

FRONTIER CONFLICT IN THE

BOWEN DISTRICT, 1861-1874.

Thesis, M.A. Qualifying.

N.A. LOOS

James Cook University of North Queensland,

July 1970.

CONTENTS

Pages

Abbreviations			
Introduction			I-V
Chapter	I	The Land and Its People before European Intrusion.	1
	II	The Influence of the Squatting Movement upon Frontier Contact.	68
	III	The Settlement of the Bowen District.	107
	IV	Black Meets White.	169
	V	Conclusion.	212
Appendix	A	James Morrill's Account of Aboriginal Life.	236
	B	Various Aboriginal Vocabularies.	247
	C	The Loss of Life in the Bowen District.	258
Maps	1	A Map of Pastoral Districts of Queensland.	1a
	2	Map of the Bowen District.	Va
	3	Map Showing Tribal Distribution of the Bowen District.	10a
Diagram		A Simple Schema of Tribal Organization.	49a

Illustrations	a	Bed of the Burdekin River)	
	b	Rugged Hill Country)	1a
	a	Typical Open Forest Country)	
	b	Brigalow Forest)	2a
	a	James Morrill)	
	b	Salt Marsh of the Coastal Fringe)	5a
	a	A Burdekin Aboriginal, approximately 1870)	
	b	Beete Jukes Meeting Aborigines at the Mouth of the Burdekin in 1843)	7a
		A Detachment of Native Police, approximately 1860		93a
		Aborigines in Transition		184a
Bibliography				266

ABBREVIATIONS

Col. Sec.	Colonial Secretary
C.S.I.R.O.	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization
C.P.S.	Court of Petty Sessions
J.P.	Justice of the Peace
P.M.	Police Magistrate
P.D.T.	Port Denison Times
Q.S.A.	Queensland State Archives
V. & P.	Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Legislative Assembly

INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts to describe and analyse Aboriginal-European relations in the Bowen District from the first settlement by Dalrymple's party, on 11 March 1861, to the early 1870's by which time the Europeans had dictated the peace to the Aborigines and frontier conflict virtually ceased. The nature and course of conflict between the races determined their future relationship. It will be shown that the two stereotyped procedures described in Queensland as 'keeping the blacks out' and 'letting the blacks in', in reality, involved firstly, the act of open warfare and secondly, the acceptance of unconditional surrender by the Aborigines. The subsequent relationship between the races was that of conqueror and conquered, and the tendency to dismiss the conflict to pass on to some more 'positive' chapter of ethno-history can leave that history imperfectly understood.

By the time the Bowen district was settled in 1861, conflict between the Aborigines and Europeans had been occurring for over seventy years in Eastern Australia. The first settlements at Port Jackson, in 1788, immediately

THE IMAGE ON THIS PAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED
DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

A Map of Electoral Districts of Queensland.

From Farnfield, Frontiersman, p. 18.

resulted in the Europeans outnumbering the local Aborigines and Aboriginal resistance was relatively slight;¹ but as settlement spread, clashes 'inevitably' occurred because Aborigines and Europeans were both competing for the water and the most fertile land. The Aborigines were increasingly denied freedom of movement for food gathering or for social and ceremonial reasons. As their food resources became more circumscribed they were forced to become paupers, dependent upon the Europeans, or to collect the farm products and to kill the domesticated animals. The Europeans invariably responded to destruction of their property by punishing the Aborigines as thieves.

As settlement spread, settlers were unsupervised and replied to Aboriginal resistance as they wished: often by organized punitive expeditions but sometimes by the use of poison. Elkin claims that this method of 'pacification by force' became institutionalized after 1840, receiving indirect support from the legislatures where frontier pastoral interests were strongly

1. A.H. Chisholm, The Australian Encyclopaedia, Volume I. (Sydney, 1965), p.99.

represented.² Because the Aborigines communicated with each other over extensive distances,³ it seems very likely that reports of European actions often preceded the pastoralists, creating hostility even before the races met. This pattern of contact extended to the Moreton Bay district by 1842 and to the Dawson River by 1857.⁴

In this brief description of frontier conflict in Eastern Australia, expressions such as 'institutionalized' and 'pattern of contact' might perhaps indicate that the detailed study of a district is hardly necessary. However, the justification for such a regional study is obvious. As students begin to write the ethno-history of North Queensland they must refuse to accept both the generalizations postulated for Australia as a whole and the findings in other areas. In actual fact, very few close regional studies have been written to test the validity of these generalizations. Such a study also allows attention to be focused

-
2. A.P. Elkin, The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them. (Third Edition) (Sydney, 1956), pp. 321-323.
 3. See Chapter I for an indication of intertribal communication.
 4. Australian Encyclopaedia, p. 101.

on the people involved, their reactions to the challenges they faced, and often their state of mind as they were caught up in a situation which their normal code of behaviour did not encompass.⁵ In many cases, the same people were involved throughout the studied period and it is possible to record their changing reactions to the changing circumstances. In the Bowen district we are fortunate to have a witness for the Aborigines who can describe, however crudely, their way of life and their reaction to the coming of the Europeans. This was the English sailor, James Morrill, who had lived with the Aborigines, during these crucial years of contact. It will be seen that neither Aborigines nor Europeans could participate in the challenge of racial conflict without some of the deepest values of their respective civilizations being set aside. It is only in the study of a small area that habits of conduct can be examined for their

5. M. Reay, 'The Background of Alien Impact' in Aboriginal Man in Australia: Essays in Honour of Emeritus Professor A.P. Elkin, ed. R.M. and C.H. Berndt (Sydney, 1965), p.377. Reay points out the need for studies of 'the day-to-day contacts between "whites" and Aborigines'.

durability under stress when normal restraints are removed.

Map of the Bowen District.

