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'A Matter of Primary Importance': early missionary educational attempts at Ramahyuck (Victoria) and Poonindie (South Australia)

Amanda Barry

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The missionary role in educating Aboriginal children has received some attention from various scholars, but it has not been considered as a distinct theme in the history of how they, as well as colonial governments, educated the Aboriginal children of South-Eastern Australia from the time of settlement until twentieth-century assimilationist policies resulted in the closure of many Aboriginal schools. My PhD research focuses on education as a central theme in understanding the process of colonisation and its varying, and usually devastating effects on Aboriginal people. Further, without denying the destructive impact of colonisation as a whole, I hope that my research can highlight that in some cases, the education of children provided unique opportunities for engagement and negotiation between the European colonists and Aboriginal peoples.

Although my research is in its early stages, it appears that this engagement was more prevalent in the missionary encounters with Aboriginal people than in government educational programs. In many ways, this is not surprising. As often the first sustained white contact with Aboriginal people, religious missionaries of many denominations had to adapt to the landscape and the people they sought to convert. Later, when Aboriginal people were deprived of land and heavily controlled by government 'Protection' boards, such interaction was reduced by the highly institutionalised nature of Aboriginal life, and the limited recourse for action against the government bodies that rigidly controlled their daily lives.

The history of the European education of Aboriginal children intersects with many aspects of Australia's post-contact history. Consequently, in the context of

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long-standing historical and historiographical debates about the telling of Australia's past, isolating the history of education from so many congruent themes becomes impossible. However, as a focus, it provides a new way of exploring how the colonial project effected those most vulnerable to its consequences. A colonial history which focuses on education provides new opportunities to write the history of engagement and negotiation between Aboriginal people and the white occupiers of their land. We can see in the archives that Aboriginal parents were particularly concerned about how their children would be educated by the invaders. European education could not provide, or compensate for, the rich cultural heritage of Aboriginal society, tradition, folklore and custom. In the earlier years of settlement, for example, parents would sometimes remove their children from school, for 'initiation' and other cultural practices. However, as the spread of settlement in south-eastern Australia made traditional life increasingly difficult, my examples today will demonstrate how Aboriginal parents actively engaged in ensuring the quality and consistency of their children's new education.

For Indigenous people, colonisation brought a new imperative of survival which overtook continuation of traditional practices including the education of children. Dispossessed and often starving, their hunting grounds turned into farmland, Indigenous families had little choice but to accept government aid, which was often conditional on sending their children to school. This new education also began a process of psychological separation of Indigenous children from their family group, foreshadowing the more brutal physical separation of children from their parents as government involvement in Aborigines' lives increased.

In experimenting with a comparative framework as an approach to understanding more deeply this complex history, I will today discuss two short, and differing examples of Aboriginal schools, one in Victoria and one in South Australia.

The Protectorate and early missionaries

Although few in the nineteenth century accorded to Australia's Indigenous people any land rights or recognition of an existing culture, colonial governments and religious representatives were highly concerned with the civilisation and

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Christianisation of the 'savages' whose presence inconveniently falsified the 'terra nullius' basis upon which the land had been taken.[1] Indeed, in 1825, King George IV had instructed Governor Darling 'that you [must] do to the utmost of your power promote religion and education among the Native Inhabitants.'[2] What sort of education, however, remained an open question, debated both in the colonies and in London. Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey wrote in 1848 that 'schools should be formed…on the principle of combining the arts of industry with the elements of ordinary and religious education.'[3]

In the new colony of Port Phillip, Governor Bourke had by 1837 already appointed George Langhorne, an experienced missionary from the Cape of Good Hope, to establish a nine hundred acre mission by a 'lush swamp' next to the Yarra, which later became Melbourne's Royal Botanical Gardens lake. The Colonial Secretary's instructions to Langhorne emphasised that he 'will have a better chance of succeeding in instructing the children of those tribes than the adults, and the younger the children the greater the chance of success.'[4] Langhorne was therefore encouraged 'to induce the attendance of the children by presents to the parents and by all other suitable means.'[5] Bourke approved of this system of bribery but warned Langhorne that he should not force the children to stay or the parents to give them up.[6] Thus, Melbourne's very first school commenced in May 1837, in a rough building erected by Woi Wurrong tribesman paid a quarter-pound of bread per hour. Langhorne reported in August that keeping children at the mission was succeeding beyond his

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[1] John Heaton was an exception, writing in 1887 that 'At the period of Governor Phillips's landing, Australia was the only country in the world of any considerable extent whose aboriginal inhabitants were still the undisputed possessors of the soil.' From John Henniker Heaton, *On the origin, them manners, customs, and institutions, and the annihilation of the Aborigines of Australasia* (London: Reprinted from the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, Vol XIV - Part 1, 1887, by Harrison and Sons, 1887), 3.

[2] Extract from His Majesty's Instructions to Lieutenant-General Darling, as Governor of New South Wales and its Dependencies, 17 July 1825 in *Copies of Instructions given by His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, for promoting the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of New Holland or Van Diemen's Land*, (London: Colonial Office, Downing Street, 1831), 9.

[3] As quoted in J.J. Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous: A History of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales* (Sydney: J.J. Fletcher, Southwood Press, 1989), 28-29.

[4] Colonial Secretary's draft Memorandum, [to George Langhorne] 9 December 1836 in Ian MacFarlane, *The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839*, vol. 2, *Historical Records of Victoria* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1982), 163.

[5] Colonial Secretary's draft Memorandum, [to George Langhorne] 9 December 1836 in Ibid., 163.

[6] GK Holden to GM Langhorne, 25 March 1837 in Ibid., 171.

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expectations, probably because he had made it a rule to deny meals to any child who left the mission-house without permission.[7] Enrolment rose to twenty male students, until, Langhorne reported late in 1839 that the 'blacks of the Waworong tribe removed their children from school upon every frivolous pretext…until at length the school was entirely neglected and deserted.'[8] Consequently, the school closed.[9]

Independent missionary groups were also interested in the Port Phillip Aborigines. The Wesleyan Missionary Society's Reverend James Orton, visiting from Tasmania, reported in 1836 of the Victorian Aborigines' 'professed willingness to receive instruction themselves, and specially to commit their children to the care of missionaries.'[10] Two years after this, and other apparently amicable exchanges, Reverend Francis Tuckfield established the Buntingdale Wesleyan Mission in the Otways, forty miles from the young Geelong township and far from the evil influences of white men and alcohol.[11] Government correspondence indicates that provision of funds was contingent on encouraging a settled life, primarily through the provision of education for children. To achieve this, Reverend Orton recommended that 'at least one [missionary]…should always be at the establishment for the purpose of instructing the natives, particularly the children.'[12]

A few months after commencing, Tuckfield reported that the young scholars were 'attentive and manifest powers of mind capable of receiving instructions of any kind.'[13] By December 1839, up to seventy young Aborigines regularly attended the school, learning to read from word-lists printed in their native language.[14] Tuckfield's first annual report concluded that 'the present state and prospect of our Mission,

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[7] GM Langhorne to Colonial Secretary, 14 August 1837 in Ibid., 173.
[8] G.M Langhorne, to C.J. La Trobe, 15 October 1839 in Ibid., 509.
[9] Aldo Massola, *Aboriginal Mission Stations in Victoria: Yelta, Ebenezer, Ramahyuck, Lake Condah* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1970), 9.
[10] Rev. JR Orton to George Arthur, August 1836, in MacFarlane, *The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839*, 90.
[11] This location was then the junction of the Barrabool and Lake tribes, and is near to where Birregurra is today.
[12] Rev. JR Orton to Sir George Gipps, 3 May 1838 in MacFarlane, *The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839*, 96.
[13] Journal of Francis Tuckfield in Ibid., 139. As an aside: Mrs Tuckfield had given birth to a son just one month earlier, also had a one-year-old daughter and had just travelled a boggy 40 miles by cart to the mission station.
[14] Rev. B. Hurst to Chief Justice La Trobe, 7 May 1840 in Ibid., 149.

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particularly with regard to the children, are truly encouraging.'[15] However, by the early 1840s, low attendance at the mission and increasing white settlement of the area forced Buntingdale's closure.

Failure and stagnation

By the 1850s, the distraction of gold left Victoria's young colonial government with little time for administrative consideration of the Aboriginal situation. Aboriginal education was largely dismissed by an 1866 Commission into compulsory schooling, establishing from that time the separation of Aboriginal schools from the mainstream system. One commissioner argued that being 'a migratory people, there seems no reason why we should charge ourselves with their education. Their admission to our Common Schools could not be otherwise than distasteful to our own people.'[16] It was therefore left to mission stations, and the Board for the Protection of Aborigines to provide for the education of Aboriginal children. Although some mission and reserve schools became state Common Schools in the 1870s, their administration and funding was never adequately resolved, with the Department of Education and the Board, later re-named the Aborigines Protection Board, continually disagreeing on whose responsibility the schools were.

'Please help us soon': Education at Ramahyuck and parental protest

German Moravian missionary Friedrich Hagenauer established Gippsland's Ramahyuck mission station on the Avon River near Sale in 1863. A dormitory for children and a church were the first solid buildings constructed, replacing the original bark schoolhouse.[17] The dormitory dining-room then became school-room for seventeen young students, until a separate, adjacent school house was built in 1871, when a Victorian-era code of moral propriety prevailed in gender-segregated playgrounds which could be viewed from all main buildings. The so-called 'orphan

[15] Ibid., 150.
[16] Palmer, 1866 Commission as quoted in L.J. Blake, *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Melbourne: Education Department of Victoria, 1973), 158.
[17] David Rhodes, *The History of Ramahyuck Aboriginal Mission and a Report on the Survey of Ramahyuck Mission Cemetery* (Melbourne: Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, 1996), 47.

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house' remained in use however, Hagenauer describing it as 'a special branch of our educational work'. Most of the schoolchildren slept there, the physical separation of children from their parents being considered at the time vital to the process of civilisation.[18] Children were taught the three 'R's' as well as vocational skills including wood-work for boys and sewing for girls. Victoria's Board for the Protection of Aborigines hoped that such skills would eventually make the reserves self-sufficient.

In early 1867, Bessie Flower, a young, educated Aboriginal woman from Western Australia, arrived at Ramahyuck and immediately began to teach the Aboriginal children as well as Hagenauer's own, with what she described as 'great earnest'.[19] When the government introduced compulsory education in the early 1870s, Ramahyuck was one of the few Victorian mission schools to come under the control of Victoria's Education Department. The school received generally glowing reports from Gippsland's Inspectors, including the unprecedented honour in 1872, when Bessie was assistant to the Education Department teacher, of being the only Victorian school to gain a 100 per cent pass rate.

Often set in attractive locations, by lakes and rivers, and in abundant natural bushland, some mission stations earned extra income as quasi-resorts. At Ramahyuck, Victorian tourists were shown over the reserve, punted around the lake by Aboriginal men, and would perhaps buy a purpose-made traditional weapon to take back to Melbourne as a souvenir. They also wrote comments in Ramahyuck's visitors' book, and several visitors expressed surprise at the high abilities of the young students. In 1897 a visitor wrote that

[18] F A Hagenauer 'Aboriginal Mission Station Ramahyuck' Report for 1885 printed, part of a booklet detailing missionary endeavours all over Australia (cover and title pages missing or never existed). Box One, Hagenauer Papers MS 9556, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. Also Bain Attwood, "Space and Time at Ramahyuck, Victoria 1863-85," in *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, ed. Peter Read (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000), 47.

[19] Several West Australian Aboriginal girls came to Gippsland, mostly to marry, and Harris notes that 'Many Gippsland Aborigines today have some Western Australian ancestry.' See John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, 2nd ed. (Sutherland: Albatross Books, 1994), 202. Bessie Flower to Ann Camfield, Port Albert July 24, 1867. Bessie Flower letters MS 12117 Box 3420/5 Australian Manuscripts, La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria

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> The training of the children in penmanship, arithmetic, singing and physical exercises indicates unlooked for intelligence…the development of which is its own testimony to the careful and assiduous training by the instructors.[20]

An 1883 visitor was 'deeply thankful at the knowledge of holy things displayed by the children especially.'[21] The school and its scholars were variously described as 'admirable,' 'delightful' and 'most gratifying'.[22] The children's writing 'was good and carefully done' and visitors were often surprised by the school's high standard in singing, 'general appearence [*sic*] and academic ability'.

Few archival examples of how the students reacted to this education survive, but some can be found in missionary's reports. In 1877 a very agitated Hagenauer advised the Board that five young boys had absconded from school. Although this was the first such occurrence, he warned the Board that if swift and severe police action was not taken, the incident 'would have evil consequences even with the children...for many of [them] wish to run away and go begging through the country.'[23] Such an extreme response to a relatively minor infraction suggests a degree of discontent and restlessness among the children that belies the Inspector's glowing reports.

Later, in 1892, Ramahyuck parents protested the racism of the school's two female teachers, and the quality of their children's education. A group of Aboriginal women wrote to the Department asking for the teachers' dismissal:

> We the undersigned Aborigines at Ramahyuck most respectfully request that you will be so good to remove…the two ladies who have the charge of our school, as they demoralise our children…it is no easy matter to bring up our children in the good way, but they receive bad examples and nasty words…Please help us soon.[24]

The teachers also received a letter directly from an upset mother, who argued that 'for my [children's] sake I think I do quite right in not letting them go to school to hear

[20] Ramahyuck Mission Station Visitor's Book 1881-1906 Box One, Hagenauer Papers MS 9556, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Hagenauer to Secretary BPA 21 November 1877, Item 171, NAA CRS B313/1 Box 10 Ramahyuck.
[24] Bessy Cameron, Florence Moffat, Mary Scott, Emily M. Hephen and Lulu Darby to the Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, February 29 1892. BPA records for Aboriginal Station Ramahyuck, 92/10464 registered 16 March 1892.

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you abusing the Head of the place and all the people: what a bringing up for them!' She asked instead for a 'good Presbyterian woman, but no mischief makers.'[25] Altogether, Ramahyuck parents withdrew fourteen children from the school. There is no record of how the teachers responded to these accusations, but they left the school and one of them resigned from the Department soon afterwards.[26] They were replaced by a stream of new teachers, until declining enrolments meant that the Department would no longer operate Ramahyuck as a State School. The date of the school's closure varies from 1901 to 1905, but it is clear that when parents protested the Department's suggestion that children walk five miles to the nearest school, the Board appointed, and paid, their own teacher until the school closed a few years before Ramahyuck itself was closed in 1908.

South Australia: social responsibility?

South Australia prided itself, however erroneously, on being free from the violence which characterised other colonies' early interactions with Aboriginal people. However, as in Victoria, the South Australian colonists' philanthropic goodwill was quickly limited to those seen to have the most 'civilising' potential – young Aboriginal children. The South Australian Protector's early reports reflect a hopeful attitude towards education. Protector Moorhouse had begun a school at the 'Aboriginal Location' established in Adelaide next to the Governor's house. The school produced graduates who were employed in the township as errand boys or apprenticed into the trades. Based on these results he believed 'that the capacity of the native child is equal to that of the European.'[27] As early as 1843, the *Adelaide Examiner* regretted 'that schools have not been established on a larger scale, and with more liberal means,' asking 'how callous have we grown since we left home?'[28] Furthermore, other colonists and the Anglican church noted that although the children did well at school, they soon returned to their families upon graduating, preferring to

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[25] E.M. Hephan to Mesdames Moss and Vidler, [n.d.], BPA records for Aboriginal Station Ramahyuck, 92/10464 registered 16 March 1892.
[26] note on registration page, BPA records for Aboriginal Station Ramahyuck, 92/10464 registered 16 March 1892, Ramahyuck February 29 1892.
[27] "The Report of the Protector of the Aborigines," *The Adelaide Examiner*, 1 April 1843, 2.
[28] Ibid., 2.

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live with them and experience initiation and traditional cultural education. This, many residents believed, was the failure of the Protection system, and it was this unique, if misguided, social conscience that led to the most experimental civilising mission the colonies had attempted.

'Everybody looked fat, happy and clean': Schooling at Poonindie[29]

In 1850, Anglican Archdeacon Mathew Hale established the Poonindie Natives Institution at Port Lincoln, which at that time was only accessible from Adelaide by boat. The Institution was an exercise in complete separation and isolation of young Aborigines who had graduated from the Adelaide school, and been coupled off for marriage by the Protector. Hale had emphasised that at the time of its establishment, Poonindie was 'intended as a home and as a place of further training and instruction <u>in natives who have already been to some extent weaned from the habits of bush life</u>'.[30] To maintain this isolation, Hale originally stipulated that Poonindie would not accept local Aborigines.

Hale reflected later that in 'civilising' the Aborigine, 'the object to be primarily aimed at in all cases should be getting hold of and instructing the children.'[31] Hale was a great believer in the necessity of educating children. He warned that:

> if the intellect is not stimulated in early years, not cultivated, nothing set before the mind to help it on in expansion and growth, it becomes hopelessly dwarfed or stunted. There is a time for growth and expansion. But if that time is lost it can never be recovered.[32]

Hale's educational zeal proved fortunate, as it soon became clear that his planned utopia was not within the fiscal reach of the fledgling South Australian

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[29] *The Melbourne Missionary* as quoted in Matthew Hale, *The Aborigines of Australia: Being an account of the institution for their education at Poonindie, in South Australia* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889), 91.
[30] Undated report – c1856, Hale papers AJCP M381 (microfilm). State Library of Victoria.
[31] Hale, *The Aborigines of Australia: Being an account of the institution for their education at Poonindie, in South Australia*, 69.
[32] Ibid., 67-68.

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government. In 1852, the Governor decided that future funds would be conditional on Hale's acceptance of *any* Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal child that the Protector decided to send to Poonindie. Most significantly, this included the schoolchildren at the nearby Port Lincoln Aboriginal school. However, upon hearing the news most of the young students ran away. They were clearly reluctant to be sent to Poonindie, which Hale had populated with young couples originally from the Murray tribe who were traditional antagonists of the Port Lincoln Aborigines.

To encourage attendance at the school, Hale decided to employ the local parents and allow them to camp on the Institution's outskirts while their children attended the school and lived in the boarding house with other children the Protector sent. However, when Hale passed the administration on in 1859, it became clear, as one newspaper letter-writer noted, that 'these wild blackfellows are often induced to leave their children at the station' and furthermore, were discouraged from working at Poonindie.[33] Their ration depot was also relocated in a government attempt to separate the children from their parents.

Daily school life at Poonindie was highly regulated and carefully constructed to maximise Christian learning. Hale, like Hagenauer at Ramahyuck, was attempting the transmission of useful, usually manual skills which he hoped would allow the Poonindie people to become a new farming and labouring class within the colony. Women and children were taught during the day, with reading and writing taking up the morning, and sewing the afternoon. The older boys and adult men, who would work Poonindie's fields all day, attended evening school, which newspapers as far away as the Melbourne *Argus* reported 'was well attended by men and boys; many of them can read and write very well.'[34] Bishop Short from Adelaide, on inspecting the Institution and the school in 1872, reported that 'the whole number under instruction averages thirty. Their reading is intelligent; writing very fair; [but] the arithmetic does

[33] 'Poonindie Mission' To be inserted in the Observer. Printed page dated 18 September, 1859. Letter by GW Hawkes to the Bishop, Hale papers AJCP M381 (microfilm). State Library of Victoria.
[34] Mr Goodwin's speech at the annual meeting of the Church of England Mission to the Aborigines, as reported in the *Argus*, quoted in Hale, *The Aborigines of Australia: Being an account of the institution for their education at Poonindie, in South Australia*, 88.

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not go beyond the first four rules.'[35] The *Melbourne Missionary* journal had a simpler measurement for success, reporting approvingly that 'everybody looked fat, happy and clean'.[36]

In contrast to the public image that Hale and his successors worked hard to maintain, the racism of the teachers' unpublished reports is remarkable. Their comments sometimes verged on the bizarre. One advised the Protector in 1889 that 'I should like to see the school children wearing boots and stockings, believing [this] to be an elementary principle of education.'[37] One teacher admitted that he 'like[d] some of the little fellows in spite of their blackness though they are certainly different to white children.'[38] It appeared that the students enjoyed their spare time, and there is a poignancy to the report that the boys' 'chief' would often have them 'making believe that they were wild "black fellows" and throwing spears which they do most cleverly.'[39] The teachers commonly reported that the children struggled with arithmetic, the girls more so. However some young women performed especially well. The teacher reported in 1876 that he believed one of his senior students, Jessie Milara, capable, when she graduated, of becoming 'head assistant teacher'. Two other students would become assistants.[40] The only obstacle to this, the teacher wrote, was Jessie's mother, who wanted to keep her daughter at home. The teachers' frustration with parents exercising what little control they could over the situation, is frequently expressed. One teacher wrote that he 'often wish[ed] the boys could be kept from the grown-up ones as they not only contaminate the young ones but also try to set them against [us]'.[41] This last comment takes me to my final, brief analysis of the reproduction of class difference between different tribes at Poonindie, which I believe was principally determined by educational opportunity.

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[35] Bishop Dr Short, extract from an account of a visit to Poonindie in year 1872, as quoted in Ibid., 96-97.
[36] *The Melbourne Missionary* as quoted in Ibid., 91.
[37] Report of Poonindie School, for Quarter ending September 27th, 1889. From Microfiche copy of Reports of the school master of Poonindie Native Station 1876-1889. From Poonindie School SRG 94 W83 10, State Library of South Australia (Henceforth Poonindie School Reports)
[38] Letter dated 3rd October 1884, accompanying report. From Poonindie School Reports.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Report on the schools at the Poonindie Native Institution for the quarter ending 31st March 1876. From Poonindie School Reports.
[41] Letter dated 3rd October 1884, accompanying report. From Poonindie School Reports.

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'Superior, mentally and physically': education reproducing class?

Adelaide's Bishop Hawkins' 1853 description of a Poonindie man making purchases at the Port Lincoln general store, concludes that Kewrie's ability to understand the value of money 'indicate[d] a real mental and moral development.' Hawkins was full of praise for young Kewrie, warning that 'had he been left to native influences…would probably have become…a dirty, ragged, diseased, lazy sheep-stealer'.[42] This contrast demonstrates how Hale and his successors reproduced class distinctions between the local Port Lincoln Aborigines and original Poonindie residents, descendants of Murray tribes, who as a long-time colonist put it in 1859, were seen to be 'superior, mentally and physically, to any other tribes…in this colony, New South Wales, or Victoria.'[43]

Much of this superiority, most commentators believed, was the result of successful transmission of Western ideas via the education Aborigines received at the Institution as children. By contrast, the Port Lincoln Aborigines at Poonindie were, a colonist argued, 'literally made "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for their more civilised brethren…[who] evidently look upon them as inferior beings.'[44] However, their children, educated at Poonindie, were permitted to enter its 'superior' ranks through marriage. Whilst I am in the early stages of my South Australian research, it is clear that education was an important social determinant at Poonindie.

Conclusion

It is a sad coincidence that both institutions, successful, at least in their own terms, at 'civilising' Aboriginal people, were closed within ten years of each other. At Poonindie, it was the greed of the surrounding landowners that eventually led to the Anglican trustees' sale of the land in 1896. The people were relocated to other

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[42] Bishop Reverend E. Hawkins on his visit February 1853 in a letter to S.P.G. in Hale, *The Aborigines of Australia: Being an account of the institution for their education at Poonindie, in South Australia*, 54-55.
[43] 'Poonindie Mission' To be inserted in the Observer. Printed page dated 18 September, 1859. Letter by GW Hawkes to the Bishop, Hale papers AJCP M381 (microfilm). State Library of Victoria.
[44] Ibid.

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government reserves, or were left to fend for themselves. At Ramahyuck, a declining population led to the Aborigines Board's decision to forcibly relocate all residents further east to John Bulmer's Lake Tyers mission station in the early twentieth century. I have little time today to attempt much comparative analysis, but it is striking that both institutions sought to construct a positive public image of their educational work, through newspaper reports, publications, and open days when the schools and their students were displayed for public consumption. By contrast, it is in the tedium of weekly, and quarterly reports by teachers and administrators at both Ramahyuck and Poonindie that strikingly racist attitudes towards Aboriginal children become apparent.

The history of European provision of education for Aboriginal children is complex. Sometimes, it appears that the colonial education of Aboriginal children constituted a complete rejection of Indigenous culture and a blind imposition of Christian values, religion and morality. However, it is also clear that Aboriginal people did not simply accept this education, and in the early years would temporarily or permanently, remove their children from school, in a clear attempt to preserve and promote their own education and initiation traditions. When Victoria's rapid growth resulted in institutionalisation of most of its Aboriginal people, the protests at Ramahyuck show that Aboriginal parents were actively concerned about the quality and continuation of their children's schooling. Conversely, the reluctance of the Port Lincoln parents to send their children to Poonindie showed their anticipation of later policies that would force their children's attendance and severely restrict parental access to the Institution by denying work and relocating ration depots. Education was central to the early policy decisions that eventually took over Indigenous people's lives. I hope that the short examples I have discussed today demonstrate that in the nineteenth century, Aboriginal people responded, protested and negotiated with Europeans who, having colonised Aboriginal land, were attempting to psychologically colonise Aboriginal children.

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