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Too white to be regarded as Aborigines: An historical analysis of policies for the protection of Aborigines and the assimilation of Aborigines of mixed descent, and the role of Chief Protectors of Aborigines in the formulation and implementation of those policies, in Western Australia from 1898 to 1940

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Chapter Five

AMENDING THE ACT, 1919-1936

The rapid increase of the Aboriginal half-caste population and their tendency toward procreation within their own group created an Aboriginal population for whom the provisions of the 1905 Act were inappropriate. That Act was predicated on an assumption that Aborigines would be extinct within a few generations. They were not. They thrived and, as a group, became pluralistic and complex. The Act had attempted to prevent miscegenation by making cohabitation unlawful, but that proved futile. By 1935 it was irrelevant. Half-castes were in their third and fourth generations and were reproducing within their own cohort. As few as one-in-ten births were attributed to white fathers. There were half-castes who languished on the fringes, alienated, sustained by relief, sheltered in the discards of white society, and bound by the *Aborigines Act*; there were those granted exemption from the Act and those born outside its reach, independent and increasingly assertive; and there were those whose status was uncertain, the children of half-caste mothers and fathers, of quarter-caste mothers and Aboriginal fathers, of white mothers and Aboriginal fathers, of half-caste Aboriginal mothers and East Asian, Afghan or Negro fathers. A few prospered, most did not and only a small number stood as equals in white society. They were, collectively, ‘the half-caste problem’ not anticipated by the architects of the 1905 Act.

Legislation drafted at the end of the previous century which reflected false assumptions about the destiny of the Aboriginal race had to be revised to accommodate emergent realities of the new Aboriginal population. Principles of protection, or as has been argued here, management and control, which dominated colonial administration after 1837 persisted in public policy, but Neville saw a need for legislative reform to allow new directions for the absorption of Aborigines into the mainstream of Western Australian society. The process of change proved arduous. When the Act finally was amended in 1936, it heralded a substantial shift in Aboriginal affairs, but not to the advantage of Aboriginal people. The definition of who was an Aborigine was more inclusive and more people of mixed descent were caught by oppressive provisions of the Act and denied civil rights.

In this chapter the process of legislative change and the competing influences that retarded and advanced that process will be examined. One factor was the increasingly influential advocacy by pressure groups for better opportunities for Aborigines. The influence of emergent trends of these kinds will be discussed. Evidence presented to and the report of the Moseley
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Royal Commission were important in government’s decision to amend the *Aborigines Act*. More important to this thesis, however, was Neville’s response. That will be examined closely.

**Redefining Aboriginality**

The first question to be addressed in amending the legislation was, ‘Who is an Aborigine’? The 1905 prescription that an Aborigine was an Aborigine or any person who lived or habitually associated with Aborigines no longer was appropriate for the purposes of the law. The Crown Solicitor provided various opinions exposing complex legal contradictions. His answer in the negative to the question, ‘Is the daughter over 16 of a half-caste man and a full blooded aboriginal woman who are living together as husband and wife a “half-caste” within the meaning of section 2 of the *Aborigines Act* 1905?’ was referred to above. The implications of that opinion were compounded by successive other opinions: a father who was an Aborigine within the meaning of section 3 might be considered other than an Aboriginal father within the meaning of section 2; a half-caste deemed Aboriginal within the meaning of section 3 by reason of living or associating with Aborigines would cease to be an Aborigine on ceasing to associate or live with them; and a white man who took as his mistress an Aboriginal girl who had ceased to live and associate with Aborigines would commit no offence.\(^1\)

The implication of these successive interpretations was that, depending upon the circumstances of each individual, persons of Aboriginal descent were not necessarily Aborigines for the purposes of the Act. In 1918, Neville raised with the Solicitor General the status of people who described themselves as half-castes and had sought exemption from the *Aborigines Act* under section 63.\(^2\) His enquiries had shown their mothers were half-castes and their fathers white men. Neville asked whether they were quarter-castes, and therefore not caught by the Act, or were they, as the children of half-castes, Aborigines within the meaning of section 3 of the Act. The Solicitor General advised that the child of a half-caste woman by a white father was not a half-caste, other than under the deeming provisions.\(^3\) If the child married an Aborigine or lived or habitually associated with Aborigines, he or she would be deemed to be an Aborigine, but only as long as those conditions applied.

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1 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 652, Item 368/1915, folio 3, Crown Solicitor to CPA, 19 February 1915.
2 State Records Office, Native Welfare, Acc 993, Item 461/1928, folios 17-18, CPA to Under Secretary, 16 May 1918.
3 *Aborigines Act* 1905, s. 3.
That opinion did not explain the meaning of ‘habitually associate’. A separate opinion on
another case indicated a liberal interpretation might prevail. In 1921 Sir Henry Lefroy, a former
Premier and Minister for Lands, objected to having to seek permits to employ two half-castes,
Narrier and Burton, whom he claimed did not habitually associate with Aborigines. The Moora
police challenged that. They claimed that while the two men did not associate with Aborigines in
their employment, when in town they lived at the native camp, as Aborigines they paid no
registration fee for their dogs, and they played football with an Aboriginal team. The Solicitor
General agreed that the terms of section 3 applied. Lefroy was required to apply for permits to
employ the two men deemed to be Aborigines.4

Legislative revision of whom the Act was intended to embrace as Aborigines was not
addressed until 1929. In his early submissions for review of the Act Neville was more concerned
to address administrative details rather than broad issues of principle. In 1920 he sought to
address the half-caste problem by ensuring that his powers over Aborigines extended also to half-
castes other than those deemed to be Aborigines under section 3. An amendment was drafted to
include the words ‘or half-caste’ wherever there was reference to ‘aboriginals’ in relevant sections
of the Act. For example, section 12 empowered the Minister to have Aborigines removed to

4 State Records Office, Native Welfare, Acc 993, Item 461/1928, folios 41-44, copies of memos among various
public officers, 18 October 1920 to 14 February 1921.
reserves. Neville sought to have inserted the words ‘or half-castes’ after the word ‘aboriginal’. His reason was that only half-castes deemed to be Aborigines under section 3 could be removed forcibly and he sought to extend the authority of the Act to all: ‘there are half-castes claiming that they should not be classed as aboriginals who are unfortunately more suitable as subjects for removal than many of the aboriginals’.\(^5\) Similarly, Neville sought to extend the proscription against cohabitation so that it was an offence for a white man to live with a half-caste woman. Section 43 referred only to Aboriginal women and the Chief Protector was powerless to remove a half-caste woman or to prosecute the man. Neville saw the omission as a grievous error: ‘the half-caste girl is much more prone to fall than even the aboriginal woman, and even more rigid steps should be taken to protect her’.\(^6\)

Such amendments might have clarified the intention of the particular provisions of the legislation, but they did not address the mischief which the Solicitor General’s advice had exposed. The definition of ‘Aborigine’ in the Act was a legal construct, limited by its own language, relevant only for the purposes of the Act, and given narrow meaning by successive Solicitors General. If Parliament wanted broad powers to apply to all persons of Aboriginal descent, then an open and inclusive meaning had to be given to who was an Aborigine. Neville’s recommendations did not alter the meaning prescribed in sections 2 and 3 of the 1905 Act, and therefore did not address its anomalies.

Other amendments which Neville previously had recommended in 1919 indicate his predilections for administrative clarity. Some had implications for actions already taken by his department. Section 64 of the *Aborigines Act* had given the Chief Protector independent financial authority over moneys allocated for the purposes of the Aborigines Department. Payments from Consolidated Revenue were deposited in a trust account operated by the Chief Protector or other officers delegated by the Minister. The practice had been that moneys collected for employment permits, receipts from Moola Bulla or the sequestered portions of wages of Aborigines were paid directly to the trust account. The Solicitor General ruled that all receipts must be paid directly to Treasury. Neville sought to have receipts payable to the trust account. His solution might have been administratively convenient, but it was constitutionally unsafe. Section 64 of the *Constitution Act 1889* required that all moneys payable to the Crown should form one Consolidated Fund. The trust account was a hangover from the 1868 Act which gave the Imperial Government oversight of funds for Aboriginal purposes. The pertinent section of the *Constitution Act 1889* was repealed by the *Aborigines Act 1905*, but the trust fund prevailed, principally, it would appear, to appease concerns of the Imperial Government that Aborigines might not be treated fairly in the

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\(^{5}\) State Records Office, Aborigines, Acc 653, Item 100/1925, folio 25, Explanatory Notes for Proposed Legislation, section 12.

\(^{6}\) *ibid*, folio 27, Explanatory Notes for Proposed Legislation, section 43.
competition for public funds. As demonstrated above, experience vindicated that concern.

Doubts about the legality of removing diseased Aborigines to lock hospitals were to be resolved by extending the power of removal to reserves granted under section 12 to include removal to hospitals. Under the law as it stood there was no legal power to do so or even to examine Aborigines who refused. The practice since 1910 in those circumstances had been to allow them their liberty, even in the face of concern that they might spread infection. Neville sought an amendment to give police officers and protectors the power to compulsorily examine natives suspected of venereal disease.

None of these matters intimated a profound shift in policy. They were designed to rectify untidy legislative provisions and to establish consistency among complementary laws. They might have made administration easier, but would have had little impact on the lives of Aborigines. They did not proceed. The Mitchell Cabinet decided against introducing the legislation in the 1920 spring session.

Neville tried again in May 1921. The Minister for the North-West, Hon. Hal Colebatch, advised the Premier that some of the suggested amendments were very desirable and some highly controversial. He suggested that he be ‘authorised to have the amending bill prepared for next session, to be submitted to cabinet during the recess’. That action was approved, but in the interim a man known as Sydney Wallam pleaded guilty in the Carnarvon Police Court to a charge of receiving liquor. Arthur Woolley, who supplied the liquor, was charged under section 45 of the Aborigines Act with supplying spirituous liquor to an Aborigine. Wallam gave evidence that he was a half-caste, but the Resident Magistrate took the view that as Wallam’s parents were both half-castes, he was not an Aborigine within the meaning of the Act and dismissed the case. The Crown Solicitor agreed with the magistrate. Wallam was a half-caste within the ordinary meaning of the term, but he was not a half-caste as defined by section 2 of the Aborigines Act. Neville sought to have section 2 amended to extend its provision to second and third generations, to include the offspring of half-castes who were the children of an Aboriginal parent on either side, mother or father, or of half-caste parents. The Bill was withdrawn and returned to Crown Law for reconsideration. It foundered because the first question of who was an Aborigine had not been resolved.

Neville made further annual submissions for the Act to be amended, but political interest was not revived until the cases of Hunt at Hamersley Station and Fitzpatrick at Dalgety Downs came to attention. Government prevaricated before introducing a Bill late in the 1929 spring session of Parliament. That Bill included new interpretations for the terms ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘half-

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7 State Records Office, Aborigines, Acc 653, Item 100/1925, folio 42, Collier to Hon Premier (In Cabinet), 15 October 1921.
8 ibid, folio 55, Crown Solicitor to Under-Secretary for Law, 17 June 1922.
 caste’. The new meaning restricted the application of the term ‘Aboriginal’ to persons of the full blood or not less than three-quarters blood and adult male half-castes whom the Chief Protector deemed incapable of managing their own affairs. That did not mean contraction of the number of persons to whom the Act might apply. The phrase, ‘or half-caste’ was inserted after the word ‘aboriginal’ in all pertinent sections of the Act. Those amendments, and others to extend provisions that had applied previously only to people deemed Aborigines under section 3 of the 1905 Act, were extended to embrace all first and second-generation half-castes. The reach of the proposed amended Act extended to a wider group of persons previously not caught by the Aborigines Act 1905.

The status intended for quarter castes is uncertain. As defined in the proposed bill, a half-caste was the offspring of an Aboriginal parent on either side and the offspring of that half-caste person. If both parents of second-generation offspring were half-castes, the children were half-castes. They had at least one Aboriginal grandparent and half-caste parents. Their children, that is the third generation, the great-grandchildren of Aboriginal progenitors, were not half-castes even if both parents were second-generation half-castes. The interpretation given to ‘half-caste’ extended only to the second generation, the offspring of first generation half-castes.

These new interpretations of ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘half-caste’ intended in the 1929 Bill were more inclusive, but still prescriptive and subject to seemingly perverse interpretation. The amending provisions might have meant the Act caught some half-castes and some quarter-castes, but not all. Had the Bill passed into law, the proposed new meanings might have created more problems than they solved. Parliament rejected them along with the rest of the Bill, but for reasons other than the legal complexity of the meaning of Aboriginality.

The Amendment Bill 1929

The complaint against Hunt was lodged in March 1923. An Aboriginal station hand named ‘Cockle’ made statutory declaration that Hunt, the overseer at Hamersley Station, ‘is all the time taking my woman (Maggie) away from me. He sends me out on the run and then He sleeps with my woman’.

Another complaint by a different employee, Ruse, was lodged the following year that Hunt, ‘commits misconduct with this Gin at his pleasure’. On May 7, Neville instructed the Protector for the Roebourne District, Dr Kenny, to investigate. Kenny confirmed Cockle’s complaint and ‘cancelled any agreements that Hunt may have to work natives and refused him

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9 Aborigines Act 1905, sections 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26 and 42.
10 State Records Office, Aborigines, Acc 653, Item, 195/1924, folio 1, Complaint by Aboriginal Cockle, Hamersley Station, 15 March 1923.
11 ibid, folio 14, W.A. Ruse to CPA, 22 May 1924.
permission to work natives in my district'. Neville referred the report to the Under Secretary for Law with a recommendation that proceedings be taken against Hunt in accordance with section 43 of the *Aborigines Act*. The Solicitor General responded:

(2) …assuming that Hunt had intercourse with this woman Maggie that alone would not be an offence under section 43 of *cohabitation*.

(3) It is not as far as I am aware an offence to have intercourse with an aboriginal; and this does not seem to me to be a case of ‘cohabitation’.

Neville informed the Minister for the North-West he felt the Solicitor general’s opinion was contrary to the intention of the framers of the Act. It effectively prevented him from taking action against white men who had intercourse with Aboriginal women. Neville was of the opinion that action should be taken. He advised ‘there is nothing for it but to recommend an amendment of the Act’. The Collier Cabinet considered his recommended amendments, but declined to proceed. In August 1924 Hunt was blacklisted from employing Aborigines anywhere in the State.

There is no extant evidence that those who framed the Act intended other than a literal meaning of cohabitation - living together, especially as husband and wife. The legislation was framed first in 1897 and was passed in 1905 in much of its original form, with some changes to accommodate recommendations of the Roth Royal Commission. As discussed above, after the Act had been operating for only two years, Prinsep recommended amending section 43 to include an offence of sexual intercourse with an Aboriginal woman. His concern was to check immorality and the spread of disease amongst Aborigines.

Crown Law was advised of Prinsep’s proposed amendments, but they were not acted on. The Act was amended in 1911, but the change to section 43 was to include a new subsection to instruct that complaints under the section could be made only with the authority of the Chief Protector. An averment in the complaint made by the Chief Protector was deemed proved in the absence of proof to the contrary. That did not clarify that cohabitation should have other than its literal meaning. The onus of proof was reversed, but the offence continued as before, cohabitation. The meaning of section 43 intended when the Act was drafted remained a matter for interpretation.

Those who enacted the legislation in 1905 were silent on the issue. No comment was made upon section 43 in second reading debates or in committee of the Legislative Assembly or the Legislative Council. When the amendment in the 1929 Bill was debated the only comment

12 *ibid*, folio 18, Protector Roebourne District to CPA, 1 June 1924.
13 *ibid*, folio 41, Solicitor General to CPA, 3 July 1924. Underlined in the original.
14 *ibid*, folio 42, CPA to Hon. Minister for the North-West, 9 July 1924.

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offered was that of the Leader of the Opposition, Sir James Mitchell. He suggested that such a clause would not have appeared in the Bill had it been drafted by men younger than 30 years of age. Mitchell’s observation that Parliament should ‘not provide the opportunity to send a boy to prison for a matter of that sort, which may easily happen, and does happen’, was no more illuminating than the silence of his parliamentary colleagues of an earlier generation. Nothing otherwise said in Parliamentary debate clarified the intention of the word ‘cohabitation’ and without evidence to the contrary the literal meaning stood.

Neville was of a different mind, but seemed to shift in his opinion whether the evil he opposed was an Aboriginal woman living with a white man or promiscuous sexual intercourse. His preparatory notes to the 1925 Bill suggest it was the first. He sought to have section 43 extended to include half-castes since he had no power to remove girls from compromising situations. He had ‘come across a number of half-caste girls living in immorality with low-class white men’, but could neither prosecute the man nor remove the girl because section 12 applied only to Aborigines. By 1929 his focus was clearly upon promiscuous sexual intercourse; ‘In my view a man other than an aboriginal or half-caste who continues to practice sexual intercourse with native women should be punishable by law’. Certainly when the incident at Dalgety Downs had to be resolved, his preference was for punishing Fitzpatrick, but he was unable to do so because of the Solicitor General’s ruling in the case of Hunt.

Neville’s concern was not merely moral disapprobation, but embraced also unease about the vulnerability of Aboriginal women, ‘the prey of any low-class white man able to seduce them’. He regarded half-caste girls as particularly vulnerable ‘and it should be possible to punish the men responsible for their downfall’. As Chief Protector he had a particular duty of care for half-caste girls removed to Moore River and subsequently placed in employment as domestic servants. Too high a proportion of them were returning to the care of his department either pregnant or with babies. Neville put the number of girls in that situation at 200. Their children ultimately became a charge on the state: ‘The procreation of half-caste and quarter-caste children on this account is rapidly increasing, and the Department has no redress’.

The legislators who considered the 1929 Bill seemed not to share Neville’s moral and social concerns. The debate in both Houses of Parliament was not enlightening. The principles of the Bill were not considered and argument focused upon the authority conferred upon the Chief Protector, the employment of Aboriginal youths, and the financial imposition upon the pastoral

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17 ibid, folio 157, ‘Notes the Hon Minister introducing the Bill in the Legislative Assembly: Section 43’.
18 ibid, folio 157.
19 ibid, folio 157.
industry for the medical treatment of Aboriginal employees.

The 1905 Act required agreements for the employment of Aborigines to stipulate, ‘supply by the employer of the aboriginal...medicine and medical attendance when practicable and necessary’.\(^{20}\) It was practice for pastoralists to provide rudimentary health care or transportation to the nearest medical facility in cases of serious industrial injury. If hospitalisation was necessary, that was a charge upon the State. The 1929 Bill included a clause that transferred that cost to the employer.\(^{21}\) The Crown Law Department previously had ruled that Aboriginal employees came within the scope of the Workers’ Compensation Act.

Opposition to the new provision founded on propositions of discriminatory treatment and intrusive government authority in the pastoral industry was voiced in parliamentary debates. It was that argued Aborigines were unjustly favoured. Under the Workers’ Compensation Act an injured white man had to contest his own claim upon the State Insurance Office, ‘but under this Bill the Government will step in on the aboriginal’s behalf and incur any expenses and charge them up to the employer’.\(^{22}\) Any advantage to Aborigines was seen as detrimental to pastoral interests, especially at that time when the industry was enduring a downturn in the price of wool. Government, it was claimed, was granting to the Chief Protector, ‘such powers as will cause considerable financial inconvenience to pastoralists who are struggling to make their stations pay’.\(^{23}\) Aborigines were denigrated for their inability to manage money—‘Fancy the gin, being in possession of £600, finding herself anywhere near an hotel somewhere in the North!’\(^{24}\)—and their inefficiency as pastoral labourers—‘aborigines and half-castes are of very little use except under the supervision of white overseers’.\(^{25}\)

Such apparently low regard of Aboriginal employees was contradicted by opposition to an assumed prohibition upon the employment of Aboriginal youths. Clause 9 sought to raise the age requirement for permission to employ half-caste boys. Previously, half-caste boys under the age of 14 could be employed only with a Protector’s permission. The amendment raised the age to 21 so that a Protector could exercise supervisory authority over the employment conditions of half-caste youths. Opponents of the change interpreted the clause as prohibiting the employment of youths under 21; ‘I do not know that an aboriginal child should wait until he becomes 21 before he engages in any employment’.\(^{26}\) The extreme proposition opposed any interference; ‘I think the day we started to be benevolent and sentimental towards the natives of the State, with a desire to

\(^{20}\) *Aborigines Act 1905*, section 22(e).

\(^{21}\) *A Bill for an Act to amend the Aborigines Act 1905*. Clause 17.


\(^{24}\) Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, Hon. A. Lovekin, 14 November 1929, p.1580.


\(^{26}\) Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, Hon. A. Lovekin, 14 November 1929, p.1579.
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perpetuate the race, that was the time when we began the work of their extermination’. Parliament was reluctant to extend the authority of the Chief Protector.

The new interpretation of ‘Aboriginal’ in the 1929 Bill which included as Aborigine ‘a male half-caste whose age exceeds twenty-one years, and who in the opinion of the Chief Protector is incapable of managing his own affairs’, occasioned hostile responses. Part of the objection raised in Parliamentary debate was to a perceived devolution of authority. The discretion granted to the Chief Protector met with the rejoinder, ‘that is far reaching indeed. …I do not know any other Act which would give one individual that power’. Significantly, there also was objection to the notion that half-castes should be treated as Aborigines: ‘I am not with the Honorary Minister…when he seeks to deal with all of them as if they were quite alike and equal’.

Successive speakers defended the many half-castes who were ‘living decent clean lives’, ‘some of these half-castes are well educated’, ‘many of the half-castes are excellent citizens, and the one thing they hate is to be classed as aborigines’, ‘the half-castes working around Guildford are giving good service, obtaining the ruling rate of wage, and are particularly capable in the calling they are following’. The respect was not unqualified. Distrust was expressed of ‘officials’ who had ‘led the native to understand that he is the master of the situation’ and often was ‘a less desirable station servant than he used to be’. The impulse to control Aborigines was never far below some white skin.

The implication seemed to be that Aborigines were subordinate and had to know their place, but half-castes were intermediate in the socio-cultural hierarchy and, unlike their Indigenous forebears, capable of improvement. Some demonstrated worth by absorbing white cultural values; ‘living decent clean lives’, ‘well educated’, ‘giving good service’, and ‘capable in their calling’. Those people were, in the words of Paul Hasluck, but used with different contextual meaning, ‘living right in the midst of the community, but not of it’, absorbed, but not assimilated. They were capable of managing their own affairs and, just as the opposition advocated, the terms of the Bill did not include them as Aborigines. However, first and second-generation half-castes were treated in the same manner as Aborigines for the purposes of the Act.

29 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Hon. Sir James Mitchell, 11 December 1929, p.2101
30 ibid, Hon. Sir James Mitchell, p.2101.
34 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, Hon. V. Hamersley, 27 November 1929, p.1833.
Authority under section 3 to deem some half-castes to be Aborigines had reposed with the Chief Protector since 1905. Similarly, under section 63 the Minister could exempt any Aborigine or half-caste from the Act. The nomination of the Chief Protector rather than the Minister as the authorised person in the 1929 Bill was a matter of form. The significant change in 1929 was a shift of perception. In 1905 half-castes who lived with and as Aborigines could be deemed to be Aborigines. That was accepted without dissent in Parliament. A quarter-century later, however, if Parliamentary opinion reflects community opinion, some half-castes visible in the community as ‘decent citizens’ were not to be regarded as Aborigines. Community awareness judged Aboriginality not by skin colour alone, but by style of living. Parliamentary debates intimated that half-castes who continued to live as Aborigines were Aborigines; those who did not were not and should not be treated as though they were.

In spite of those arguments, the Bill passed the Committee stage of the Legislative Council with only two minor amendments and was agreed to without dissent at the third reading. In the Assembly the debate lasted two days and reiterated much the same argument as in the Council. The Bill was rejected at the second reading by a comfortable majority of Government and Opposition votes. Having come so far, Neville was frustrated once more.

**The Moseley Royal Commission**

An emerging community consciousness of the plight of Aborigines, and in particular of urban-dwelling Aborigines and half-castes, gave rise to new advocacy favouring segregation and separate development in one form or another. Conservative sectarian groups such as the Australian Aborigines Amelioration Association advanced policies re-affirming existing public programs, including the re-opening of the Carrolup River Native Settlement. Other organisations such as the Women’s Service Guilds, or League of Women Voters, committed to supporting ‘any movement to protect, defend and uplift humanity’, lobbied on behalf of Aboriginal causes that came to attention from time to time. The Guild expressed particular concern about the exploitation of Aboriginal women and lobbied for a national policy for Aborigines. At the extreme, the Aborigines Protection League advocated an Aboriginal State so that Aborigines may ‘work out their own salvation safeguarded from the envious eyes of encroaching white population’.

The Anti Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society in the United Kingdom, motivated by much the same evangelical values as the Select Committee of the House of Commons which in 1837 had advocated the protection of Australia’s Aborigines, appealed to the leaders of Christian churches in Australia to make a united effort to:

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Do all that is possible to sweep away all wrongs and injustices, to make generous reparations for the past, and to ensure not only protection, but also appropriate educational and moral uplift for the very considerable remnant of a race which is not only most ancient, but also endowed with remarkable and attractive qualities of mental and moral character.37

Their call echoed the principle argued almost a century previously before the House of Commons:

It requires no argument to show that we owe the natives a debt, which will be but imperfectly paid by charging the Land Revenue of each of the Provinces with whatever expenditure is necessary for the instruction of the adults, the education of their youth, and the protection of them all.38

Neville’s summary of the conditions of Aborigines in his annual report for 1932 disclosed a dispiriting distance between aspiration and actuality. He judged that his department lacked the necessary means and facilities to prevent Aborigines from becoming ‘a race of outcasts’.39 The department had less to spend than before World War I, but demand had increased in volume and complexity. As the economic depression progressed, employment opportunities for Aborigines decreased and numbers on relief grew substantially. Their physical condition deteriorated, ‘particularly the children, as the foodstuffs do not provide for the special requirements of children’. Rations were intended as supplements to bush foods, but had become, ‘practically the sole diet of the people and it is inadequate’. Unsurprisingly, deaths due to treatable pulmonary diseases such as influenza increased steadily. Of the one-hundred-and-three Aboriginal deaths reported in 1932, nearly half were ascribed to those causes, pointing ‘clearly to the fact that undernourished and lacking sufficient bedding and clothing the people are less able to resist the inroads of disease when it attacks them’. The loss of child life was greater. There was insufficient hospital accommodation and many cases were in extremis before treatment was sought; ‘At all times reluctant to enter hospital, the lack of such institutions specially for their needs deters many natives from making their condition known in time’.

Aboriginal children continued to be shut out of government schools. The school at the Carrolup River Native Settlement had lasted little more than seven years. The educational offering and the resources available at similar schools established at Moore River and Moola Bulla

38 Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines. ‘VI. – Religious Instruction and Education to be provided’, 1837, p.79.
were far below the standard of even the lowliest placed state schools. Outside the native settlements, educational opportunities for Aborigines and half-castes were at the whim of the white community. The incident at Wagin State School in June 1933 discussed above exemplified the prejudice of many rural communities. A meeting of the Parents and Citizens Association after the fourteen half-caste children who had been excluded from the school were reinstated at Premier Collier’s direction had a record attendance. The parents voiced strong objection, but emphasised, perhaps disingenuously, that their protest was not based on colour:

The objection to these children sitting alongside and mingling with the white children was that their mode of living in aborigines’ camps was not conducive to a proper code of morals and cleanliness. Further, that such mingling of children at school was liable to contaminate the morals and health of white children.40

The Chief Inspector of Schools placed the issue of educating Aboriginal and half-caste children in Neville’s hands. There it rested until 1940 when the Education Department reluctantly assumed responsibility of Aboriginal children who lived within the prescribed distance for compulsory attendance, that is 3 miles from the nearest appropriate school. Only an estimated twenty per cent of Aboriginal children of compulsory school age regularly attended school in that year.

Those issues of social disadvantage and neglect did not precipitate the Moseley Royal Commission, however. Members of Parliament seem to have been indifferent to or wilfully unmindful of the condition of Aborigines. The catalyst for the inquisition was government’s anxiety about its reputation and possible international censure. Adverse reports about the treatment of Aborigines publicised through the international network of the Anti Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society prompted government support for a motion by the Member for Kimberley, Aubrey Coverley, for a Royal Commission to inquire into allegations of maltreatment of Aborigines, the Aborigines Act and the administration of the Aborigines Department.41 Neville’s management of Aboriginal affairs was a target for public scrutiny.

The seemingly inconsequential agent provocateurs whose critical commentaries provoked support for a Royal Commission were Ralph Piddington and Mary Bennett. Piddington, a social psychologist of the University of Sydney and subsequently the University of Hawaii, conducted research among Aborigines in the Fitzroy District on two occasions in 1930 and 1931. His observations published in academic journals had intellectual respectability.42 Less measured opinions publicised in popular newspapers caused discomfort for Neville and the Mitchell

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40 ‘Coloured Children, Tuition With White Pupils’, Western Mail, 10 August 1933, p.22.
Ministry. An article attributed to Piddington and published in the *World* newspaper described Western Australia as ‘a plague spot of European oppression of the native,’ and accused the state government of being ‘callously indifferent’. He charged that efforts to improve conditions for Aborigines were ‘hampered by insufficient funds and public apathy’. The following week the same newspaper published further allegations of ‘slavery of natives, trafficking in lubras, and the murdering and flogging of aborigines by white men’, and an accusation that the Mitchell Government was ‘indifferent to the abuse of the native because natives have no votes’. Other newspapers took up the story. One reported Piddington as having said that ‘the native is generally regarded as a dog, and is deemed unworthy to be regarded as a human being’.

Piddington’s observations were repeated in London in the newsletter of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society. A Western Australian correspondent to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines’ Friend*, most probably Mary Bennett, summarised Piddington’s opinions as reported in Melbourne in the *World* and the *Argus*, and in Sydney in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The newsletter repeated them as ‘a deplorable account of the treatment of the aborigines and their general treatment in that colony [Western Australia]’. Aborigines and half-castes were said to have neither human rights nor protection:

There was trafficking in lubras—native slavery was in operation and aborigines were murdered and flogged by white men. …The West Australian Government was indifferent to abuses of the natives. The police were biased in favour of the station owners. …Women were sold for liquor, and where husbands were unwilling to surrender their wives pressure was brought to compel them.

In Perth, the *West Australian, Daily News, Sunday Times* and *Mirror* were silent on Piddington’s accusations. The political preoccupations of those newspapers were Western Australia’s unfair treatment in federal fiscal equalisation, opposition to a gold tax, and secession.

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45 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 133/1930, folio 53, Travers Buxton Secretary, The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society to CPA, 29 September 1932.
46 Mary Montgomery Bennett was born and raised on a pastoral property in north-west Queensland. She finished her education in England before marrying and settling there. In 1927, after the death of her husband, she published a biography of her father, *Christison of Lammermoor*, and ‘Notes on the Dalleburra tribe of northern Queensland’ published in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain*, vol.57. In the same year she joined the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society. She published articles on Aborigines in the *Manchester Guardian*, earning the sobriquet, ‘champion of the blacks’. When she returned to Australia in 1930 to investigate Aboriginal conditions, she spent some time as matron of the Forrest River Mission and then as a teacher at Rod and Mysic Schenk’s Mount Margaret Mission. See, Alison Holland, ‘Whatever her race, a woman is not a chattel, Mary Montgomery Bennett’, in Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisley (eds), *Uncommon Ground, White Women in Aboriginal History*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2005, pp.129-152.
from the Commonwealth. Neville, however, was offended by Piddington’s allegations. He discussed the matter at length in his Annual Report for 1932. Piddington’s research, he said, had been approved and assisted by the Aborigines Department, ‘his research work taking him to the La Grange Bay area, yet his comments referred to deal mostly with areas he had never visited’. Neville’s more scathing comments were saved for disapproving commentators in local newspapers; ‘Many of these contributors cloud the issue by repeated reference to misdeeds of the past, and so their case loses weight and force’. Neville’s *bête noir* was Mary Montgomery Bennett who had established herself as a vociferous opponent of his policies.

Bennett took up the cudgels in a letter to the *A.B.M. Review of May* 1932. Her claims about the treatment of Aborigines included some of those attributed to Piddington in the July edition of *Anti-Slavery Reporter*: that Aborigines and half-caste had no rights or protection; Aborigines were engaged in the pastoral industry in a system of slavery; prostitution was endemic among Aboriginal women; plurality of wives was common practice within Aboriginal communities; and that native reserves were inadequate.

Neville’s detailed denial was published in full in the *West Australian*. Subsequent, but not all, contributions to the public debate tended to support Mrs Bennett. Ernestine Hill did not. She wrote on 26 May that the Aboriginal race was doomed and that the payment of wages to pastoral workers, ‘leaving the blacks to fend for themselves on untenanted tracts of country,’ would only hasten their demise:

> To pay the labourers in money would be even more to their detriment, for in the handling of money the native is a dupe and a fool. The only alternative is a generous provision of life’s necessities, a protective and kindly interest, and, so far as is humane and practicable, for the rest an attitude of *laissez faire*.

Other correspondents rejected that approach as ‘taking the line of least resistance’. They shifted the focus of the argument from general rights and the protection of all Aborigines to the rights of Aboriginal women; ‘these dark sisters of ours have possibilities of development and are entitled to rights common to other women…the right of woman to the sanctity of her own person is denied to the native women of Australia’. The Women’s Service Guild enlisted the support of other women’s organisations: ‘will you affirm the right of the aboriginal woman to the sanctity of

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49 ‘A.B.M’ – Australian Board of Missions.
her person’.\(^\text{53}\) Thereafter, feminist groups encouraged public censure of the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women.

Mary Bennett, encouraged by Rod Schenk of the Mount Margaret Mission, promoted international concern through the offices of Anti-Slavery and the Aborigines Protection Society. The *Daily News* reported in detail a letter written by her and read to the British Commonwealth League Conference in London in June 1933. Ironically, perhaps, the theme of her paper drew attention to the status of women in tribal society, but placed blame upon pastoralists and public officers:

> Aboriginal girls are bespoken in their infancy—sometimes before their birth—by the older men. The older men usually have other wives already. Thus the property status causes women and children to suffer the evils of infant betrothal, child marriage and polygamy.\(^\text{54}\)

Western Australia’s Agent General in London, former Premier Sir Hal Colebatch, advised that since the proceedings of the conference attracted a limited audience, ‘I have not deemed it advisable to enter into any controversy regarding it’, but requested that the article be referred to the Aborigines Department so that he may be advised ‘in the event of it becoming necessary to make further reference to it’.\(^\text{55}\)

Government already had acceded to the call for a Royal Commission. Coverley’s speech in support of his motion for a Royal Commission rehearsed in detail the contents of Mrs Bennett’s letter, as published in the *Daily News*, as well as presentations to the Conference by people such as Herbert Basedow and Rev. George Love, Superintendent of the Port George Mission.\(^\text{56}\) Those presentations were particularly critical of the treatment of Aborigines in the North West and Kimberleys.\(^\text{57}\) Coverley declared that, as the representative of the Kimberley electorate, ‘one of the districts inferentially referred to in the Press reports, I deem it my duty to provide an opportunity by which the allegations can be proved or disproved’.\(^\text{58}\)

The Premier, Phil Collier, supported Coverley’s motion. He regarded claims published in

\(^\text{53}\) State Records Office, Aborigines, Acc 993, Item 166/1932, folio 13, Women’s Service Guild to Country Women’s Association, 18 February 1932.


\(^\text{55}\) State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 133/1930, folio 47, Hal Colebatch, Agent General, to the Premier, 18 June 1934.

\(^\text{56}\) Herbert Basedow (1881–1933), anthropologist, geologist, explorer and medical practitioner. His obituary, published in *Nature* following his sudden death from peripheral venous thrombosis in June 1933, claimed that, ‘since the death of Sir Baldwin Spencer Dr Basedow has been generally recognised as the first authority on the aborigines of Australia’. His *Knights of the Boomerang* was published in 1935.


\(^\text{58}\) Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 30 August 1933, p.639.
the press about the treatment of Aborigines as exaggerated. Unfortunately the statements were broadcast and attracted a good deal of attention in Great Britain and other countries. ‘We cannot,’ proclaimed the Premier, ‘afford to have our good name besmirched in this manner’.59

Forty-four witnesses gave evidence to the Royal Commission hearings in Perth. A further 101 appeared at country hearings. Mrs Bennett gave wide-ranging evidence over two full days. Some of her observations were supported by factual, or anecdotal evidence, others were unsupported opinion. She canvassed issues ranging from the property status of Aboriginal women to the administration of the Aborigines Department and included reference to the proximity of native camps to towns, the need for living areas for the sole use of Aborigines, the importance of education, disease among Aborigines, conditions of employment, and the trial of Aboriginal offenders.60

Mrs Bennett did not object to the segregation of Aborigines from the white community. In fact she saw native settlements as ‘the heart of the whole matter’:

An adequate series of native settlements is the only solution, from their point of view. The surest way to destroy a race is to destroy its communities, and destruction is the effect—sometimes intended, sometimes unintended—of pastoral occupation of native territories.61

She estimated that at least 50 reserves were needed, ‘equitably spaced throughout the state in the natives’ own districts,’ and recommended that land in every district where there were natives to be resumed to establish homeland reserves. 62 There is resonance in that request with a similar, but less ambitious, proposition advanced some twenty year previously by Charles Gale and later reaffirmed by his successor as Chief Protector, A.O. Neville.

The social and economic position of Aborigines, Mrs Bennett argued, was ‘caused and conditioned by the victimisation of aboriginal women’, and wanted government to proscribe traditional practices which, in her estimation, reduced women to property status. 63 Missionaries, she claimed, did not ask that the way of living of ‘the few wild uncontaminated tribes’ should be altered, or that men should give up their several wives:

They do ask that in the settled areas the property status of human beings with its attendant evils of infant betrothal, child-marriage, wife-lending and polygamy, shall be declared illegal; that there shall be one law of the land; that aboriginal and

59 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 2 September 1933, p.749.
60 Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, Mary Montgomery Bennett, Monday 19 March and Tuesday 20 March 1934, pp.213-317.
61 Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence of Mary Montgomery Bennett, 19 March 1934, p.248.
62 ibid, 19 March 1934, p.253.
63 ibid, 19 March 1934, p.213.
half-caste girls who need the protection of the law shall obtain it; and that all people shall be free to make their own lives within the law, and not handed over to claimants as property.  

Neville did not reject entirely Mrs Bennett’s recommendations regarding some tribal practices. There was no legal power to prevent them, but ‘the department is seeking such powers’. When the 1936 Bill to amend the Act was brought forward, it proposed a new section to ‘minimise or stamp out’ tribal practices that the Commissioner regarded as ‘injurious to the natives or any section of the natives’.  

Mrs Bennett was secure in her rationale for opposing the separation of children from their mothers, ‘Departmentalism is no substitute for mother love’, but her estimation of the numbers of forcible separations may not have been as well grounded. Children and families were ‘mustered up like cattle’, she said, and deported to Moore River:  

there to drag out their days and years in exile, suffering all the miseries of transportation, for no fault but only because the white supplanteers are too greedy and too mean to give them living areas in their own districts.  

Neville rejected Mrs Bennett’s claims about Aborigines forcibly removed from all parts of the State being incarcerated at Moore River. He produced evidence which showed that between January 1930 and 31 March 1933 there were almost as many departures as arrivals:  

And there always have been. They are coming and going all the time, and it is nothing in the nature of a prison except in the case of those under warrant, 200 in the last three years, and those that may have been there before and the young children who are not allowed to go out while they are wards of the department.  

The data contained in Registers of Inmates of Moore River tend to support Neville’s position and refute the propositions of Mrs Bennett and others. They do not answer the charge against the forcible removal of children, however. Neville defended it on grounds that the children removed lived in unsatisfactory surroundings. Infants, he said, were not taken from their mothers before they were aged six years, ‘and generally not then. If we have to do what is unusual, viz., take a  

64 ibid, 19 March 1934, p.219.  
65 Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, A.O. Neville commenting on Mrs Bennett’s evidence, 3 May 1934, p.603.  
66 Aborigines Act Amendment Act, 1936, s. 59G.  
67 Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, Mary Montgomery Bennett, 19 March 1934, p.225.  
68 Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, A.O. Neville, 3 May 1934, p.603-4. In that period, 1067 persons arrived and 1030 departed.  
69 State Records Office, Colonial Secretary’s Office, Acc 1326, item 1108/1921; Acc 993, item 459/ 1933; and Acc 993, Item 170/1939.
child from its mother, it is because the mother is not fit to look after it’.

Dr. Cyril Phillips Bryan was the principal advocate before the Royal Commission of a policy favouring selective breeding against Aboriginal racial characteristics. He rejected the notion of the unavoidable extinction of Aborigines. Rather, he suggested they had weathered the storms of colonisation and dispossession and, ‘just as captive and subdued blacks have done elsewhere in the history of the world…will now multiply with us side by side’. For Bryan, the problem was not the resurgence of the Aboriginal race, but the emergence through miscegenation of a ‘coloured’ one, the half-castes, ‘scorned by both whites and blacks’. He recommended to the Royal Commission that steps be taken to breed out the half-caste, ‘not in a moment, but in a few generations’, by ‘the application of the principles of the Mendelian law which we are ever ready and every day applying to animals and plants but have never bothered to apply to the human species’.

Commissioner Moseley was unsympathetic. Bryan had claimed he was not an advocate of miscegenation, defined as the mingling of blacks and whites by intermating, but he failed to explain how that differed from the ‘scientific’ application of Mendelian law to breeding out colour. In his Report, Moseley expressed relief that he was, ‘not called upon to join issue with him’. Even though he was cautious about the efficacy of such law, ‘I am inclined to think more can be done by public opinion than by laws’, Moseley recommended amending the Aborigines Act in the manner Neville advocated to render unlawful any sexual intercourse between non-Aborigines and Aborigines or half-castes. His objective was not to breed out half-castes, but to slow down their rate of increase.

That concession to legislative amendment was due more directly to Neville’s influence than to Mary Bennett’s representations for laws to protect Aboriginal women and girls. Moseley was dismissive of her submissions—‘they…provided nothing specific into which I could inquire’—and was expressly critical of her role in agitating through the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society. He disparaged the article published in the Daily News under the heading ‘Natives are Virtually Slaves’ and Mrs Bennett’s role in sending that information to London, ‘to be discussed there by organisations, the members of which have little or no knowledge of the aboriginal natives of this country’. He suggested that ‘greater good could be accomplished by people who protest that they have the interests of natives at heart’ if they took their protests to

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70 Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, A.O. Neville, 3 May 1934, p.605.
72 ibid, p.356.
73 ibid, p.357.
74 Moseley Royal Commission, p.5.
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the authorities whom they believed were ‘not alive to the conditions as they actually exist’.\footnote{ibid, p.22.}

Neville attended most sittings of the Royal Commission in Perth, cross-examined witnesses and offered detailed commentary on the evidence of crucial witness. His own presentation to the Royal Commission extended over three days. After the 1929 amending Bill was rejected by the Legislative Assembly, Neville had it redrafted by removing or modifying clauses which had caused offence in either House of Parliament, and submitted it as part of his evidence for Moseley’s consideration. The bulk of his presentation before the Commissioner elucidated successive clauses or offered contextual explanation of matters of detail. Moseley’s 26 recommendations appear to have drawn heavily upon Neville’s submission, but not entirely so.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Neville was not displeased with Moseley’s report and advised his Minister, W.H. Kitson, that, ‘the views expressed by him as Royal Commissioner so nearly approach my own as generally tendered in evidence before him that so far as its general tenor is concerned it would seem superfluous on my part to traverse the entire report here’.\footnote{State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, item 333/1933, folio not numbered, Memo, Chief Protector to the Honorary Minister (Mr. Kitson), ‘Royal Commission on the Treatment of Aborigines 1934’, 13 March 1935.} He differed with Moseley on three important matters: the treatment of Aborigines by northern pastoralists; a revised organisational structure for the Aborigines Department; and a definition of Aboriginality to decide who might be brought within the reach of the Act and, therefore, under the authority of the Chief Protector.

Moseley reported that Aborigines employed on pastoral stations in the Kimberley Division experienced conditions ‘which approached their natural life’. Their work was appropriate, ‘in the bush amongst stock’, and, apart from medical attention, in the main they wanted for nothing. In Moseley’s opinion they were well fed and clothed and the huts in which they lived were ‘suitable for their needs’. ‘Anything more elaborate,’ Moseley asserted, ‘would not be appreciated by them—indeed, they would not be used’.\footnote{Moseley Royal Commission, p.4.} Neville disagreed. He felt much had escaped Moseley’s notice. The Commissioner did not visit any of the more remote or less accessible pastoral stations where Aborigines lived in adverse conditions. Neville averred, ‘I would merely say in this regard that there are exceptions to the rule that station natives are living on velvet as the Commissioner would have us suppose’. He recommended the appointment of three Deputy Commissioners in order that the minority of pastoral employers might be dealt with according to local circumstances.\footnote{State Records Office, Native Affairs, acc 993, Item 333/1933, folio not numbered, CPA to the Honorary Minister, ‘Royal Commission on the Treatment of Aborigines 1934’.} That difference between Neville and Moseley became part of the consideration of the organisational structure of the Department and, like the meaning of Aboriginality, was resolved by legislation.
The Amendment Act 1936

In his evidence before Commissioner Moseley, Neville emphasised that the condition of Aborigines varied across different parts of the State. In the Kimberleys where was little European settlement the Aborigines were ‘a free and independent people, living in the wilds and safeguarded by tribal inhibitions and prohibitions’. In the South-West, he judged deterioration and demoralisation among the Nyungars as ‘becoming acute’. He recommended, therefore, that the system of honorary protectors, the majority of whom were police officers or magistrates, be replaced by three Deputy Commissioners with ‘direct responsibility for all actions necessary to protect Aborigines within their respective districts, but accountable to the Chief Protector.’

Moseley offered no comment on Neville’s opinion of the conditions of Aborigines in the three regions of the State, or his proposal for deputy commissioners. He judged it impossible for Aboriginal affairs to be governed by one officer located in Perth, but did not accede to Neville’s proposed organisational structure. Instead he recommended the appointment of three Divisional Protectors: one for the North or Kimberley Division; a second to be responsible for the area including the Ashburton, Gascoyne and Murchison Districts; and a third, the Chief Protector who was also to be the Secretary of the Aborigines Department, to be responsible for the remainder of the State, the Midlands, Goldfields and South-Western areas. Divisional Protectors, chosen for their knowledge of Aborigines, were to have equal authority within their respective districts and be accountable only to the Minister.

Neville advised against Moseley’s recommendation. There already was power within the Aborigines Act for the appointment of Deputies to the Chief Protector. They could be called Divisional Protectors, but in Neville’s view they must be ultimately be responsible to the Chief Protector. He argued that the Department should be styled the Department of Native Affairs, the Chief Protector should be called the Commissioner for Native Affairs, and there should be District Commissioners, but not with independent decentralised authority.

Neville’s advice prevailed. He became the Commissioner for Native Affairs, his department was renamed the Department of Native Affairs, and section 7 of the Act was amended to allow the appointment of travelling inspectors. The number of travelling inspectors was not specified, but to be decided on need from time to time.80

Neville was not as successful in having accepted his suggestions about who should be classed as an Aborigine. He submitted to Commissioner Moseley a definition of ‘half-caste’ broader than that contained in the 1929 Bill and extended government authority over half-caste

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80 Native Administration Act, 1905-1936, section 7.
women:

‘Half-caste’ means (a) any person being the offspring of aboriginal parents on either side and (b) the half-blood descendants of such persons and any child one of whose parents is a half-caste as herein defined and which child is a female of any age and a male under 21 years.\(^{81}\)

In effect, the meaning of half-caste was to be that used in the deeming section 3 of the 1905 Act and embraced patrilineal as well as matrilineal antecedents. It also extended the authority of the Act over successive generations beyond the second-generation limit prescribed in section 3 of the principal Act. The children of half-caste parents on both sides were to be classed as half-castes and therefore Aborigines for the purposes of the Act. Children of half-caste parents would continue to be half-castes over successive generations. The female children of half-caste parents on one side and other races on the other, technically quarter-castes, were also to be half-caste for the purposes of the Act, but only for a single generation and only until they reached age 21 years. The wardship of the Chief Protector was to be extended for male Aborigines and half-castes until they attained adulthood, but for females it would be indefinite, or would continue until they were granted exemption or citizenship.

That would have resolved for Neville the particular problem of half-caste girls being sent out to work from Moore River and returning pregnant. Many of the fathers were white men and the children born at Moore River were quadroons. Technically they were beyond Neville’s authority and questions about their future care and maintenance should have been referred to a Children’s Court under the *Child Welfare Act 1907-1927*. Under Neville’s proposal those children would be wards of the Chief Protector, as would be their mothers, and he might exercise independent authority to keep children with their mothers at Moore River or to send them elsewhere.

Moseley’s recommendation anticipated a definition of Aboriginality for the purposes of the Act over further extended generations of interbreeding. He proposed that the definition of ‘half-caste’ in Section 2 of the Act be amended to include ‘persons of aboriginal origin in a remote degree’.\(^{82}\) Under that definition, any person having any Aboriginal blood, other than full blood, would be categorised a half-caste. The status would be inherited indefinitely along matrilineal and patrilineal lines. Moseley suggested a juridical safeguard for persons of Aboriginal descent to be exempted from Act if they were ‘properly cared for’. Under Moseley’s proposal, before persons were to be categorised half-castes their circumstances would be considered by a magistrate ‘who would decide on the merits of the case whether or not such person should be

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\(^{81}\) Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, A.O. Neville, 13 March 1934, p.55.

\(^{82}\) Moseley Royal Commission, p.19.
subject to the Act. The meaning of the phrase, ‘properly cared for’ would be at the decision of individual magistrates considering the merits of each case.

In practical terms the proposal also would have meant that a magistrate would be required to decide half-caste status at or before registration of birth. That may not have been what Moseley intended, but as he presented it in his report the question was not one of exclusion from status, and therefore exemption from the provisions of the Act, but rather one of inclusion. In either case, Moseley’s proposal would remove authority to decide exemption from the Minister as provided in section 63 of the Aborigines Act 1905 and give it over to a magistrate’s court. That would have eroded the Chief Protector’s influence significantly. Neville demurred from Moseley’s recommendation on grounds that the definition ‘goes much further than anything I have hitherto suggested, and much further than it need’. The 1936 amendment of the Act eliminated the definition of half-caste and introduced a new definition, ‘Native’. The Chief Secretary, Hon W.H. Kitson, explained that the change was not merely a convenience to define a class of people ‘who range from almost full blood to near white’, but also because ‘the name [Aborigines] itself is repugnant to the coloured people, who look upon it as a term of degradation to which they ought not be subjected’. He claimed further that the ‘coloured people called themselves natives, and that is the term we propose to use when referring to them’. It was to apply to ‘any person of the full blood descended from the original inhabitants of Australia’, except quadroons under the age of 21 who did not live in the manner of natives and quadroons aged over 21. Persons of less than quadroon blood born before 31 December 1936 were granted entitlement to request Ministerial approval to be natives for the purposes of the Act, but consent continued to repose with the Minister.

This new definition meant that, for the purposes of the Act, Aboriginality continued through extended generations until there was a second crossing of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal blood and qualifications of non-Aboriginal habituation applied. Hence the child of a full blood native parent and non-native parent was a native, and if that child’s descendants continued to procreate with natives, the status of native for the purposes of the Act endured across successive generations. It terminated only when a child born of a parent of that lineal succession and a non-native parent did not live as a native or attained adulthood.

The revised definition of ‘native’ extended the reach of the Chief Protector, or as he was now called, the Commissioner for Native Affairs. New powers were legislated to authorise persons to examine natives for disease and to compel natives to submit for examination; to vest

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83 ibid, p.19.
84 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 333/1933, folio not numbered, Chief Protector to Honorary Minister, 13 March 1935.
85 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 22 September 1936, p.713.
in the Commissioner all properties of any deceased or missing native; to compel all employers of
natives to contribute to a medical fund to defray the medical and hospital expenses of sick or
diseased natives or those injured in the course of their employment; to clarify the powers of the
Commissioner with respect to the marriage of natives; to render unlawful any extra-marital sexual
intercourse between a native man or woman and another non-native person; to establish native
courts for the trial of any offence committed by a native against another native; to empower the
Commissioner to recover moneys owing to natives and to keep them in a trust fund; and to
establish a fund for the general welfare and relief of natives and to require natives to contribute
to that fund. Other amendments clarified which provisions of the Amendment Act were binding
upon native persons who under the principal Act were half-castes, but not deemed Aborigines
and therefore exempt from its provisions.

Many of the provisions of the Amendment Act validated or legitimised future acts which
had been the accustomed, but not necessarily lawful practice of the Department and Chief
Protector, or reaffirmed the intention of sections of the Act which had changed through usage,
by decisions of the courts or through legal opinion. Others, such as the sections to establish the
native courts and the medical fund, were initiatives originating from the Royal Commissioner’s
report, recommendations 21 and 26, respectively.

In the main, the effect of the 1936 amendment was to reaffirm authority over the lives of
Aborigines which had been granted to the Chief Protector by the 1905 Act and to extend that
authority to a group of persons who had not been anticipated in 1905, namely that amorphous
group of people of Aboriginal descent who fell into the uncertain category called ‘half-castes’.
The amendments were to empower Neville to deal with the half-caste problem and, to a limited
extent, manage the lives of quarter-castes. His authority was not untrammelled, however.

Actions taken unlawfully under the principal Act were not validated retrospectively by the
1936 Act. Quarter-caste children who before 1936 had been removed from the Moore River
Native Settlement and detained at the Queen’s Park Cottage Home, for example, may have been
removed and detained unlawfully. They were outside the reach of the Aborigines Act and could be
dealt with only within the jurisdiction of the State Children’s Act, or after 1927, the Child Welfare
Act. The 1936 Act did not retrospectively validate their forcible removal or detention. In fact,
quadroons under the age of 21 who did not live in the manner of natives continued to be exempt
from the provisions of the Act. Furthermore, it was not until 1937 that Sister Kate’s was declared
a Native Institution, and a place to which natives might be sent at the decision of the
Commissioner.

These matters were not raised in debates on the amending Bill in either House of
Parliament. The minister in charge of the Bill in the Legislative Council, Hon. W.H. Kitson,
merely rehearsed the argument that many people who in practical terms were half-castes and who lived as Aborigines were not caught by the 1905 Act: ‘We have, therefore, had to do many things which, strictly speaking, do not come within the scope of the Aborigines Act’. Such actions were legally unsafe.

The Opposition spokesman, Hon. Les Craig, was less concerned about esoteric matters of law, and more about growing numbers of half-castes; ‘The breeding of half-castes constitutes a colossal menace to the State’. In his opinion the fault lay with Aboriginal girls, and the solution was to remove them from their mothers ‘when they reach a certain age and train them…because the native girl is a child of nature and is not sufficiently strong to withstand the urge of nature’. White men, on the other hand, Craig proclaimed, were relatively blameless, doing ‘only what was natural in the circumstances’.

That theme and the harshness of penalties to be incurred by white men guilty of sexual intercourse with natives was subject of lively debate at the Committee stage of the Bill. The Committee reduced the minimum penalty from six to three months’ imprisonment, and subsequently removed the minimum altogether; ‘If there were extenuating circumstances the magistrate would inflict a fine, but if the case called for drastic punishment, imprisonment would be ordered’. Opposition speakers expressed concern about the different treatment of white and Aboriginal women; ‘If a young man commits an indiscretion in the case of a girl belonging to the white race, he may not in certain circumstance suffer any penalty, but if the white girl is a native half-caste, he may be sentenced to three months’ imprisonment’. Government defended its position less on the grounds of protecting Aboriginal women, but more out of consideration of its international reputation: ‘This is a bad advertisement for the State’.

Debate in the Legislative Assembly paid more attention to the meaning given to the term ‘native’, and in particular the inclusion of quarter-castes. Members objected to the inclusion of quadroons under the age of 21 as natives. The Minister argued that the term ‘half-caste’ in Section 3 of the principal Act included any person born of an Aboriginal parent on either side and the child of any such person, and therefore embraced quadroons. Other members rejected that proposition, notably Hon. Norbert Keenan. He observed that the only reference in the Act to quadroons was in the interpretation section, and only to make it clear that the term ‘half-caste’ did not include quadroons. In his opinion, the reason for excluding quadroons had been to advance opportunities for assimilation, ‘to leave the gate open for such amalgamation and

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Relevant clauses were amended in the Assembly, but when the Bill was returned to the Legislative Council the amendments were rejected. A conference of managers resolved the dispute with further amendments acceptable to both Houses. A new paragraph was added to clause 2 of the Bill to exempt some quarter-castes from the status ‘native’ and therefore from the provisions of the Act:

I. A quadroon under twenty-one years of age who neither associates with or lives substantially after the manner of the class of persons mentioned in paragraph (a) in this definition unless such quadroon is ordered by a magistrate to be classed as a native under this Act.92

The reference to ‘the class of persons’ in paragraph (a) was to full blood descendants of Indigenous Australians. This meant quarter-castes who did not live in the manner of Aborigines were not to be treated as Aborigines under the Act: those who did were. In effect, the Act created its own category of white Aborigines. It was to apply not only to quarter-castes living in native camps, but also to ‘those who are wards of the State, and in certain homes’. Hence, quarter-caste children living at the Queen’s Park Children’s Cottage Home and similar places and not living after the manner of natives were to be classed as natives. The quizzical explanation offered by the Minister was that this would ‘provide an opportunity to improve the conditions of quadroons’:

They will mostly be children of tender age, but for many reasons an endeavour will be made to uplift them, particularly those who are very light in colour—and there are some sad cases—who are wards of the State and are sent to homes and controlled.93

The more likely explanation is political expediency. It gave an appearance of legitimacy to actions already taken in removing quarter-castes from Moore River and giving them over to the care of Sister Kate. The legitimacy was more illusory than real, however. The amendment gave lawful authority to the Commissioner for the future removal of children and their placement in care, but did not legitimise such past action as had occurred. The amending legislation was prospective not retrospective in its application.

The meaning of the terms ‘amalgamation’ and ‘absorption’ used in several places of the debates were not explained. The lead speaker for the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, Charles Latham, for example, canvassed the proposition that full bloods were dying out, but that

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91 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 9 December 1936, p.2549.
92 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 10 December 1936, p.2651
93 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 10 December 1936, p.2653.
there was a ‘very big half-caste population’ who should be treated differently from natives; ‘our main objective should be to reach a point where we can absorb those people into the ordinary population’. The example used by Latham to illustrate his concern anticipated assimilation, but not biological absorption. He related a personal encounter with a half-caste who ‘spoke as well as I and was equally well educated’ and whom Latham reported as having said:

> Under this legislation which is being introduced I am going to be forced to become a ward of the State because I am half-caste. I am going to be controlled by a man down here. I do not want to be controlled by him and I do not want him to control my children. I am living the life of an ordinary Englishman, living in a house with my wife and family. My girls go out to service. Now I am to be called a native and I shall have to go back to the native conditions again.  

‘Surely’, Latham concluded, ‘what we want to do is not drive those people back in a retrograde manner but to lift them up’.

Latham’s colleague in the Legislative Council expressed a contrary view. While he was concerned about the proliferation of half-castes, Craig was more concerned that they might live with full bloods, ‘and in that way go back to the darker blood’. He supported segregating full bloods from other Aborigines, ‘so that the blending shall be towards the white’:

> The colour must not be allowed to drift back to the black. If we can only segregate the half-castes from the full bloods we can go a long way towards breeding the dark blood out of these people.

Segregation for the purposes of breeding out the colour was not the policy of government. The point was made clear in the Legislative Assembly. When the Minister for Agriculture introduced the Bill and was explaining the amendment to section 43 and the penalty for sexual intercourse between blacks and whites, the member for Murchison interjected, ‘I thought the Chief Protector was in favour of getting rid of natives in that way’. The Minister for Agriculture, Frank Wise, responded, ‘I cannot answer for that. This is not the Chief Protector’s Bill. The Government desires to follow the lines of the Royal Commission in that respect’.

Technically, it was not Neville’s Bill; legislation is the province of Parliament. Neville, however, had nurtured the legislation through its gestation over many years and persuaded Commissioner Moseley of its merits. The 1936 Bill embodied the important features of the 1929 Bill as well as initiatives recommended by or arising from issues raised in the Royal Commissioner’s report. Moseley did not support miscegenation and neither did he favour cross-

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94 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 3 December 1936, p.2369.
cultural sexual intercourse. He felt that the law ‘in its present form’ must be amended, and the amended law ‘administered with the greatest severity in order to minimise, if not eradicate this lamentable feature of the North’.  

Moseley’s report reflected Neville’s submission on this matter. The Solicitor General’s opinion in the Hunt case in 1924 had prevented successful prosecution in complaints of cohabitation; ‘Since that ruling we have had 26 cases of the kind [cohabiting] in which we have taken action, but we have been able to get conviction in only five’.  

Neville wanted half-castes to be included in the relevant section as a measure of protection for them; ‘We know that these men are constantly chasing the half-castes and yet we cannot protect the girls’. His policy intention was to minimise miscegenation by outlawing sexual intercourse: ‘A few examples in the court would put a stop to that sort of thing’.

In addition to his concern about the social cost of uncontrolled miscegenation, he was conscious there was also a public financial cost:

The offspring of Europeans and half-caste girls or women are increasing in numbers and the State has to support them because there are no means by which we can make the father pay maintenance. Very often the girls themselves do not know who the fathers are.

**Discussion**

The meaning and nature of the problem embodied in the oft-used phrase, ‘the half-caste problem’, was seldom made explicit, either in official documents or public discourse. Popular opinion regarded half-castes as inferior, ‘a psychological monstrosity’. They were looked upon as an alien, disaffected underclass, growing in numbers, for whom the state had a responsibility of care, but who did not have access to services which might help them rise above their economic and moral poverty, if indeed they could. Some saw that as impossible: ‘whether it be a half-caste or a full blooded black, so soon as they associate with white people they never or rarely take up any of the virtues of the whites but always acquire the vices’.  

Neville himself expressed disquiet that ‘their inherent weaknesses and taints will inevitably affect the whites as miscegenation proceeds’. His vaguely articulated concern reflected a communal anxiety that

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97 Moseley Royal Commission, p.5.
99 *ibid*, p.69.
100 *ibid*, p.68.
101 State Records Office, Aborigines, Acc 653, Item 342/1925, folio not numbered, Ernest Mitchell to CPA, ‘Preventing or minimising the breeding of half-castes’, 10 August 1925.
had been enunciated by Inspector Barry in his report regarding the re-opening of Carrolup:

The half-caste is increasing rapidly and is allowed—with one exception—all the facility of learning the white man’s vices, which he is not slow to avail himself of, but at the same time is debarred to a great extent, the chance of bettering himself by Education.\(^{104}\)

There were two exceptions, not one as indicated by Inspector Barry. Half-castes, like other Aborigines, were denied alcohol and they could not carry guns: ‘the most potent instruments for the subtle or violent destruction of human life, viz, Brandy and gunpowder’.\(^{105}\) Before 1905 any Aborigine was allowed the use of firearms, but after 1905 only if he were licensed. Police objected; they believed no Aborigine should have a gun. The *Firearms and Guns Act 1931* (No 8 of 1931) repealed sections 47 to 51 of the *Aborigines Act*. Thereafter, an Aborigine could be refused a firearms license if a police constable objected. In spite of Neville’s protests that ‘the unfortunate natives have lost another of their few privileges’, the 1936 Amendment Act was silent on the matter of firearms.\(^{106}\) Licensing remained a matter for police discretion.

Full blood Aborigines were segregated from whites to protect them from contaminating influences of the whites, and half-castes from full bloods and whites to protect them from contaminating influences of both. Paul Hasluck, writing as the *West Australian*’s ‘special representative’ in 1936, cautioned against social and economic costs of ‘pushing the half-castes back to the aborigines’:

Is there a place in our social planning for a totally different and inferior body of possibly 10,000 people living right in the midst of the community but not of it—a body which will not be able to earn its own living in competition with the whites but will be a growing charge upon the State; a body which, being untrained, will be of little economic use; a body which does not understand our ideas of religion, and has limited ideas and no religion of its own, one which will become more and more a nuisance, more and more an expense and more and more a misery to themselves? Shutting them off from the whites means that.\(^{107}\)

The solution, according to Hasluck and his like-minded peers such as A.O. Neville, was to isolate half-castes on government settlements, not to be segregated forever, but to be assimilated by the white community through the provision of schools where the children could be educated and

\(^{104}\) State Records Office, Aborigines, Acc 993, Item 65/1929, folio 78, Inspector Barry, Narrogin, to Commissioner of Police, 26 November 1930.

\(^{105}\) *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, 1837, p.5.

\(^{106}\) Moseley Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, A.O. Neville, 12 March 1934, p.47.

trained as valuable workers; ‘and in two generations there should be no half-caste problem’.

In spite of parliamentary protestation of endeavours ‘to uplift them’, there was little evidence after the passage of the Aborigines Act 1905 that government supported positive action to do so: ‘They have given no education to the children, no encouragement to the families to do better and have offered them no means of improving their living conditions’. Nothing in the 1936 Amending Act indicated political will for change. The white community imposed upon half-castes the ‘mode of existence’ considered by Neville to be ‘undesirable’. Housing of a reasonable community standard was beyond the financial means of most of them. Instead, state and local governments allocated living areas, or native reserves, without water or sanitation on the fringes of rural towns, usually located near liquid and putrescible waste sites, and itinerant Aborigines constructed shanties from bush timber and the discards of town and farm, ‘so many rubbish tips for humanity’.

Country towns and the Perth central city area were prohibited areas from which Aborigines, including half-castes, not in lawful employment were banned. A curfew operated after daylight hours. Camp natives from outlying suburbs were allowed to enter Perth for genuine business purposes, but were required to carry passes signed by police officers and were required to produce them when questioned by city police. Half-castes exempt from the Act were similarly required to carry and produce their citizenship cards, or as they called them, their ‘dog licences’.

Where hospital care was available in country towns, it was in segregated Aboriginal wards, frequently on the verandas of public hospitals. Few pregnant half-caste women had medical care, or were delivered of their babies in hospitals. Infant mortality was high. In Perth, Aboriginal women, including half-castes, were barred from admittance to King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, the state’s premier public maternity hospital. Half-castes in need of other medical care frequently attended or were admitted to public hospitals usually only when in extremis.

Throughout his term as Chief Protector Neville complained of insufficient financial resources allocated to his department. His complaints were justified. In his Annual Report for 1935, Neville presented a comparison of spending for Aborigines among the States for the year ended 1934. Western Australia compared unfavourably with the rest. The allocation of £1/10/2 per capita provided for little other than the distribution of clothing, blankets and food

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108 ibid, p.23.
110 Aborigines Department, Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Aborigines for the Year Ended 30 June 1932, p.3.
111 The City of Perth was proclaimed and gazetted as a prohibited area on the 18 March 1927. The prohibited area was bounded by Newcastle St, Bennett St, the Swan River foreshore, and Milligan St; ‘an area in which it shall be unlawful for natives, not in lawful employment, to be or to remain’.
rations to indigent Aborigines, the maintenance of the Moore River Native Settlement, subsidies for missions and the upkeep of feeding stations at Moola Bulla, Violet Valley, Munja and La Grange. An inference may be drawn that Aborigines had low priority in competing demands for public sector outlay.

There was some increased outlay after the Moseley Royal Commission and the proclamation of the Native Administration Act 1905-1936, but much of that was consumed in new initiatives for a medical officer in the north, a travelling inspector, native courts and other initiatives encouraged by the Royal Commission. Financial constraints and lack of political will militated against persistent requests by Neville and local government authorities for the reopening of the Carrolup Native Settlement. The only settlement in the southern half of the State providing rudimentary education for half-caste children and, after 1935, a native hospital, was Moore River, damned by Royal Commissioner Moseley as ‘a woeful spectacle’. Improvement of the settlement languished for want of resources.

The Native Administration Act 1905-1936 gave Neville, now as Commissioner for Native Affairs, statutory powers over a greater number of half-castes, but he was still constrained by financial incapacity to effect significant changes in their conditions. There certainly were too few funds available to launch what might have been an ambitious program to resolve the half-caste problem by controlled miscegenation, a program to ‘breed-out the colour’. Even if that were a hidden agenda of public policy, the legislative amendments of 1936 imposed severe disincentives for cohabitation or sexual intercourse with any native. Both were offences against the Act with tariffs of imprisonment for not more than two years or a fine of not more than one hundred pounds. Marriage of half-castes and whites was stigmatised. Half-castes turned to their own and little of the increase in the number of children born to them, at least in the south of the state, was from miscegenation. Commissioner Moseley’s belief that ‘more can be done by public opinion than by laws’ apparently was vindicated, but not necessarily in the direction he might have anticipated.

The amendment to the section 42 of the Act prohibiting mixed marriage without the Chief Protector’s permission constrained the Commissioner’s discretion. He could object to a marriage, but on relatively narrow grounds.\textsuperscript{113} It is difficult to construe from the law as it stood any intention other than Neville’s often-repeated contention that, ‘Half-caste females are in the care of the Department until they marry and it is surely right that the Chief Protector should see that they do not come to grief by making an undesirable alliance’.\textsuperscript{114} The effect of the new power for the Commissioner to object to any marriage of a native ‘according to the laws of the State’

\textsuperscript{113} Native Administration Act 1905-1936, s. 42.

was only to put Neville into further conflict with churches and missionaries.
Sister Kate retired from Parkerville Children’s Home on 21 August 1933. Her departure had not been of her choosing and she was deeply hurt by the decision of the Board of Control to replace her. Parkerville had been her life for the thirty years after she and the Kilburn Sisters had established it in 1903. In that time, and under her compassionate direction, Parkerville became ‘one of the most important child welfare institutions in the State’. At age 72, and cast adrift by Archbishop Le Fanu, she sought to continue her work for children. Eight months before her enforced retirement she had written a personal letter, marked ‘Private and Confidential’ to the Chief Protector of Aborigines:

Dear Sir,

Will you please consider my letter entirely Confidential for your own private perusal.

I have always been keenly interested in Half-castes & Natives & I should very much like to work among them.

Her timorous overture indicates Sister Kate’s uncertainty about what she might do. Clearly, she had not contemplated caring for quarter-caste children. Rather, she expressed interest in working among ‘half-castes and their children’. She hoped that, together with Ruth Lefroy, three of her long-term helpmates and other volunteers, she might be permitted to re-open Carrolup:

I can easily go to our Cottage by the Beach & have a few children & other work, but I was wondering if you think there is an opening for work for my friends & myself among the half-castes and their children. Would there be any hope of our opening Caralup (sic) for a Settlement?…If Caralup is not suitable we are willing to go to any place in the State.

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1 ‘Parkerville Home’, *Western Mail*, 29 June 1933, p.32.
2 Vera Whittington, *Sister Kate*, Chapter 11, pp.272-297 offers a comprehensive account of the Archbishop’s manoeuvres to remove Sister Kate from Parkerville.
3 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 279/1933, folio 1, letter, Sister Kate to Mr Neville, 28 December 1932. Underlined by Sister Kate. The formality of the appellation suggests that Sister Kate had not previously worked with Neville. Her subsequent letters addressed him as Mr. Neville.
4 *ibid*, The cottage by the beach was 6 Beach St, Buckland Hill [Cottesloe] which was owned by Parkerville Children’s Home and which Archbishop Le Fanu and the Board of Management had offered to Sister Kate for her use for as long as she chose.
There is little evidence to explain why Sister Kate nominated Carrolup. Circumstances suggest others may have encouraged her. In June and July 1930 Conferences of Clergy of the Church of England Archdeaconries of Albany and Bunbury had resolved separately to request government to re-open the Carrolup River Native Settlement. Neville also had been advised by the Bishop of Bunbury that his Diocese would assist in ‘providing for the spiritual and educational welfare of the natives and half castes (sic) at Carrolup.’ Hence, while Sister Kate was resisting moves of Archbishop Le Fanu to remove her from Parkerville, other Anglican clergy were lobbying for the re-opening of Carrolup. That may have prompted Sister Kate’s approach, but she wrote in a footnote to her letter to Neville ‘Mrs Chase is coming to see you about this proposal. She has worked with me for 30 years at Parkerville.’

Muriel Chase was the well connected social editor of the daily newspaper the *West Australian* and the weekly *The Western Mail*. Her columns were published under the *nom-de-plume* ‘Adrienne’. Mrs Chase had met Sister Katherine Mary Clutterbuck, Sister Kate, on board ship returning from London to Perth in 1902. Sister Kate and two other Kilburn Sisters were chaperoning 22 English orphans on the voyage and Mrs Chase volunteered to assist in their daily care. Afterwards she maintained a life-long friendship with Sister Kate. She was a dedicated supporter of the Parkerville Children’s Home and after 1933 until her untimely death in February 1936 was a member of the Ladies Committee of the Children’s Cottage Home Queen’s Park.

It is possible that Mrs Chase brought Sister Kate’s attention to public conjecture about the future of Carrolup. In November 1933 the *Western Mail* published an article on what it termed the ‘Problem of Half-Castes’, citing a report of the Chief Protector that his department had neither the means nor the facilities to do ‘what is patently and urgently necessary’ to prevent these people from being turned into ‘a race of outcasts, which they are rapidly becoming.’ That was followed on December 22 by a further report on the desirability of re-opening Carrolup. It is reasonable to speculate that Mrs Chase discussed these matters with Sister Kate. Certainly, Sister Kate nominated Mrs Chase as her envoy to Neville.

Ruth Lefroy’s biographer, William de Burgh, on the other hand, suggests she and Sister

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6 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 279/1933, folio 1, letter, Sister Kate to Mr. Neville, 28 December 1932. Note in the margin.
7 Her husband, Ernest Chase, was a member of the Government House staff, both as private secretary and *aide-de-camp* to the Governor. She also was connected to the ‘first families’ through her maternal great-grandfather, Marshall Waller Clifton of Australind.
8 Muriel Chase championed many charitable projects, but probably is best known for her initiative to establishing the Silver Chain Nursing Association. See Noel Stewart, *Little But Great, Saga of the Silver Chain (1905-1965)*, Silver Chain Nursing Association (Inc), Perth, 1965.
Kate were ‘spurred on by Ruth’s brother Charles’. Archdeacon Charles Lefroy, a former Archdeacon of the Diocese of Perth, had been General Secretary of the Australian Board of Missions and in England was a member of the Anti-Slavery Society and the Aboriginal Protection Society. He was an ardent advocate for Aborigines and proposed the establishment of ‘a large chain of large native reserves, with here and there a cattle station worked by the natives, across the whole of the northern part of the continent’. Apart from the inspiration he may have given by example, however, there is no direct evidence of his involvement in establishing the Children’s Cottage Home. As late as April 1933 Ruth Lefroy anticipated that Sister Kate would move to the cottage at Buckland Hill, ‘taking a few of the very delicate and afflicted ones [children from Parkerville], and I hope to help her there’.

Whatever the source of Sister Kate’s idea that she and Ruth Lefroy might move to Carrolup after they left Parkerville, it is obvious she was considerably distressed by her conflict with Bishop Le Fanu. On 5 January 1933, Neville replied to Sister Kate’s letter of 28 December, but she did not respond until 12 June. She offered the apology, ‘I have been so unsettled in any

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13 W.J. de Burgh, Phoebe Ruth Lefroy her Life and Letters, p.38.
plans that I hardly knew how to answer.14 In spite of her earlier tentative proposal, Sister Kate did not express any settled thoughts about working with Aborigines. Neither had she actively pursued the matter. She advised Neville that she was to have 6 Beach St, Buckland Hill, ‘a nice roomy cottage that would, if it was any help take about 12 native or Half caste (sic) children’, but it would appear she spent little time there. After leaving Parkerville she lived at Neville Street Bayswater, a property bequeathed her by Edgar Bentley, one of her Parkerville old boys whom she had brought out from England and who had been killed in World War 1.15 Much of the work in readying the house at Buckland Hill to receive the children was done by Ruth Lefroy and three helpers, Julia Lloyd, May Holt, and Miss Gloster.

What Neville had proposed in his early reply to Sister Kate and what he discussed with Muriel Chase is not certain. When next he wrote on 25 July, in response to Sister Kate’s letter of 12 June, Neville addressed himself to Miss Lefroy and made quite clear that the children to be given to Sister Kate’s care were to be chosen for the colour of their skin:

When at Moore River I saw a number of children whom I should like to transfer elsewhere, because they are so very white, and should have the benefit of the doubt, so to speak.16

He then sought advice on what aged children Sister Kate was willing to receive. Sister Kate replied the following day: ‘we do not mind what age the children are as long as they are not under 2 years’.17 In her letter of 12 June, Sister Kate had indicated she sought to care for orphans, ‘the poorest and most neglected, not those who have mothers to love and care for them’, but six weeks later she did not quibble about whether the children were orphans or that they were pale-skinned. Rather, she expressed delight and impatience to receive them:

We are quite ready to take the children you so kindly promised to send me & it seems a waste of some weeks to have beds empty & the staff prepared so that we can welcome their arrival when it is convenient for you to send them....Since seeing you we have had several offers of children who are needing a Home but we should much prefer to have the quarter caste (sic) or half caste (sic) child.18

Neville’s intention was clear and so, it would appear, was Sister Kate’s understanding. At her request, Neville met with Sister Kate on 21 June and told her he was looking for accommodation for quarter-caste children who should be removed from Moore River, ‘and other

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14 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 279/1933, folio 3, letter, Sister Kate to Mr. Neville, 12 June 1933.
15 W.J. de Burgh, Phoebe Ruth Lefroy her Life and Letters, p.39.
16 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 279/1933, folio 12, letter, CPA to Miss Lefroy, 25 July 1933.
17 ibid, folio 13, letter, Sister Kate to Mr. Neville, 26 July 1933.
18 ibid, folio 15, letter, Sister Kate to Mr. Neville, 18 August 1933.
unsuitable environments’. He felt that the quarter-caste children ‘should not be at the Settlement, though we have no funds with which to subsidise them at other existing institutions.’

Sister Kate indicated that she was delighted to take them and that she should be quite satisfied with Neville’s suggestion that his Department might be able to allow her the amount being paid ‘for rations for these youngsters at Moore River Settlement.’ Even though she had earlier expressed a desire to care for orphans, there was only one among the first eight transferred to Buckland Hill from Moore River on 28 August 1933.

By July 1938 there were 68 children aged between one and sixteen years of age living at the Queen’s Park Home. They had diverse backgrounds and had come from several parts of the State. More than half of them, 37, had been removed from pastoral stations, principally in the Murchison and Gascoyne districts. Only one quarter, 19, had been born at Moore River, conceived of white fathers when their mothers were domestic servants on assignment from the settlement. Two others had been at Moore River after being placed there with destitute mothers who subsequently had died. One, a girl, was aged 12 when she was taken to Buckland Hill with the first group in August 1933: the other, a boy, was aged two-and-a-half when he arrived in October of the following year. The remaining children were sent to Queen’s Park from quite different directions. The Child Welfare Department placed five at the home and five were placed by their mothers, two on Neville’s advice and three without Neville having been consulted. Twenty-nine children were siblings from nine families, mainly from pastoral stations. Only sixteen white fathers paid maintenance for their 27 children.

The common factor among the children was that their mothers were half-castes. Under the definition of the Aborigines Act 1905 they had mothers who were Aboriginal and fathers who were not. The children in Sister Kate’s care were at least another generation removed in Aboriginal genealogy; they all had Aboriginal grandmothers, but white fathers. All were quarter-castes, the children whom Neville later described as being ‘too white to be regarded as Aborigines’. To each of them Sister Kate was ‘Gran’ and Ruth Lefroy was ‘Friend’. To each was given Sister Kate’s and Ruth Lefroy’s unconditional love.

Geoffrey Parfitt was four years old when he arrived at Queen’s Park in September 1936. His mother, a Moore River resident, had died of tuberculosis at the Wooroloo Sanatorium. When asked what it was like growing up at the home he replied:

\[19\] *ibid*, folio 7, file note, A.O.N. CPA, 21 June 1933.

\[20\] *ibid*.

\[21\] State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 615/1938, folio not numbered, ‘The Inmates of Sister Kate’s Home’ as at 1 July 1938.

\[22\] State Records Office Native Affairs, Acc 99, Item 333/1933, folio not numbered, Subject: Royal Commission on Treatment of Aborigines 1934 ‘Notes for Royal Commission’. 

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It’s like it is, you were treated, brought up with love. Love in the morning, love at dinnertime and, you know, they loved you…Even if you went wrong they’d scold you, they’d send you over to Gran. Well that was alright because she’d go crook at you and then give you a lolly.  

Ken Lindley confirmed that judgement. He had been born at Murgoo Station on the Murchison in 1937 and removed to Moore River with his mother. In 1940, possibly with his mother’s approval, he was transferred to Queen’s Park. He recalled that ‘Granny she was just wonderful’:

She was so kind, so loving, didn’t matter, you know. Two kids were fighting and she would come up and hug us. Instead of going all crook at us she would just grab hold of us both and start hugging us, and she told us she loves us, you know.

In Ken Colbung’s opinion, Sister Kate, ‘acted more or less like a saint….I guess in the words of Christianity she would have been a saint. We revered her’. Ken was a five-year-old when he arrived at Queen’s Park on 15 September 1936. His mother also had died at Moore River.

Marjorie Van de Berg (nee Sara) was less effusive, but equally as sincere in her respect for Gran. Marjorie, aged 7, her sister Ethel aged 14 and brother Mervyn aged 10, had been removed to Queen’s Park from the Pilbara. Their father was a stationhand and their mother had died early in Marjorie’s life. Marjorie was never told why she was removed from her home and was able to recall little of her mother. Marjorie lived in Sister Kate’s cottage from the time she arrived at Queen’s Park and recalled her sense of fun:

Oh she was kindly. Actually, she was quite full of fun, you know, in her younger…well, she was seventy then. So, yes, she seemed, you know, quite full of fun with us, you know. She played the violin. She could cook.

Gerry Warber was remembered as Friend Lefroy’s pet. Ken Colbung offered the judgement, ‘she would look on him more as a son than the rest of us, because he was much fairer and she would tend to make a pet of him’. Gerry did not disagree, ‘Yes, I used to be called Friend’s Pet’, but he had enduring and deeply held respect for Sister Kate: ‘Sister Kate was very loving and she…her

whole life was devoted to the children’. He may have been Ruth Lefroy’s favourite, but he appreciated that she and Sister Kate gave the children equal love: ‘But love was the prime concern of her and Granny when we were there, and there was plenty of that’.

Gerry was a member of the second group sent to Buckland Hill on 10 October 1934. He was not quite 2 years old when his mother, Mary Warber, died of tuberculosis. Six months afterwards, Gerry and seven others, including Arnold Franks and Richard Wheeler, were removed from Moore River. Richard, aged 12, was sent to the home in response to Sister Kate’s request for ‘a boy from Mogumber or elsewhere over school age to help grow vegetables here, to help with the cow, chop wood, etc, & it is really necessary to have a boy’. The two older children in the group, Richard and a girl aged 10, went to Queen’s Park where Sister Kate was establishing the first cottage for school-age children. The younger ones stayed with Ruth Lefroy in the nursery and kindergarten at Buckland Hill. When a second cottage was built, they moved to Queen’s Park. Gerry remained in Ruth Lefroy’s care. He remembered her as ‘a lady of great kindness’:

> She used to come into the dormitory, read us wonderful stories from the Bible or read us stories about ‘Snugglepot and Cuddlepie’ and different children’s stories like that and it was always something we looked forward to. And there was always that, that great love that was always present there.

The model of accommodation Sister Kate developed at Queen’s Park was the one she pioneered at Parkerville, children’s cottage homes where groups of youngsters lived together with a housemother. There were no separate dormitories for boys and girls. To Marjorie Van de Berg it felt rather like a family home:

> We just played together, apart from the boys sleeping on the boys’ veranda and stuff like that, you know, there was that. But we weren’t segregated to the extent where, you know, you felt the boys were there.

The housemothers did what they could to make their cottages homely:

> They did build, you know, different houses and one was a nursery, so all the little ones went to the nursery and they had lovely airy rooms and, you know, Miss Holt and Nurse would be painting the rooms. Miss Holt was very clever. She

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29 National Library of Australia, Gerard Warber, TRC 5000/101, p.11.
30 State Records Office, Acc 993, Item 279/33, folio 93, Sister Kate to Mr. Bray, 12 September 1934.
made the curtains and, you know, made it lovely.\textsuperscript{33}

As in many households of that day, children had assigned chores like making their beds, chopping firewood, milking the cows, or feeding the fowls and gathering eggs to attend to before and after school. They shared in laundry, dining room and kitchen duties, but also enjoyed considerable freedom and time to play. Marjorie Van de Berg recalled having a lot of time for play:

I mean, after you finished you chores you can go and play anywhere in the home. Christmas holidays we’d be allowed to stay up and we’d be playing chasey or there was a game called hip, you know, and somebody would catch somebody and then they’d have to join the catch. We’d run for miles, you know, playing these games in the night because there wasn’t much else to do anyway.\textsuperscript{34}

Ken Colbung compared Queen’s Park and Moore River:

It was a different situation to the old Moore River set up because in Moore River you were taken from your parents and you were locked up in a big steel shed and all the kids were together, boys and girls and everything ... It wasn’t a good thing. But in Sister Kate’s it was certainly a big difference, but once again because of our freedom that we enjoyed up in Moore River we just went off whenever we could, back to the bush, and it was lucky, there was a lot of bush around there then…even the airport that’s out there now, that wasn’t there, it was over in Maylands, the airport, and we were allowed to go right through. That was swampland, all the way through there.\textsuperscript{35}

Gerry Warber was an infant when he lived at Moore River and had no recollection of the living conditions there, but compared what he learned of other places with his experience of Queen’s Park:

I’ve heard of places like Carrolup and Mogumber where they were really institutionalised with barbed wire, lockups and that sort of thing. But at Sister Kate’s we have none of that. We were all happy kids, we didn’t need to be locked up. There were no fences, no gates. You know, we roamed round the suburbs to our hearts’ content.\textsuperscript{36}

Gerry had one deep regret about growing up at Queen’s Park;

\textsuperscript{33} ibid, p.9.
\textsuperscript{34} ibid, p.10.
\textsuperscript{35} National Library of Australia, Ken Colbung, TRC 5000/336, p.10. In fact, at Moore River there were separate dormitories for boys and girls, but children were locked in before sunset each night. The airport Ken referred to is the Perth International Airport.
\textsuperscript{36} National Library of Australia, Gerard Warber, TRC 5000/101, p.6.
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Being institutionalised you’ve got no one to give you a hug, you know, when you’re in distress. Or if you feel somehow lonely and in need of comfort because you’re sick or if you’ve hurt yourself, that no one ever gave you a hug.37

The Aborigines Department knew that Gerry’s father, Luke Warber, camped on the Hamersley property at Caversham.38 He was generally well respected and tried several times unsuccessfully to visit Gerry at the home. Gerry was not told about Luke until after he died in 1945:

Although my mother died when I was two of tuberculosis, I did have Luke Warber who I believed tried to get to see me for eleven years before he died. But I think he was discouraged because of the big question mark over who my father really is. I didn’t realise at the time he was out there and that he was trying to see me but this was never permitted. I’m not alone in this, there are lots of kids that I know who never ever had family visits and it was as simple as that. It’s not the lies that were told to you, I think it was what wasn’t told you that really mattered, what your real family status was.39

The apparent discrimination over some children being allowed family visits and others not was the only aspect of Sister Kate’s policies that Gerry was willing to condemn. Others of his friends from the home were uncertain as to whether there was a policy about family visits. Geoffrey Parfitt believed they were not encouraged to mix with Aborigines:

Oh well they’d hunt ‘em away from the gates, the mothers and different things, when they’d come to see you. That used to happen. I’d seen ‘em crying up there but I didn’t know what they were crying about.40

Ken Colbung was emphatic that contact with families ‘wasn’t sort of entertained’:

Although on weekends you could go and meet them down the meadow, and if your family was able to get down there, they had to make their own way.41

Marjorie Van de Berg could recall ‘some kids having visits from, you know, their father or their mother’. It never happened to her, but she did not know whether family visits were encouraged:

No, it wasn’t encouraged. Oh, I don’t know if it was discouraged to that extent either. But because our name was changed and I don’t think that…I didn’t know I

37 ibid, p.5.
38 State Records Office, Native affairs, Acc 993, Item 105/1937, Subject: Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area - Reports on Inspection by Head Office Inspector, folio 6.
had any relatives apart from my father and...well, we knew that he was supposedly alive, but as I grew up I felt he must've died, you know, because we hadn’t heard anything from anybody.  

Aboriginality was not discussed at the home, neither was it strong in the children’s awareness. Geoffrey Parfitt, for example, recalled not feeling Aboriginal in any way:

No, not really, I think we were treated equal. I wasn’t, I never heard...Well never, ever seen any Aboriginal. I never had anyone come visiting me. A lot of the mothers and that never ever come to see their kids again.

Gerry Warber didn’t consider it important:

A lot of us, particularly like myself, didn’t care too much about that, about our Aboriginality. We just grew up as kids, all very, very happy.

If Ken Lindley had any concern about skin colour as a child, it was only because he was too pale. He was aware that some of the other children had complexions darker than his own, but it wasn’t a pressing issue other than his concern that he wanted to be more like them:

We were all just brothers and sisters, we didn’t have a problem there. I can remember when one was really black, he may be arguing or something and he calls another who is really fair ‘You black so and so’. So, there wasn’t a hassle that way.

As a matter of fact I used to often when I was growing up wonder why I wasn’t as dark as that one. I used to cry over it, ‘cos he was different from me sort of thing, you know. We went through all those sort of moments.

Occasionally their classmates at the Queen’s Park State School teased them about their skin colour, but that was dealt with summarily. Geoffrey Parfitt was a robust lad and inflicted his own retribution:

The kids at the school were a bit cruel, used to call you Nigger and all that, you know. But it didn’t worry me because I was fairly light. But some of the others used to take...I had to chase ‘em and give ‘em a hiding, you know.

Others were protected by the group identity, a kind of *esprit de corps*, which bonded the children from the home. Gerry Warber, blonde-haired and blue-eyed with a very fair complexion, didn’t

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42 National Library of Australia, Marjorie Van de Berg, TRC 5000/102, p.12.
recall being the target of racist taunts at school, but knew the children from the home had an advantage of numbers:

I think to a large degree it was very handy having the school next door, the primary school. It was wonderful there because the word ‘racism’ never came up—I don’t know whether that was because there were about a hundred of us and we were quite equal in numbers to the others that were there, but it was a great upbringing.\textsuperscript{47}

Similarly, Marjorie Van de Berg was not made to feel different, but was aware of the security offered by group solidarity:

I felt I was accepted very well. But even if I wasn’t it didn’t bother me because I felt, ‘Well, if they don’t like me, they don’t like me’. It never worried me that much about that. But, you know, if they did call the kids names, you know, racist names, they’d all gang up on them anyway.\textsuperscript{48}

The children sent to the care of Sister Kate’s may have been quarter-castes, wards of the Chief Protector of Aborigines and after 1936 subject to the provisions of the Aborigines Act, but they were raised in the manner of white children without consciousness of their Aboriginal heritage. Gerry Warber called it ‘very much a British type of upbringing’:

One of the things about Queen’s Park was that both Ruth Lefroy and Sister Kate were of British stock and things English mattered very much to them. On the first Sunday of November each year there was a fete and…the girls were dressed up in white dresses, and there would be maypole dances and different things like that. There was a very British atmosphere in those days. Ruth Lefroy and Sister Kate obviously cherished these facets of the life there and they tried to relive them with the children there.\textsuperscript{49}

Attention was paid to the grooming and deportment of the girls. Ethel Dannatt was the principal of the prestigious Church of England School, St Mary’s Girls’ School, West Perth, and an inaugural member of the Ladies Committee of the Queen’s Park Children’s Cottage Home Inc. When she retired from St Mary’s in 1938 she joined Sister Kate as a housemother and had particular responsibility for the older girls. Marjorie Van de Berg recalled that ‘as we grew older we went and stayed with her and she taught us to be ladies’:

\textsuperscript{47} National Library of Australia, Gerard Warber, TRC 5000/334, p.10.
\textsuperscript{48} National Library of Australia, Marjorie Van de Berg, TRC 5000/102, p.14.
\textsuperscript{49} National Library of Australia, Gerard Warber, TRC 5000/334, p.8.
Like how to set a table properly and how to behave properly, drink from cups and saucers and, you know, how to be ladies, because most of us were tomboys because we always played around the home with the boys. We’d play cricket and, you know, boys things.

In 1933 Sister Kate had expressed interest in working with ‘half-castes and their children’ and was delighted and impatient to receive the first group of quarter-castes. Within the home, children were not labelled according to mathematical apportionment of racial admixture; they were children and were raised in a manner as near as possible in an institutional setting similar to the conventional up-bringing of children in Perth suburban households. The colour of their skin was not an issue for Sister Kate’s care of her children.

Ruth Lefroy certainly objected to the children being referred to as quarter-castes.\(^5\) She also disagreed with Neville over whether the children should be regarded at law as whites or Aborigines and, when they left the home, expressed pride in observing how well they were accepted in white society. Her role in establishing and maintaining the Children’s Cottage Home and her influence in its policies and management have not always been appreciated. It was she who prepared the cottage at Buckland Hill to receive the first eight children from Moore River and it was she who donated the first block of land for the home at Queen’s Park. Her cousin, Jack Crossland, bought the third and was largely responsible for the construction of the second cottage and the chapel. The Lefroy family were major benefactors of the home and Ruth had the social contacts to encourage philanthropic contributions for its maintenance. As Sister Kate became increasingly frail, Ruth assumed increasing managerial responsibility, and after the death of Sister Kate in July 1946 continued to run the home until only a few months before she died on 1 July 1953.

After he retired as Commissioner for Aborigines, Neville made a small annual Christmas Cheer donation for the children at Queen’s Park, and each year Ruth Lefroy wrote to him about the children he knew, many of them from among those he first selected to send to Sister Kate. In December 1950 she wrote:

Margaret Darby is training as a nurse in Merridin (sic) Hospital. She has been through Northam Hospital.

Marjory Sara has been training for 18 months in St. Andrew’s Hospital at Midland Junction & now has been accepted as a Nurse at Fremantle Hospital.

Ivy Kilmurray is a fully qualified & clever Dressmaker.

Betty George is apprenticed to a Hair Dresser for 5 years.

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Rosemary George is a Sales woman in Coles. Brian Williams is a Clerk in a Commonwealth office.

Two boys are apprenticed to be motor mechanics. Gerald Thompson, Ken Colbung, Tom Hunt are in the Army, & several others are coming home to enlist. May Kilmurray has married a nice white man who is Head Gardener at Yanchep. He has 5 men under him. Tilly Anderson is happily married to a white man. Both these have their own car.

Daisy Ashwin is married to a very nice white farmer. Cecilia Turvey the same. Jessie Boddington is engaged to a very nice white man, an oxywelder by trade. They will be married as soon as they can find rooms or a cottage. Mary Corbett is engaged to one of my old Parkerville boys. He is working on a farm & they will be married in March.

Jim Ashwin married Ethel Sara. He works at the zoo. Mervyn Sara married Doris Howard. He has always worked for Dawson & Harrison, except when he was in the Army.

Douglas Lockyer has married a nice white girl. He works at Chamberlain’s motor factory.

Dorothy Knight always seems able to secure a good job in one of the Perth shops.

Richard Wheeler married Nellie. Their marriage was unhappy.

Another boy is doing well with a big electric firm in Perth. And we often receive letters from employers thanking us for sending them such a good lad or lass.

Len Sutton suffers from epileptic fits & as he also has a violent temper, he is in Claremont Mental Hospital. Am taking him a Christmas Hamper tomorrow.

Our two failures are Nancy Narrier now with her mother, somewhere about Broome. And Pansy Coomer. 51

Ruth Lefroy’s judgements of success or failure appear to have been how well Sister Kate’s children assimilated with the white community. Her letters might also have reflected what she knew of Neville’s interest in the experiment at Queen’s Park and provided the sorts of information he wanted to hear. She also may have not known about the personal conflicts many of the children coped with after they left Queen’s Park. Each had different experiences, but each retained or sought some connection with their Aboriginality.

Geoffrey Parfitt admitted to some difficulties about ‘being out in society’, but was not bothered by discrimination. After leaving the home he worked on farms at Mukanbudin and other places before he joined a shearing team as rouseabout on stations in the Murchison, the

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51 Berndt Museum of Anthropology, University of Western Australia, A.O. Neville Collection, letter, P.R. Lefroy to Mr. Neville, 22 December 1950, not catalogued.
Gascoyne and the Goldfields and learned to be a shearer. He subsequently worked on sheds throughout Australia and New Zealand, but always returned to Western Australia after periods of up to three years away. He became a gun shearer, consistently shearing in excess of 200 sheep a day, and was the ringer in sixteen sheds, including two seasons in succession at Rawlinna Station. Between seasons he worked as a fruit picker, a motor mechanic on the Nullablue, and as a labourer in a freezing works in New Zealand. He was forced to abandon shearing in 1982 when he became suddenly arthritic. In later years he managed his arthritis with bush medicine.

Geoffrey never married. His was the masculine world of shearing sheds, the open road and sleeping beside rivers. In his adventurous, knockabout life he occasionally was called ‘a black so and so’, but says he was ‘big enough to look after meself’. He was not resentful and preferred to ‘let bygones be bygones and be merry, you know’:

I got used to it though because, you know, you were called names and that, and the few names that any farmers and that called me was nothing compared to what I got in the orphanage sometimes when we were at school. But we were all very good mates, those white kids too. You know, even now I can go down and stay at Greenbushes at different places, you know, I went to school with them. Bless their hearts, some of them have died off lately but...they loved the Home kids. We all got on well down there.

Gerry Warber lived at Queen’s Park for fifteen years, and after a short period as a photographer’s assistant at Geraldton, he spent twenty years doing military mapping in the army. He retired at the rank of warrant officer and served eleven years with the Department of Minerals and Energy, Perth. It was not until he was in his late teens that he learned that his mother was Aboriginal. He spoke of his desire to learn more about his roots:

I have an urgent sense of doing the genealogy to find out where my roots lay, who my parents were, whether I have kin out there in society and say, ‘Hey, I’m a cousin’ or something like that. A couple of people have contacted me and we’ve been in contact. But I think that, you know, blood relatives are important and this is what I’ve tried to do in later years.

After completing her nurse training at Fremantle Hospital, Marjory Van de Berg worked at Bunbury District Hospital and returned to St. Andrew’s Hospital in Midland. She had wanted to study midwifery before she married and raised six children. Marjory made contact with her Aboriginal relations, but felt she belonged to neither culture, white or Aboriginal:

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I’ve felt I don’t belong to my original side very much because although they accept me to a certain extent, I can’t even speak the language. So in that way I feel more, you know, white. But then again you’re not accepted there either, you know.\(^{54}\)