NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 4th General Meeting of the Society for 1987 will be held in:

THE CONSERVATION CENTRE, 120 WAKEFIELD STREET ADELAIDE

ON

MONDAY 22ND JUNE 1987 AT 8.00 PM.

AGENDA

1. Apologies:

2. Minutes of the previous General Meeting:
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held in the Conservation Centre, 120 Wakefield Street Adelaide on 25th May 1987, having been circulated in this journal, to be confirmed.

3. Papers and Journals:
   Papers and journals received from other societies and organisations, since the last general meeting, will be tabled at this meeting.

   Speakers:
   S. Hemming and P. Clarke of the Anthropology Division of the South Australian Museum, will address the Society, and the subject of their addresses will be:

   "Aboriginal Culture in Southern South Australia: Recent Research."

4. Supper will be served at the close of the meeting.

R. Allison
Hon. Secretary
120 Wakefield Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000
Reminiscences of Aborigines in the Adelaide Hills

Steven Hemming

Introduction

There is very little known about the Aboriginal people who lived in the Adelaide Hills. Glimpses of their culture can be seen in settlers' diaries, early newspaper articles and through the research of anthropologists earlier this century, in particular, Dr Norman Tindale.¹ He has provided us with the tribal name, Peramangk, for the people occupying the eastern side of the Adelaide Hills. The following information about Aboriginal people in the Hills was obtained principally from three long-time residents of the area and an Aboriginal man from Swan Reach, in South Australia. These reminiscences aptly illustrate the value of even the briefest of memories in providing an insight into the Aboriginal history of a particular region.

The information that I have collected from oral sources, appears to be predominantly about Aboriginal people from the Murray River area travelling through the Adelaide Hills. I have a research interest in the history and culture of the Aboriginal people from the Murray River in South Australia and in particular, the people from the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong. The movements of these people and the history of their relationship with the city of Adelaide, from the beginning of the State, are of interest to me and the following reminiscences provide useful information in relation to these topics. In a previous article based on the memories of a Pt Willunga man, I was able to document the movement of Aboriginal people from the Pt Elliot region, along the coast south of Adelaide to Pt Willunga, during the period around the turn of the century.² The reminiscences featured in this present paper, however, provide information about a route through the Adelaide Hills, and particularly the Murray River people's activities along the route, at a time when the camps of the 'Mt. Barker tribe' were a thing of the past.³

How the reminiscences were collected

I collected the first of the reminiscences featured in this paper by complete accident. In 1982, I was researching the early conflict between Aborigines and whites on the Upper Murray in South Australia. As part of this project, I visited the 'old folks' home at Berri, in South Australia's Riverland. I was interested to talk with descendants of some of the old settler families of the region and I was hoping that they knew some stories relating to the early days. Philip Jones from the S A Museum was accompanying me on this trip and we asked the people in charge of the home if they thought that there were any likely people with stories about Aboriginal people. They advised us to talk to an elderly lady called Mrs E Walsh and to our surprise she knew an interesting story about Aboriginal people, but not in relation to the Upper Murray. She said that she came from Aldgate, in the Adelaide Hills and that as a girl she had seen Aboriginal people in this area.⁴

The second of the oral histories was collected in 1986 from Mrs E. Gibb who has also been a long-time resident of Aldgate.⁵ Tom Gara, through work he was doing on the rock art of the Adelaide Hills, became aware that Mrs. Gibb knew something of the culture of the Aborigines of the Mt. Lofty Ranges. An interview was set up and I was able to obtain a tape recording of Mrs. Gibb's reminiscences. As coincidence would have it, she turned out to be the sister of Mrs Walsh. She was able to provide a more detailed account of the visits of Aboriginal people to Aldgate than those of her sister.

The first time that I spoke to one of the Andrewartha family of Aldgate - this was the maiden name of the two sisters - I was trying to obtain information about the Upper Murray Aboriginal people and on the
second occasion I was excitedly expecting to learn about the culture of the Peramangk people of the Adelaide Hills. However, it soon became obvious that what I was hearing about were probably travelling groups of people from the Lower Murray. Therefore, although I was disappointed in one sense, that I had missed out on the Upper Murray and Peramangk histories that I was expecting, I received as a consolation prize information that fitted well with my main regional interest in the people from the Lower Murray area in South Australia, the Ngarrindjeri. It is well documented that the Ngarrindjeri and other Murray River groups travelled to Adelaide for rations and for other reasons from an early period, however, information about the routes they took and what they did along the way is not so readily available.

The third of the oral histories was collected only recently, in May 1987. It was told to myself and Philip Clarke by Mrs J Weatherald, who lives near Stirling and grew up in Verdun or as it was called before the First World War, Gunthar. Philip, an Aldgate resident, was able to organise the interview with Mrs Weatherald and she kindly consented to a tape recording being made of her reminiscences about Aboriginal people travelling through Verdun on their way to Adelaide. We became aware of Mrs Weatherald's knowledge through a booklet compiled by the St Catherine's School for the Jubilee 150 celebrations. It contains the life stories of a group of elderly Adelaide Hills residents and includes Mrs Weatherald and Mrs Gibb. However, the full details of the knowledge that these two women have about the Aboriginal visitors to the hills was not obtained by the school students.

Finally, I will be including a few comments by Mr Harry Hunter, an Aboriginal man, originally from Swan Reach. I interviewed Mr Hunter in 1983 and he kindly consented to a tape recording of the conversation. He provided a few comments about the Adelaide Hills people and early trips through the Hills to Adelaide from the Murray.

The Reminiscences

Mrs E Walsh grew up in Aldgate and remembers the visits made by an Aboriginal group to this hills town when she was a young girl. She estimates that she was about 4 or 5 years old at the time that she first remembers them. This would place the period of the visits at around the turn of the century. The time of year in which they visited was always during the warmer months and the group consisted of about eighteen people. They always camped in the same spot near the the willows by the creek. During their stay, which was only a short one, they would make baskets and feather flowers to sell to the locals. Mrs Walsh assumed that by selling baskets and feather flowers they were able to help support themselves. The baskets she thinks were made from the reeds growing in the creek.

Feather flowers are made from real feathers and they are still made by Ngarrindjeri people, who usually use pelicans feathers. They are dyed different colours and arranged like a bunch of real flowers, to be used as a decoration. It appears likely that the idea of making feather flowers was introduced by the authorities to the people at Point McLeay as a means of earning extra money. The fact that the people visiting Aldgate made feather flowers supplies some evidence that they were Ngarrindjeri people and provides a useful record of their early manufacture.

However, it was mainly due to the corroboree that Mrs. Walsh remembers the Aborigines who visited Aldgate. It was performed in the evening and the people in the town would go down to the willows and watch. The two key things that Mrs Walsh seems to remember about the corroboree was the singing and the method of creating rhythm. The words that she remembers being used in the song were "Ninni Na Na" and she said that these were repeated over and over. She also said that they slapped their thighs to create the rhythm. Finally, she was not sure where these Aborigines came from or where they were going but she said they came through Aldgate several times in her memory. When these memories are coupled with those of her sister, Mrs E. Gibb, an interesting picture of the corroboree emerges.
Mrs. Erica Gibb was also born in Aldgate and has lived in the same house all her life. She is a few years older than her sister and she seems to remember a little more about the visits of Aboriginal people to her town.

Mrs. Gibb was about 10 or 11 years old when a group of Aborigines visited Aldgate and she remembers them camping near the present day RSL hall. They always came during the warmer months of the year, possibly in October or November. During the evening they would give a corroboree. A large group of people from the town would go to watch it. By a large group she means up to 15 people, this number being considered a crowd by the residents of Aldgate in the period around the turn of the century. She recalls that the men were naked from the waist up and she thinks that they were probably wearing trousers. They decorated themselves with white ochre by highlighting the bone structure of the body.

For example, they highlighted the bones in the arms, the rib cage and around the collar bone.

Descriptions of the body decoration styles of southern South Australian Aborigines often mention the highlighting of bone structure and this technique can be seen in the available visual records relating to this area. George French Angas painted a series of watercolours of South Australian Aboriginal people in the early 1840s and his representations of various ceremonies and types of body decoration provide good examples of the highlighting of the body's bone structure.\(^{15}\)

Mrs. Gibb says that the corroboree included both dancing and singing. Several details seem to have lodged firmly in her memory. As Mrs. Gibb puts it, "I can't remember anything more than that they sang over and over this, "Ninga Ninga Nanna". Edward Stephens arrived at a similar set of words for part of a corroboree that he witnessed, probably in the 1840s, in the Adelaide area. His equivalent set was, 'Nack-a Nack-a-na Nack-e-na'.\(^{16}\)

Mrs. Gibb says that as they sang they had metal or wooden devices in their fingers and they tapped and worked their fingers to make a rhythmic tapping sound. She makes the point that it was only the men who were involved in the corroboree. She only remembers going to see it about three times and she is not sure if this was because the Aborigines ceased coming or because she grew too old to be interested in going to see them.

Mrs. Gibb's description of the technique used for the creation of rhythm during the corroboree is an unusual one. It is well documented that the Ngarrindjeri and the Kaurna people of the Adelaide plains used a small pad of skin on which to create a rhythm.\(^{17}\) It was usually used by the women, while the men made a tapping sound with their clubs, boomerangs or other weapons. It may be possible that the men in the Aldgate corroboree were making tapping sounds with devices manipulated with their fingers, as a substitute for the weapons used in the days before white contact.

Mrs. Gibb estimates that there were up to 14 people in the Aboriginal group camping on the flat near the RSL hall. They didn't have tents, just saplings cut down and arranged in a type of windbreak. It was a temporary camp and they only stayed for the one night. They always had the corroboree in the evening and it seems that it was held near to their camp-site.

Interestingly, Mrs. Gibb was told where the Aboriginal group were heading and from where they had come. They were going to Adelaide to obtain rations and blankets and they had come from a camp at Wellington, on the lower Murray. This locates them firmly in Ngarrindjeri territory and they were most likely from a camp called Murungun, near Wellington.\(^{18}\) Probably the main Ngarrindjeri family using Murungun at the turn of the century were the Karpany family.\(^{19}\) This family is still very large and there may be someone in the family who knows something of the trips to Adelaide via Aldgate made by Aboriginal people from Wellington. On the return journey from Adelaide, Mrs. Gibb thinks that the group probably stayed at Stirling. Mr. Sid Rogers of Stirling told her that he remembered some Aborigines camping at Stirling at about the same period as the people who were visiting Aldgate. Mrs. Gibb also remembers someone telling her that the same group also camped at Bridgewater. She thinks that they must have used the road from Wellington, through Echunga to Aldgate. She doesn't know how far they travelled each day but she is certain that they travelled on foot.
Although Mrs Gibb's version of the Aboriginal visits to Aldgate contains more detail than her sister's, on most points, she doesn't remember baskets and feather flowers being made or sold by the group. This may be due to a number of reasons, but it certainly shows the variation in individual accounts of the same event.

Mrs J Weatherald grew up in Grunthal in the Adelaide Hills. The town was renamed during the First World War because of its German origin and became known as Verdun. She has a similar story to tell about Aboriginal visits to Grunthal and the corroborees they staged. From about the time when she was 6 years old, until she was about 11, she remembers a group of Aborigines visiting the town each year in the warmer weather. This would make the period of the visits from about 1911, through to the middle of the First World War.

Mrs Weatherald says that the Aborigines came once a year and that they camped by Stanley Bridge, on the Onkaparinga River. Their camp was on a reserve used by the local people for camping and picnics. The remains of the old Stanley Bridge are still there and the area where the Aborigines camped is probably to the right of the new bridge, as you travel away from Adelaide. There were approximately twenty people in the group and there appeared to be families with most ages represented. According to Mrs Weatherald, the people were mostly 'full-bloods'. They would only stay in Grunthal for a few days and then they would continue on their long walk towards Adelaide. Mrs Weatherald was under the impression that they were going to Adelaide to collect rations. They did not come back through Grunthal on their return trip and she thinks that they probably went back through Mt Barker. Her brother, who also witnessed the visits and who associated with Aboriginal people, says that they came from the Murray River.

During their stay, the Aborigines would always put on a corroboree for the town's people. According to Mrs Weatherald, they held this in the evening, near the hotel. Dancing and singing were preceded by a boomerang throwing exhibition, staged by one of the younger men. The boomerangs were of the returning variety and she thinks that other types of objects were also demonstrated, but she is not sure of the type. The singing and dancing of the corroboree would last for several hours, although each dance was fairly short. Mrs. Weatherald is not sure how the rhythm was created. Both the women and men danced and one old lady, who was a particularly good singer would sing, 'Nearer my god to thee'. This was always very popular with the crowd. Interestingly, Mrs Weatherald compares the style of the performance to the 'corroborees that you see on television today'. Unlike the corroborees at Aldgate, the Aborigines did not decorate themselves in any way for the performance and they remained fully clothed. The whole event was staged for money and the town's people would pay at the end of the performance.

Mrs Weatherald also knows some stories passed down to her from her mother. When her mother was just married and living in Grunthal, there were Aborigines living in the area all the year round. Her mother grew up in the Mt Barker area and she spoke of Aborigines travelling through Mt Barker and and stopping to hold corroborees. Her mother used to go to watch these and Mrs Weatherald thinks that these people came from the Murray. She also says that her mother mentioned that there were quite a few Aboriginal people permanently living in the Mt Barker area.

Mr Harry Hunter was a well known and respected member of the Ngarrindjeri community. Most of his life was spent in the Swan Reach and Riverland areas of South Australia. Of relevance to this paper, is his memory of his father telling him that as a boy he travelled over the Adelaide Hills. He goes on to say that he does not think that there was a separate group living in the Hills. He thinks that the only Aborigines in that region were those that were travelling through and this would have meant the Murray River people.
Discussion

When Dr Norman Tindale's book on the Aborigines of southern South Australia is completed, our understanding of the relationships between the people of the Adelaide Plains, the Adelaide Hills and the Murray River area, before white contact, should be much clearer. However, at present only a limited amount of information can be gleaned relating to this subject, mainly from early sources. In a report on the heritage value of the Mt Barker summit, Neale Draper brings together much of the available information relating to the Mt Barker or Peramangk tribe and he also attempts to analyse the relationship between this and neighbouring groups. The reminiscences I have collected provide little information about the Adelaide Hills people, but they do provide evidence of the use of the Hills by other groups, in a period when the Hills people seemed to have ceased to exist as a group. As a background to this situation, I will also try to provide some evidence of very early visits to Adelaide and examples of the early use of the Hills as a route to Adelaide.

Some scanty evidence of Murray Aborigines visiting the Adelaide area, prior to the establishment of Adelaide, is available in a booklet by Adams. He simply states that Murray people would visit Adelaide to steal wives. However, in the following statement by an angry elder of the Adelaide area, called by the Europeans, King John, the relationship between the Murray and Adelaide is made very clear:

Before white man come Murray black fellow never come here. Now white man come, Murray black fellow come too. Encounter Bay and Adelaide black fellow no like him. Me want him to go away. Let them sit down at the Murray, not here. This is not his country.

However, even if the Aborigines from the Murray never visited the Adelaide area prior to European contact, they certainly managed to do so from a very early period. There is evidence that the Ngarrindjeri were visiting Adelaide in 1842. The Mt Barker Tribe were also visiting Adelaide from a very early date. By April 1843 the Murray tribe, probably from Moorundie, had already been visiting Adelaide and angering the Encounter Bay tribe who thought of themselves as 'owning' the good things of the city of Adelaide. By this stage the Adelaide people had already lost much of their power. By 1845 the lower Murray Aborigines were being discouraged from coming to Adelaide and rations were being distributed at Wellington, on the Murray River. There is evidence of a route through the Hills in Edward Stephens' reminiscences, and he talks about Aboriginal people from the Bremer River and Murray River passing by his house near Kensington on the Adelaide Plains. This suggests that they were using the Mt Barker road as a route through the Hills to Adelaide. It would seem from the reminiscences of the two women from Aldgate, that it is possible that the Aborigines that they remembered coming from Wellington, on the Murray River, around the turn of the century, were following a route that had been established since at least the earliest days of the colony.

It is very likely that the Aboriginal people who were visiting Grunthal and probably taking the route to Adelaide through Mt. Barker were coming from Manunka Mission, near Mannum on the Murray River. Many of the people from around Wellington spent considerable time at Manunka. The period from 1910 to 1915, when Aboriginal people were travelling through Grunthal coincides well within the period of Manunka's existence. Manunka was also perfectly situated for a trip to Adelaide via the Mt Barker road and Grunthal.

In conclusion, further research with newspaper articles and in particular, with local newspapers and with local council records, needs to be carried out. Also interviews with other old residents of the Adelaide Hills and Aboriginal people should provide more information. In general, the questions that I hope to answer with further research relate to the historical relationships of Aboriginal groups with the Adelaide area, relations with the European community during travels from place to place, and the degree of freedom of movement that sections of a particular Aboriginal group, such as the Ngarrindjeri possessed. Finally, the staging of corroborees for money, like the ones reported at Grunthal, are particularly interesting and it would be valuable to know just how common they were and how significant they were as sources of income to the Aboriginal groups involved.
Notes


3. Ibid. 1, p. 8

4. Interview with Mrs. Walsh, 30/7/82. Notebook in author’s possession.

5. Tape recording of Mrs. E. Gibb, 14/11/86, S.A.Museum Archives.


7. I use ‘Ngarrindjeri’ as the name applied for the Lower Murray River, Lakes and Coorong people. It is the accepted term today.

8. Early Newspaper references i.e. Southern Australian, May 27, 1845, 2e; May 27, 1842, 2c.


10. Tape recording of Mrs. J. Weatherald, 26/5/87, S.A.Museum Archives.

11. Year 5/6, St. Catherine’s School,  Gobstoppers, Aborigines and Sunday School, J 150, 1986.

12. Tape recording of Mr. Harry Hunter, 8/4/83, S.A.Museum Archives.

13. Feather flowers are still made by Ngarrindjeri people today.


‘See note 12.’

21. Tindale is writing a book on the Aborigines of southern South Australia, featuring the life of Clarence Long.

22. ‘See note 1’


24. ‘See note 3’

25. Register, 24/4/1844.

26. Southern Australian, May 27, 1842, 2c.

27. ‘See note 26’

28. Southern Australian, April 7, 1843, 2e.

29. Southern Australian, May 27, 1845, 2e.

30. ‘See note 16’, p. 477

31. N. Cato,  Mr. Maloga, Uni. QLD Press, 1976, p. 338