman of traditional wooden artefacts, including shields and boomerangs. These are skills he has taught to new generations. He is a storyteller who continues to educate and advise people, young and old, about Aboriginal culture, including his 17 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren. With his combination of wisdom, integrity and fortitude, Uncle Albert is a leader who will be an enduring role model.
Hylland Maris
[1934–1986]

A VISIONARY WITH A PASSION FOR EDUCATION

Aunty Hyllus Maris was many things: activist, artist, cultural leader and philosopher. Above all, she was a visionary, who used her many talents to stand up for what she believed in. Her success in establishing an Aboriginal school challenged the education status quo and has been unlocking young people’s potential ever since.

Born on Cummeragunja Aboriginal Reserve in 1934, Hyllus was the third of nine children. Her mother, Geraldine Briggs, née Clements, was a Yorta Yorta and Wiradjuri woman and her father, Selwyn Briggs, a Wurundjeri and Yorta Yorta man. Hyllus and her siblings inherited a profound sense of social justice from their parents, both of whom were prominent Aboriginal rights activists.

Hyllus lived at Cummeragunja until she was five years old. In 1939, her family were among 200 people to walk off the reserve in protest over its management. Afterwards they lived on the outskirts of Mooroopna, in a makeshift settlement known as the Flats. Its residents were excluded and stigmatised by mainstream society because of their Aboriginality. In later years, Hyllus often drew on her experience growing up as an outsider.

Much of Hyllus’ knowledge about her cultural heritage, genealogy and history came through her mother, from her grandmother, Theresa Clements. Her grandmother instilled in Hyllus great pride in her Aboriginal heritage. Hyllus attended school in Mooroopna and then Shepparton. Many who grew up on the Flats remember Hyllus as their protector, a compassionate girl unafraid to confront the perpetrators of discrimination.

From a young age, Hyllus was an artistic soul and a talented musician. She played guitar and sang at local venues in and around Shepparton. Hyllus trained and worked as a hospital dietician. In 1956, she married a Malaysian geologist and adopted the surname Maris.

She took a keen interest in Aboriginal affairs and supported her parents’ fight against inequality, becoming a member of the Aborigines Advancement League and attending meetings of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATS).

In 1970, Hyllus relocated to Melbourne, where she became a well-known activist and public speaker. She was a founding member and liaison officer for the National Council of Aboriginal and Islander Women, working alongside her sisters and mother, who was the council’s driving force. Where services for the Aboriginal community had been neglected, the women worked to fill the void.

The various acts of community service Hyllus undertook included visits to incarcerated Aboriginal people, for whom she would organise bail and represent at court hearings. Subsequently, Hyllus helped set up the Aboriginal Legal Service in 1973, as well as the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and similar services in Queensland. Later, Hyllus chaired the Victorian Council for Aboriginal Culture, which organised some of the earliest Aboriginal art exhibitions in the state.
In 1977, Hyllus received a scholarship from the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs to study social policy and community development in London with the prominent sociologist, Sir Richard Hauser. It was the first of a number of study trips abroad that included cultural exchanges with First Nation peoples of North America. During her travels, an idea began to develop in Hyllus’ mind.

Hyllus returned to Australia convinced of the need for a holistic approach to Aboriginal education. She was determined to build a school that would focus on three key areas — wellbeing, education and culture — and established the not-for-profit Green Hills Foundation to raise funds. Intense lobbying by Hyllus and others secured a grant from the Victorian Schools Commission, to purchase land near Diamond Creek. A pilot project was then conducted. Shortly after, the first independent Aboriginal school in Victoria opened its doors.

Worawa Aboriginal College officially opened in 1983. ‘Worawa’ is an Aboriginal word for eagle. The name was agreed upon by the Aboriginal Elders who worked with Hyllus on the cultural content of the college’s program, the eagle being of great significance in Aboriginal culture and a symbol of the tremendous potential Hyllus saw in Aboriginal children. Extensive consultation went into developing a curriculum that balanced Aboriginal culture with the very best of western education. Scholarships were offered to ensure the widest range of Aboriginal students could attend.

Today, Worawa is situated in beautiful grounds outside Healesville. It remains Australia’s only boarding school for Aboriginal girls, catering for the middle years of schooling (years 7–10). Students come from across Australia and collectively speak more than 30 traditional languages. The school continues to develop high achievers and its ongoing success is a proud testament to Hyllus and her vision.

Artistically, Hyllus’ legacy is equally significant. She was a playwright and a gifted poet – her poem, *Spiritual Song of the Aborigine*, is considered an anthem for her people. Hyllus also collaborated to write and produce a four-part television series *Women of the Sun*, broadcast on SBS television. It documented the Cummeragunja walk-off and the experiences of Aboriginal women across two hundred years of colonialism.

First broadcast in 1982, *Women of the Sun* won several awards including the United Nations Media Peace Prize; the main drama award at the Banff Television Festival in Canada; two Australian Writers’ Guild awards and five Television Society of Australia awards. The script was published in 1983, followed by a novel in 1985. Hyllus was appointed as the inaugural chair of the Victorian Government’s Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

Hyllus passed away in 1986 after a battle with cancer. The illness had done little to diminish her commitment to the Aboriginal community and she remained active until the end of her life.

In 1999, an annual memorial lecture was established at La Trobe University in honour of her contribution to Aboriginal education. Today, Maris House at Melbourne Girls’ College sits as a tribute to its namesake. Hyllus was inducted to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women in 2001.

Aunty Hyllus believed the future to be in the hands of the young. Thanks to her efforts, many Aboriginal children today are growing up with the opportunity to make a difference, just as she did.
A WISE LEADER WHO BELIEVES IN A FAIR GO FOR ALL

For more than 40 years, Aunty Fay Carter has dedicated herself to Victoria’s Aboriginal community. In the proud tradition of self-determination, her work has helped strengthen families, reform welfare programs, and set the standard for Aboriginal aged care services.

The Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung Elder was born at Echuca Hospital in 1935. Aboriginal women were not permitted in the maternity ward at the time, which meant Fay’s mother, Iris Nelson, gave birth to her on the hospital’s verandah.

Fay grew up on the outskirts of Mooroopna, in a settlement known as the Flats. Most of the Aboriginal families who resided there were formerly of the Cummeragunja Mission in New South Wales, including Fay’s family. In 1939, they had left in protest against the mismanagement of the mission. The Cummeragunja walk-off, as it became known, was a landmark event in the history of the Aboriginal rights movement in Australia.

Although they existed on the margins of society, Fay’s relatives proved resourceful and resilient; they made the best of life on the Flats, despite constant hardships that included regular floods. Families supported one another, so Fay’s early years were contented ones.

With seasonal farm work taking her mother away for extended periods of time, Fay spent much of her childhood in the care of her maternal grandmother, Priscilla Nelsen, née James. Fay’s grandmother looked after 19 children, including Fay and her siblings. She was an influential figure during those formative years, imparting wisdom and life lessons that have guided Aunty Fay in later life.

After attending the state school in Mooroopna, Fay went on to high school in Shepparton, and then Echuca, where she completed second form (year 8). Her first job was at the same hospital she had been born in.

Employment at a local fruit shop followed — Fay is thought to be the first Aboriginal girl in Echuca to work in retail.

In 1954, at the age of 18 years, Fay married Leslie Carter. The couple went on to have two children, Wendy and Rodney. As well as raising her young family, Fay worked various jobs, and also ran a service station for a time. The family relocated to Melbourne in 1972.

In Melbourne, Fay became increasingly involved in Aboriginal affairs, motivated by the work of the community leaders who would become her mentors. In 1973, she successfully applied for a field officer role at the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL). At the same time, she returned to study, completing several courses including a welfare officer qualification and an Associate Diploma in Community Development.

The year 1982 saw Fay employed by the Victorian Department of Social Security as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer. She later returned to AAL as the Community Development and Welfare Program Co-ordinator, and spent several years as a committee member.

One of Aunty Fay’s proudest and most recognised achievements has been her work at the Aboriginal Community
Elders Service (ACES). Fay was among a resolute group of people, led by Aunty Iris Lovett–Gardiner, who saw a need for culturally appropriate aged care services for Aboriginal Elders. Together they worked tirelessly to establish ACES, the first Aboriginal-controlled community organisation of its kind in Australia.

Fay helped lobby for the land and funding that allowed ACES to build a ‘caring place’ in East Brunswick. Opened in 1992, the centre provides a safe environment in which the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Elders is supported. Fay went on to manage ACES for 16 years, during which time she overcame many challenges and funding shortfalls, even forgoing a salary when money was tight. Many attribute the continued success of ACES to Aunty Fay’s perseverance and hard work. It is a legacy she dedicates to the Elders from whom she has drawn strength and inspiration.

Many other organisations and committees have benefited from Aunty Fay’s rational thinking and strength of spirit. She was a founding member of Australia’s first Aboriginal women’s refuge. During 11 years as a board member of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) — ten of which were spent as Chair — she helped draft and implement the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, which governs the practice of child protection services in Victoria. Her work saw her recognised as a life member of VACCA in 1991.

From 1974 to 1990, Fay was a member of the Victorian branch of the National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC), including five years as president. She completed two terms as an elected councillor on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and has served on the Austin Hospital Community Advisory Committee, the Kulin Nation Cultural Heritage Program, and the board of Worawa Aboriginal College.

Although she formally retired at the age of 72 years, Aunty Fay’s commitment to her community remains strong. She participated in eighteen months of intense negotiations with the Victorian Government to achieve a landmark native title settlement in 2013, which formally recognised the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of lands in central Victoria. As a result, approximately 266,532 hectares of Crown land has been handed back and support mechanisms for recognition and community development put in place.

Aunty Fay’s resolve to find better outcomes for vulnerable families has led to an ongoing role in the Aboriginal Family Decision Making Program, a three-way partnership between the Victorian Department of Human Services, VACCA and an Elder from ACES. The program aims to keep young Aboriginal people safe and connected to their community.

In 2001, Aunty Fay received a Centenary Medal. She was inducted to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women in 2004 and made patron for VACCA’S Child Abuse Conference the same year. In 2013, she appeared in a campaign to launch the First Peoples exhibit at Melbourne Museum’s Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre. She is happiest when with her five beloved grandchildren — Drew, Joshua, Natasha, Neane and Rodney Jnr — for whom she has immense pride.

Whether through her work for government, or the community-run organisations she has served, Aunty Fay has always strived for the best outcomes for Aboriginal people. Many have lived healthier and more prosperous lives as a result.
**The Lovett Brothers**

**First Family Group to be Inducted to the Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll**

Alfred John Henry Lovett  
Leonard Charles Lovett  
Frederick Amos Lovett

Herbert Stahle Lovett  
Edward McDonald Lovett

**The Brave Men of the Gunditjmara Garrison**
The Lovett brothers occupy a special place in the history, not just of Australia, but also of the Commonwealth. Four of the brothers served in both World War One (WWI) and World War Two (WWII). Their unique family story has come to symbolise the contribution that thousands of Aboriginal men and women have made to the defence of Australia, even at a time when citizenship rights were denied to them at home.

Alfred, Leonard, Frederick, Edward and Herbert were the sons of James Lovett, an Aboriginal man from South Australia, and Hannah (née McDonald), a descendant of the Kerrup-Jmara clan of the Gunditjmara nation in Western Victoria. As a child, Hannah, her mother, and her brother, were among the first Aboriginal people at Lake Condah Mission after it was established in 1862. Hannah went on to have 13 children, among them five boys who would enlist to fight in WWI.

Against the odds, all five brothers returned home safely. Although the Great War had been an equaliser of men — racism had no place in the trenches — little had changed in civilian life. After the closure of Lake Condah Mission in 1919 the Lovett family made a living in the surrounding district.

Four of the five original brothers re-enlisted during WWII, however due to their age they served within Australia. Their younger brother, Samuel, and several other family members also served in Australia and overseas. All returned unharmed, as has every member of the Lovett family who has served in the Australian Armed Forces — 21 men and women in total.

As a result of the heroic service of the Lovett brothers and their post-war activism in support of the service of Indigenous soldiers, Aboriginal service men and women today are given the support and recognition they deserve.

Nigel Steel, a historian at the Imperial War Museum in London, once stated that he knew of no other record of military service by a single family that matched that of the Lovett family.

Fittingly, the building that contains the Department of Veteran’s Affairs in Canberra was renamed Lovett Tower in honour of their distinguished military contribution.

The Lovett brothers were descended from a long line of heroic warriors; the ‘Fighting Gunditjmara’ people who saw conflict from the earliest days of European settlement. While there is pain in these stories, they also offer lessons for us all: in courage, resilience and hope.
Alfred John Henry Lovett (1880–1962)

Private Alfred Lovett enlisted on 29 July 1915, just before his 36th birthday. After training in the Middle East from October 1915 to March 1916, he fought with the 26th Battalion. He later transferred to the 12th Battalion.

Alfred participated in the battle of the Somme in France, including battles for Poziéres and Mouquet Farm. He returned to Australia in March 1918 and was discharged in June that same year. He was awarded three service medals.

As a civilian, Alfred worked as a horse breaker and trainer near Casterton. He was also a well-known jockey. He married Sarah Spring, from Hamilton, with whom he had two sons. They ran a farm in the region. As the eldest brother, Alfred was ineligible to enlist in WWII due to his age.

Alfred passed away in 1962 at the age of 78.

Leonard Charles Lovett (1884–1951)

Leonard, commonly known as Charlie, enlisted on 27 May 1916 and served as a Private in the 39th Battalion of the 3rd Division. He fought on the Western Front, including significant campaigns at Passchendaele in 1917 and Amiens in 1918. He returned to Australia in 1919 and was awarded two service medals.

Many people were surprised to discover that Leonard spoke fluent German. It is thought that he picked up the language while working around Tarrington, near Hamilton, which was settled by German-speaking pioneers.

Among his occupations, Leonard worked as a drover. He married Elsie Maude Clark, with whom he had seven children. Leonard re-enlisted during WWII. Between 1941–42, he was stationed in Australia as a Private with the 3rd Garrison Battalion. His daughter, Alice, served with the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force in WWII and his grandson, Mervyn, served in the Vietnam War.

Leonard passed away in 1951 at the age of 67.

Frederick Amos Lovett (1887–1958)

Frederick enlisted on 13 May 1917. He was a Private in the 29th Reinforcements of the 4th Light Horse Regiment and fought in Palestine. He was discharged on 15 June 1919 and awarded two service medals.

He married Mary Murray Rose and had 11 children. His daughter, Laura Bell, is also a 2013 inductee to the Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll. Frederick worked as a labourer for many years.

Frederick re-enlisted in March 1942. He was a Corporal and served in the Australian Army Catering Corps as a cook. He was discharged from the army in July 1947 at the age of 60. Frederick’s grandson, Sergeant Ricky Morris, has recently served in the army with the International Force for East Timor and in Afghanistan.

Frederick passed away in 1958 at the age of 72.
**Edward McDonald Lovett (1893–1957)**

Edward was known as ‘Mac’ and enlisted on 17 August 1915. He was a Trooper with the 4th Light Horse Regiment and the 13th Light Horse Regiment that patrolled the Western Front. He returned to Australia in May 1919 and was awarded two service medals.

A single labourer when he joined, Edward married Rose Ann Heron before he shipped out in 1915. The couple had two children, a son and daughter. They ran a billiards hall and pub in Hamilton for a time. Edward also worked as a labourer.

Edward re-enlisted in 1940 and served as a Corporal at the number 12 Garrison Battalion until 1943. Edward’s daughter, Sarah Pearl, also served in the Australian Women’s Army Service during WWII.

Edward passed away in 1957 at the age of 64.

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**Herbert Stahle Lovett (1898–1976)**

Herbert, the youngest of the brothers to serve in WWI, enlisted in 1917. As he was only 19 years old, his parents were required to give special permission for him to join. He fought on the Western Front as a Private in the 15th Machine Gun Company and participated in the attack that broke the Hindenburg Line in 1918, the last and strongest of the German army’s defence. He was discharged in July 1919 and was awarded two medals for his service.

Herbert married Emma Foster from Harrow in 1926 and went on to have six children. His daughter, Iris Lovett Gardiner, was inducted to the Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll in 2012. Herbert was musically gifted and played the organ at Lake Condah’s church. He was also the choirmaster and worked in the timber industry.

In August 1940, Herbert re-enlisted as a Private. He served as a cook in the Australian Army Canteen Corps and was discharged in October 1945.

Herbert passed away in 1976 at the age of 78.
A BELOVED ELDER WHO INSPIRES ACTION

Aunty Laura Bell is a respected Gunditjmara Elder who works tirelessly for Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Through her ability to inspire and enlighten, she has helped implement educational, legal and cultural initiatives that have improved lives and created opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Laura was born in Portland, Victoria, in 1936. Her mother, Mary Murray Rose, and her father, Frederick Amos Lovett, were both from the Lake Condah Mission, but raised their family in a nearby hamlet known as Greenvale. Laura had six brothers and two sisters.

As a child, Laura attended church at the mission each Sunday. The church was an important meeting place for the Aboriginal community, where families came together to socialise and support each other. Laura remembers fondly the picnics and epic childhood adventures she shared with her siblings and cousins.

The church was demolished in the 1950s, however Laura often returned to the site as an adult to help her Aunty Connie Hart maintain the mission cemetery.

Laura completed her education at Mount Eckersley State School. Although she was aware of discrimination against Aboriginal people from an early age, it was only later in life that Laura understood the extent to which her people’s culture had been deliberately suppressed by colonial institutions. She remembers her father being barred from pubs because he was an Aboriginal man, despite being a veteran of both world wars (Laura’s father, along with four other Lovett brothers, were inducted to the 2013 Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll together for their unique record of military service).

A resident of Heywood for most of her adult life, Laura has always felt most at home when on Gunditjmara country. As a mother of nine children, the demands of a large family occupied her for a number of years; she cared for two nieces and four nephews in addition to her own. However, Laura continued to support the work of family and friends in advancing Aboriginal rights.

In 1976, Laura attended the first local committee meeting of the newly established Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, which later became the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI). From that moment, she was dedicated to achieving better education and training outcomes for Aboriginal people around the state. Her involvement with VAEAI spans four decades, during which time she has served on the committee of management in a variety of roles, including vice-president. Among her achievements, Laura helped increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as Koorie Educators in schools; she herself worked as one for five years. As chair of the Barwon South West Regional Koorie Education Committee she provided local input to government policy.

Over the years, Laura has used her presence on advisory boards and committees at many of the Victoria’s leading tertiary institutions, including South West TAFE, Glenormiston College, Deakin University, University of Melbourne, Monash University and Victorian University of Technology, to
promote understanding of Aboriginal culture to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and staff. She was also a valued member of the Aboriginal Education Management Committee at the University of Ballarat.

In 1991, Laura helped establish the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation. It was a community-run organisation in the truest sense, devised by a committed group of like-minded people scribbling ideas on butcher’s paper, over a fish and chip dinner. From humble beginnings – family barbecues in the park and playgroups run out of people’s homes were among its first initiatives – Winda-Mara has grown to provide a wide range of services to Aboriginal communities in and around Heywood, Hamilton and Portland, covering health, land management, housing and economic development. It is also a significant employer of Aboriginal people. Laura is a life member and can still be found cooking and cleaning there most weeks.

When the Mirimbiak Nations Aboriginal Corporation (the predecessor to Native Title Services Victoria) was established in 1996 as the representative body for native title in Victoria, Laura was elected to the inaugural Board of Directors. She supported the native title claim of the Gunditjmara people, which resulted in the return of 140,000 hectares of Crown land and waters in the Portland region in 2007. In 2011, the Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar peoples were recognised as the native title-holders of almost 4,000 hectares of Crown land in the Yambuk region. Both were historic moments for Laura and her people.

Laura was involved with the establishment of the Victorian Koori Court, a division of the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria, and is passionate about her role as one of the Court’s Elder representatives. Her no-nonsense approach has earned her great respect from magistrates and defendants alike. Aunty Laura is a member of the Victorian Government’s Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee and was the first Aboriginal board member of Heywood Rural Health, a local public hospital and aged care facility. Her work as a community advocate has seen her invited to speak at local, national and international forums, including as a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Church Committee.

Today, Aunty Laura has 23 grandchildren and 24 great grandchildren, each of whom is a source of pride. She is a passionate supporter of the Lake Condah Wanderers Football Netball Club and a devoted member of the St John’s Anglican Church ladies’ guild. In 2001, Aunty Laura received the Centenary Medal for her service to the community. The same year she was one of the inaugural inductees to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women. She is listed in Who’s Who of Australian Women and has received a Certificate of Appreciation from Deakin University’s Institute of Koorie Education.

Further recognition of her lifelong commitment to Aboriginal education comes from the accommodation wing named after her at Deakin University’s Kitjarra Student Residency. Winda-Mara is also home to the Aunty Laura Bell Education Centre. In 2013, the University of Ballarat honoured Aunty Laura with Doctor of the University Honoris Causa. Despite all these accolades, she lists one of her proudest achievements as participating in the Portland leg of the 2006 Commonwealth Games baton relay.

 Armed with common sense, political savvy, compassion and an infectious laugh, Aunty Laura manages to be both highly respected and much loved. She is a true inspiration. ✨
A CHARISMATIC LEADER WHO CHAMPIONED HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

Jock Austin was a charismatic Gunditjmara man and one of the most revered leaders of the Aboriginal community in Victoria. He recognised and nurtured the unique sporting prowess of Aboriginal people and promoted sport not only as a means to improve health and wellbeing, but also as a way to restore pride and purpose to the lives of the most disadvantaged.

Born under a gumtree at Framlingham Aboriginal Reserve in 1938, Jock was the son of Ella Clark and Cyril Austin. He grew up surrounded by a large extended family that included 11 siblings and many more cousins. Jock attended a local state school but left to find work as soon as he was old enough. One of his earliest jobs was cutting timber with his uncles.

From a young age, Jock displayed immense talent at sport, particularly football and boxing. At the time, there were several boxing troupes that travelled throughout regional Victoria competing in circus-like tents. Many of the most popular fighters were Aboriginal men, who became Jock’s childhood heroes. He eventually convinced a passing troupe, managed by a larger-than-life character named Major Wilson, to employ him. In the years that followed, Jock toured agricultural shows, sharpened his technique as a boxer and earned a place in many stories of legend.

Jock moved to Melbourne in the late 1950s, where he joined the growing Aboriginal community in the inner city suburb of Fitzroy. He worked as a boilermaker for a time, and also had a job laying tram tracks. Jock continued to excel at boxing and football. He met Patricia Prior and together they raised their two children, Troy and Thelma. Jock was a proud family man. He affectionately referred to his mother as ‘Mummy Ella’ and his children recall attendance at her Sunday dinners as being non-negotiable.

Although his life was not without its struggles, Jock overcame them and was determined to help others do the same. To that end, he considered physical fitness and good health to be crucial. Jock was appointed sports co-ordinator at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) after its establishment in 1973 and subsequently implemented a range of social, sports, and health programs for the organisation.

In response to the drug and alcohol problems affecting young people within his community at the time, Jock proposed an idea for a gymnasium and youth club. He believed it would empower young people and get them off the streets. With the support of VAHS management, he leased a venue and opened the Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Community Youth Club Gymnasium in 1982. Its success led to its rapid expansion. Jock eventually secured funding from the Aboriginal Development Commission to purchase a building in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy. The organisation, which is now known as Melbourne Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation (MAYSAR), is still located there today.
The new youth club gymnasium provided young Aboriginal people with a place to learn, train, and connect with peers. While Jock was a highly-regarded boxing trainer, the activities on offer ranged from cricket and netball to kick boxing and aerobics. However, Jock had created far more than just a youth club gymnasium. It was a safe and welcoming place that offered shelter and structure to anyone who sought it: black or white, young or old. The youth club gymnasium became an important focal point for the entire community and Jock was its heart, a tough but adored father figure.

Jock believed in the value of education and strived to help his people understand their history and the world around them. He worked with young offenders and wards of the state, providing them with guidance and support. Over the years, Jock and his wife opened their home to countless young people in need. Together they also hosted annual Christmas lunches for Fitzroy’s poorest, including the ‘parkies’ who gathered in local parks and lanes.

A passionate footballer, Jock had a long association with the Fitzroy Stars Football Club (FSFC), an Aboriginal team established in the early 1970s. He served the club in a variety of roles, including as coach and president, and oversaw the establishment of a junior club in 1978. He was also the driving force behind the club’s revival after it was left without a league in the 1980s. Despite knockbacks from several inner city leagues, Jock persisted, until the FSFC found a place in the Melbourne North Football League in 1989. He also worked hard to establish what is today known as the Sir Doug Nicholls Sports Oval at the Aborigines Advancement League. A pavilion at the oval bears Jock’s name.

Recognised as a community leader of considerable influence, Jock held positions at the Aborigines Advancement League and VAHS. He was director of the Victorian Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation Co-operative and a board member of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. Jock represented Victoria on the board of the National Sports Foundation and was a delegate to the National Aboriginal Sports Council when it was established in 1986. In 1988, he received a National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) award for his community work.

Over the years, many prominent Aboriginal people have reflected on the positive impact Jock had on their lives. These include singers Kutcha Edwards and Archie Roach — who dedicated his first album to his cousin, Jock — as well as the world champion boxing great Lionel Rose MBE, another cousin. Jock was a figure of reconciliation and thought of by all as a gentleman: someone who could communicate as easily with workers at the docks as he could with government ministers, or Aboriginal Elders in central Australia.

After Jock passed away in 1990, more than a thousand mourners attended his funeral service, a powerful testament to the esteem in which he was held.

Jock Austin was an impressive figure, described as physically imposing. Most imposing of all is the legacy he has left behind, one of a lifetime dedicated to helping his people.
AN UNSUNG HERO OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Aunty Beryl Booth is one of Victoria’s unsung heroes and a lifelong advocate for Aboriginal people around the state. From education to the environment, there are few areas that have not benefited from her commitment and political nous.

The Gunditjmara and Gunaikurnai Elder was born in Fitzroy in 1942, the eldest of four children and only daughter to Harry Booth and Hannah (née Lovett). As a child, Beryl spent holidays with her mother’s family in the Western District and her father’s in the east. The spirit of her rural cousins helped balance her restless urban nature.

From an early age, Beryl understood the political milieu of being an urban Aboriginal woman. Her parents worked tirelessly for their community and would assist Aboriginal people in custody at the local police station, representing them in court and purchasing meals for them from the Rainbow Hotel in Fitzroy. The legacy of their efforts has provided Beryl with an endless source of inspiration.

As a child, Beryl assisted in a family venture that helped fund the activities of Aboriginal rights activists. She would fold paper bags that her father — the first Aboriginal taxi driver in Melbourne — would then distribute during his shift to collect old clothing and linen. These items were either sent to the Lake Tyers Aboriginal settlement, or deconstructed, and the zippers, buttons and fabric sold. Enough money was raised to purchase a vehicle, which was then used by community members to deliver pamphlets to raise awareness of the Aboriginal cause.

After finishing school, Beryl initially worked in factories. She married Noel McDonald, with whom she had four sons and two daughters. The family moved to Gippsland, first to Sale and then to Traralgon. Beryl became a mainstay of the community, doing whatever she could to help others. While working as a beautician, she developed a grooming protocol, which she shared with Aboriginal women to help build their confidence and self-respect. Beryl also assisted with adult education classes and would drive to neighbouring towns after work to collect students. Many elderly Aboriginal people were given the opportunity to learn to read and write as a result.

In 1969, Beryl successfully applied for the position of Community Liaison Officer with the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. She balanced caring for her young family with working to address issues associated with education, health and housing within the local Aboriginal community. In 1973, she represented Victoria at a major Aboriginal conference in Darwin, organised by the Catholic Church in the lead up to the 40th Eucharistic Congress. It was a significant moment for Beryl: she was inspired by what could be achieved when Aboriginal people across Australia worked together.

Towards the end of the 1970s, Beryl focused on reuniting Aboriginal families whose children had been removed. As the vice-president of the local junior football team, she encouraged involvement in sport as a means to resettle young people back into their families and the community. Always looking for ways to get involved, Beryl played on a Koori women’s softball team.
Beryl worked closely with the local council to advocate for Aboriginal interests. In 1978, a friendly conversation with a local businessman at the football, led Beryl and others to help set up an Aboriginal building society. It was the first initiative of its kind in Victoria and helped fund housing for the Aboriginal community. The model was later adopted elsewhere. Beryl also helped establish one of the region’s first Aboriginal co-operatives, the Central Gippsland Aboriginal Health and Housing Co-operative.

Later, Beryl was employed as one of the first Aboriginal teacher’s aides at Liddiard Road Primary School in Traralgon. The role was not limited to the classroom: Beryl visited Aboriginal families to assist getting children to school, ran breakfast and lunch programs and helped engage parents with school activities.

After returning to Melbourne to care for her mother in 1981, Beryl went on to spend 10 years as a public officer at the Kerrup Jmara Elders Corporation. At the time, the organisation was the peak body representing the Gunditjmara people on matters related to traditional ownership. Their efforts resulted in the Commonwealth Government passing the Aboriginal Land (Lake Condah and Framlingham Forest) Act 1987, at the request of the Victorian Government. It was a historic and hard-won decision that recognised Beryl’s people as the custodians of land at Lake Condah in Western Victoria.

In 1995, Beryl opened an ‘Aboriginal Embassy’ in her Northcote home. She dedicated it to the work of her parents, grandparents and others who had come before her. In the role of ambassador, Beryl wrote hundreds of letters to representatives at all levels of government, pushing for action on countless issues affecting Aboriginal people. She provided a safe place in which anyone could voice their concerns. She also helped organise some of the first ‘Welcome to Country’ ceremonies for Banyule City Council. Beryl’s work at the embassy has been acknowledged by community and political leaders.

Over the years, Beryl has donated her time to many prominent Aboriginal-run organisations, including the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, where she is regularly invited to give talks on cultural awareness to doctors. She was involved during the earliest days of what is today the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages. Beryl has also been a member of the Victorian Indigenous Remembrance Committee since it was established and plays a central role in planning the Victorian Indigenous Remembrance Service held at the Shrine of Remembrance each year. She helped produce a short film documenting several years of the event.

Beryl has also ventured into the arts. She is co-author of a short story, *The Tree*, which was published in the *Australian Short Stories* serial in 1993. In 2004, she was cast as Nanna in the Ilbijerri Theatre Company’s production of *Rainbow’s End*, which was performed at Melbourne Museum and in Shepparton. Today, she still engages in community work and continues to perform ‘Welcome to Country’ ceremonies. Her work as a member of the Indigenous Victorian Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee resulted in an award from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 2000. She hopes to find time to record in writing the many untold Aboriginal stories she feels are yet to find a place in Australian literature.

Aunty Beryl has a strong connection to her ancestors and their strength has enabled her to continue the fight for a better future for all Aboriginal people. While she humbly plays down her own contribution, recognition of her achievements is long overdue.
Valmai Heap was a Yorta Yorta woman whose accomplishments in life reflected a desire to give back to her community. Her influence in areas such as cultural heritage can still be seen today, while the glass ceilings she shattered exemplify her passionate advocacy for women.

Born in Carlton in 1943, Val was the daughter of Thomas Muir and Nellie Delahoy. Her parents were unmarried, which at the time made it difficult for her mother to care for her. Val’s paternal grandparents, Louisa and Charlie Muir, adopted her when she was three months old.

Growing up in Shepparton, Val was surrounded by strong female relatives, each of whom helped shape her character. Her grandmother Louisa was politically astute and one of the first members of the Aborigines Advancement League. She instilled in Val a sense of pride in her Aboriginal heritage. A competent student, Val completed fourth form (year 10) at Shepparton High School. She found work as a secretary upon obtaining her Leaving Certificate in 1959.

When she was 17 years old, Val met a young man named Alan Heap at a dance. The two went on to marry, before relocating to New Zealand in search of employment opportunities. Leaving family and friends for a new country was a daunting prospect for the young Aboriginal woman, but Val was a pragmatist. She remained one her entire life.

Val and Alan’s two children, Karen and Ian, were born in New Zealand. The family spent a number of years as lighthouse keepers in some of the most isolated locations in the country. It was not an easy life. There were no telephones or shops and access to the outside world was limited to a monthly visit from a supply boat. Val’s ingenuity helped her to meet the needs of her family, while her parental responsibilities extended to overseeing the children’s home schooling via correspondence.

After a period of time on the remote Chatham Islands, the family settled in Greymouth, on New Zealand’s South Island. It was here that Val became engaged in activism for the first time, attending an anti-apartheid protest during a tour by South Africa’s national rugby team. Her husband established a successful business selling the pottery he made, while Val returned to secretarial work. However, she too expressed herself artistically and was a weaver of considerable talent.

In 1982, Val and her husband followed their adult children back across the Tasman to Australia. Following a brief return to Shepparton, the couple settled in Clunes and Val successfully applied for a job in cultural heritage at the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC). She quickly proved to be someone with clear vision and determination.

Within two years, Val was appointed Administrator of BADAC. It was a significant achievement in the days when female CEOs were rare; even the board members who appointed Val were all men. Val became a role model.
for women of all ages, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, as well as a symbol of the change that she believed women could enact together.

With her ability to listen and communicate effectively with the local Aboriginal community, Val’s tenure as Administrator was a productive one. Compassionate and hard working, she helped develop health and legal services, childcare, cultural and educational programs, thereby strengthening the foundation on which BADAC has continued to build. Her valiant early efforts to promote wider understanding of Aboriginal culture, and to provide support for victims of domestic and family violence, were a precursor to future initiatives.

Today, Val’s daughter Karen continues the journey of her mother’s work.

After a short time working as a drug and alcohol officer for the Victorian Government, Val relocated to Melbourne in 1988, to take on a newly created position at Museum Victoria. As Co-ordinator of Aboriginal Training, she once again broke new ground: it was the first time an Aboriginal person had been employed by the institution.

Val’s work for Museum Victoria saw her travel the state, implementing programs that contributed to the preservation of artefacts, cultural traditions and stories. She helped assemble a collection that is exhibited to this day and is used to introduce Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to the history of Victoria’s First Peoples.

As part of her work to promote recognition of Aboriginal women, Val secured funding to produce a number of exhibitions, books and films. Among these were the successful touring photographic exhibition *Daughters of a Dreaming*; a major book titled *Living Aboriginal History*; the film *Koorie Culture Koorie Control*; a film about the Cummeragunja walk-off that focused on the experience of three women and a film about the revival of fibre craft amongst Aboriginal women. Val continued her own weaving and textile art, while remaining a dedicated supporter of other female artists.

She used the opportunity to advance Aboriginal interests and promote better understanding of the problems faced by communities, in areas such as housing.

Val passed away in 1991. A trust was established in her honour to continue her work. In 2012, she was posthumously inducted to the Hepburn Shire Council Women’s Honour Roll.

Unassuming in manner, Val’s preference was to work quietly behind the scenes, without the need for recognition. However just as her contribution to Victoria cannot be understated, nor will it be forgotten.
“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
**INDUCTEES**

**2011**

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  
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