SUPERINTENDENT KENNY

THE HULL RIVER ABORIGINAL SETTLEMENT

By KEN CAMPBELL

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An abridged version of this story is available on the web page with the same name, *Superintendent Kenny*, AB25.

Cover
Image of South Mission Beach looking to Dunk Island 2021, Ken Campbell.

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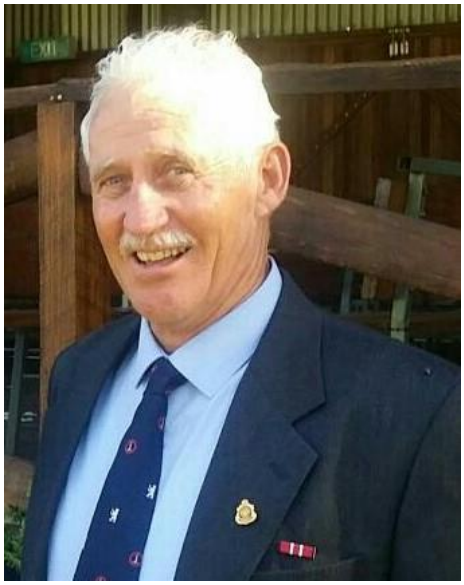
Acknowledgements

The Kenny photos are courtesy of Carmel and Yolande Collins.
Newspaper articles referred to in this paper were sourced from *Trove* and without these the story would have been difficult to piece together.

FOREWORD BY AUTHOR KEN CAMPBELL



I first became interested in our Kenny family history after reading an article in *The Sunday Mail* about cyclones in North Queensland.

A Constable J. M. Kenny was mentioned, and this rang a bell somewhere in a part of my 14 year old brain not taken up by sport and girls. My paternal Aunty, who I was staying with then, told me a little of my mother's family, the Kennys, and my interest grew.

There were very few on our maternal side left then in 1964; our mother, Eugenie Campbell (nee Kenny) had passed away in 1959 followed by our father Ray shortly after, leaving six children to be cared for by two of Dad's sisters. There was also my mother's brother, Uncle Jack (John Martin Collin Kenny), in Sydney NSW who occasionally visited us in Ballina NSW, so I made a point of writing to him and staying with him, his wife and two daughters, our cousins Yolande and Carmel and learned more from them.

It wasn't until 1974, after working on the North Coast of NSW in Construction and Landscaping then later as a Projectionist at the Sydney Opera House, that I found some time to feed this Kenny family curiosity bug. I knew so little of the story, and it was gnawing away at me. After arming myself with the limited information I could extract from family members, I proceeded to visit Registrars (Births, Deaths, and Marriages) and cemeteries (Grafton NSW and Cooktown, QLD.) There were also visits to Cape Bedford Lutheran Mission and Mission Beach where local Peter Wheatley, who had lived on the land just north of the Aboriginal Reserve since 1940, proved very helpful. The Tully library were also encouraging and gave me a 1921 cadastral map of the area that I kept all this time. However, the time restraints of work and my own family by then prevented any completion of the project or publication.

It's only now in retirement and with the assistance of Ken Gray of the Mission Beach Historical Society and Maxine Marsh at the Tully Cassowary Coast Regional Council Library that I have been able to fulfil this quest. Many thanks to all who assisted!

I lost both my parents by the time I was 10, so when I was ready to delve into our ancestry, I could not access their knowledge. This project was largely about researching our family history and making it available to those interested. However, on the journey, it soon became apparent that the role my grandfather had at the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement had broader historical implications. At one stage, the town was to be named *Kenny* after him and eventually the district, town and beach were known as *Mission Beach*. That is, the town, district and beach were named after this settlement in the

mistaken belief that it was a 'mission'. Some newspapers,[1] after the 1918 cyclone, reported the death of *the Rev. Mr. Kenny* … which compounded the mission myth no doubt.

It was evident then, that this institution, while existing only fleetingly, left an indelible mark on the area's place names. Most profound, however, was the mark that this establishment left on First Nations people who were taken there, sometimes by force. I have not been fortunate enough to hear the oral histories of the Djiru people yet know that this settlement would not be remembered fondly by many First Nations people.

They had been ruthlessly dispossessed of their land soon after the invasion by British, Chinese and other foreign settlers. I am no scholar of Aboriginal culture yet now have some inkling of their long and vital connection to their Traditional Lands. They were not only dispossessed, dispersed, and often murdered, they were deprived of their freedom and rights and ultimately taken to Palm Island and wrenched from their land and their culture.

I cannot imagine the pain that created and can only hope that my grandfather's role in leading this government institution did not make their plight even worse than it would otherwise have been.

Written on back: 'Taken down at the beach looking over Dunk Isld showing our sailing boat and motor launch. You can see how calm the sea is. JK'

[1] *The Weather. The Cyclones in the North (by Telegraph*), Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton), 15 March 1918.

FOREWORD BY LEONARD ANDY, DJIRU TRADITIONAL OWNER

I have spoken to several people who had family members incarcerated in the 'Hull River Aboriginal Settlement' and these ancestors told us how they felt about being in that place. It was built on Djiru traditional land, close to the Hull River. Djiru people didn't have a say in that; they were never asked whether or not they wanted that establishment. We didn't have a say about who was brought here either; people from other tribes were taken to the Hull River. It was entirely alien to our culture to be made to live side by side with people from other tribes.

The so called, 'Hull River Mission' was never a mission in a religious way. It was not established to help Aboriginal people; it was a prison camp and 'inmates' were treated like dogs.

Local Aboriginal people and some from far away, who were forcibly removed and transported in chains, were taken to this settlement and had to work hard. Either work or being punished! It was slavery.

Some Traditional Owners came willingly to join family incarcerated at the Hull River settlement.

Many ran away. They were called deserters, were hunted down by the local police, and tracked down by the Native Police and some settlers. They were severely punished or even murdered but they were only ever trying to get back to their traditional lands.

Inside this prison, people stayed within their tribal groups and didn't mix with each other at the 'Mission'. They were mostly fed on flour, sugar and tea and had to look for bush tucker to supplement their diet. Finding any food was harder and harder because of the high number of people living in a small area.

The settlement was wiped out by a severe cyclone in 1918. Many Aboriginal people were injured and lost their lives. Some escaped but most were captured and sent without consultation or consent to a new 'Settlement' at Palm Island, East of Townsville. That was a similar prison. Some were sent to Innisfail.

Being removed from their traditional lands had a terrible impact on Aboriginal people physically and spiritually.

Djiru people were taken to Palm Island after the cyclone and many of them call that place home today.

My father's uncle didn't have any good stories to tell about that place; he used to tell a few stories. He was saying 'if you run away, discipline is a pick handle'. Women that didn't listen and tried to run away or those who were difficult, they made them wear a dress made out of the old rag blankets, except the dress was dusted in fire ash and they shaved their heads. The women had to wear that dress, which was going right down to their ankles, for so many days or over a week, in the heat. These were some of the punishments dished out to the people held in the prison.

If you run away and you got caught, you were brought back and bashed. If you were running away twice, you were lucky to be brought back. He said some men were cut so they couldn't run, cut at the back of their leg so they couldn't move. He said some people still tried to get away. If it happened a third time, they didn't bring you back. They sent people out not to bring you back, but to shoot you, well murder you. And it wasn't just a gun, they used tomahawk and a saddle strap - the belt that goes underneath the horse belly. They snapped their necks with that. They put it around their neck, made them kneel, put their foot on their back and give a quick jerk and broke their neck.

My father's uncle said that is what they did to the old people in his group. When they captured them, they brought them down here – they were up on the Tully River – but they killed all the old, old people. They only brought the younger people, the young adults that could walk and work. That's why he told me nobody ever asked him if he wanted to be an Australian. And he said he could never be one because he saw what they did.

He was told he was born near the Tully River, where the old Tully bridge is, but that was before the bridge was built. He said, in the early days when he was little, he saw '*yarda man gunna*', horse shit, and he remembered seeing his first white man. The Old people told him to stay away from the horse shit, it was poison, not good – 'don't go near it'.

Old people don't have any good memories or stories about that place. Many Old people wouldn't talk about the past and a lot wouldn't even come down here to Mission Beach. Some of the Old people I knew, they'd come down for a short visit but they don't want to come back here.

Other Aboriginals in the area know about the place and they talk about it. Some of the older guys I spoke to said that Mission Beach is where the Djiru got 'smashed'. They come from groups that had as little as 50 survivors. But it was not only Djiru who were 'smashed', our next door neighbours Gulnay were too.

My next door neighbour (he is not Djiru) used to live at South Mission Beach. He said when he was young, his father took him down to the top memorial and not far away the blocks of concrete were still there with the rings, where they used to chain the Aboriginals up.

Old people never even said Kenny's name. He might have been the superintendent but he would have had underlings, other people there to help. With that many Aboriginals there, you need to control them.

The Native Police were in Cardwell and they did rounds; they used to go to Kirrama Station. Old people showed us the rotted log - well rotted now, big log but rotted - at Kirrama, not far from the homestead. All the locals used to have picnics and get together, bring the 'undesirables' and chained them to that log. The Native Police would do the rounds on the picnics, collect the 'unwanted' ones - the troublemakers - and chain them to that log. They played cricket and all sorts of sports and the Native Police would go around, do the rounds, go to those picnics, pick people up and take them to the coast.

At the 'Mission', Aboriginal people came from all over the place. For our people it was an extremely sad place and always will be.

FORWORD BY EDITOR KEN GRAY

It's taken 58 years to complete this project and I only became involved a few months from its end.

Late in 2021, Juanita Jones, the history guru of the Cassowary Coast Library in Innisfail emailed Mission Beach Historical Society saying she had an enquiry from a grandson of the late John Kenny, Superintendent of the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement about the location of the grave sites for John and Kathleen Kenny who were killed in the 1918 cyclone. I knew that regional historian, Dorothy Jones said they were buried at their home site on the hill but thought I should check with a couple of the long-term residents who usually know these things.

These locals said that Jones was in error and assured me that the grave sites were unmarked and near the beach in what is now a camping ground, and the Aboriginals who died in the storm were buried close by. I fed that news back to Juanita and gave it no further thought. About a month later, the person seeking the information contacted Librarian, Maxine Marsh, of the Cassowary Coast Library at Tully and Maxine referred him to me.

We arranged to meet, and I was blown away. Ken Campbell from Coolangatta had been mulling this story over and looking for information since he was 14 years old. That is true persistence. By the time we met he had uncovered compelling evidence (formal letters) confirming that the graves were indeed where Dorothy Jones said they were, not down at the beach where the Aboriginal graves were.

Our Society only formed in November 2020 and we had not yet started to research this vital part of the district's history. It is important in many ways because the 'mission,' as it had been mistakenly called, was the origin of our town and beach names. Further, we have yet to publish a history of the Djiru people who lived here for eons before Europeans arrived, and this Settlement forms a critical element of their story.

Ken Campbell had with him a written draft of his story as well as several images of the Settlement and its people. While writing other histories I had read much of the 'mission' but had missed one important part of the story. All that I had seen on the Kenny's and the Hull Settlement spoke of Mr. and Mrs. Kenny and their daughter Kathleen and very little of the other Kenny children. I had no recollection of reading that Elizabeth Kenny was pregnant at the time, only that she was severely injured and had to be taken to hospital in Townsville.

Ken said that he was the one of six children of Eugenie Campbell (nee Kenny) who was the daughter of John and Elizabeth Kenny born five months after the tragedy. Subsequently, I saw that a short and well researched history on the website of the *Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation* (C4) did mention that Elizabeth was pregnant. I had scanned this but missed that important detail.

Neither Ken Campbell nor Ken Gray are trained historians. And we are certainly not well versed in the history of the First Nations people, but we both understood that this history is intertwined with the history of the Aboriginal people of North Queensland. I had started reading Djiru history and capturing data to help those who will ultimately write that history for our Society. And to prepare myself in that endeavour, I found an amazing book, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point* by Mark McKenna[2]

[2] Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfella's Point*, UNSW Press, 2002 (2014 edition).

and was deeply impressed with this author's approach to writing a history of place (in Eden Monaro, NSW). McKenna in his introduction,[3] said, *The struggle of each community* [in Australia] *to come to terms with the past mirrors the national struggle*. That made much sense to me and I was finding the North Queensland history of Aboriginal dispossession extremely confronting. Mark went on to quote from Inga Clendinnen saying, *In her 1999 Boyer Lectures, True Stories. Inga Clendinnen*[4] *pleaded for a different kind of history*:

> *We need history: not 'black armband' history and not triumphalist white-out history either, but good history, true stories of the making of this present land, none of them simple, some of them painful, all of them part of our own individual histories.*

I could easily relate to that and had always believed that history must be written with integrity, and while we all have lenses that add bias, often unconsciously, we must strive to tell things as they really were. Ken and I discussed that tenet and agreed heartily that it should be our aim with this project.

The story is largely derived from European writing and it lacks the full voice of the First Nations people, yet Ken Campbell was always happy that the Society would at some stage find ways to hear and include oral histories of the Djiru people and other inmates of the Settlement. Traditional Owner, Leonard Andy's Foreword adds some valuable insights on how the place was seen by its inmates.

View of coast looking south from the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement circa 1915. Written on back: *This is down on the beach, our motor launch laying on the beach, Tam O'Shanter Point in the distance. Isn't it a pretty view?* JK.

When working with Ken Campbell on this history, I found him genuinely eager to uncover the full and true story and saw no sign that he wished to apply rose-tinted glasses. After immersing myself in it as an editor must and searching for every trace of evidence possible, I was left with a strong impression that John Kenny was an incredibly skilled and decent human being who did his level best to run the Hull Settlement as most fair minded people would hope he could. It is difficult to comprehend that he died in a cyclone after surviving the worst ever Queensland cyclone on the very same calendar day in 1899.

Mission Beach did not end up being named *Kenny Beach* as was planned, yet we could have been very proud if that name did endure.

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[3] Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfella's Point*, UNSW Press, 2002 (2014 edition, p. 7.

[4] Inga Clendinnen, *True Stories and what we make of them*, in Michelle Grattan (ed.) *Essays on Australian Reconciliation*, Bookman Press, Melbourne, 2000, p. 253.

JOHN KENNY SENIOR

Born in Ballina in the County of Tipperary, Ireland in 1840 to farmers Patrick and Sarah Kenny (nee O'Brien), John Kenny emigrated to Australia in 1863 landing in Sydney after three months at sea. There was good land to be had cheaply near Grafton, NSW at the time, so he probably boarded a coastal trader taking supplies and passengers up to the Clarence River. These small freighters would return with local red cedar, other timber, and produce for Sydney merchants and export.

County map of Ireland

Having an education in Engineering, John worked initially as a Road Contractor between Grafton and Maclean. While working in Ulmarra, John met Catherine Brown who was working as domestic help on a large farming property. They were married in Maclean at a hotel on 7 February 1871. The Kennys then bought 83 acres of land at nearby Upper Coldstream, cleared the scrub, and stocked it with cattle.

On 11 December the same year, Catherine, 29 was attended by a mid-wife and gave birth to a healthy son christened John Martin. Two years later in 1873, a sister to young John was born, Sarah. Tragically, Catherine was drowned after significant rain and flooding around the area in February 1879. The children were only 6 and 8 years old. The family worked the property until John Senior was no longer able to manage the farm and had to move into town, purchasing a house in Victoria Street Grafton.

Apart from a short period with her brother in North Queensland, Sarah was the sole carer for her father for two years until his death in October 1901 aged 61. By then Sarah was 27, single, and she remained in Grafton preferring the climate there more than where her brother was stationed.[5]

[5] NSW and QLD Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

JOHN MARTIN KENNY: EARLY DAYS

Young John remained at the Ulmarra family farm until early adulthood earning himself a good reputation: as a horseman, handy in the bush, and with the many other skills required to run a large cattle property in the late 1800s.

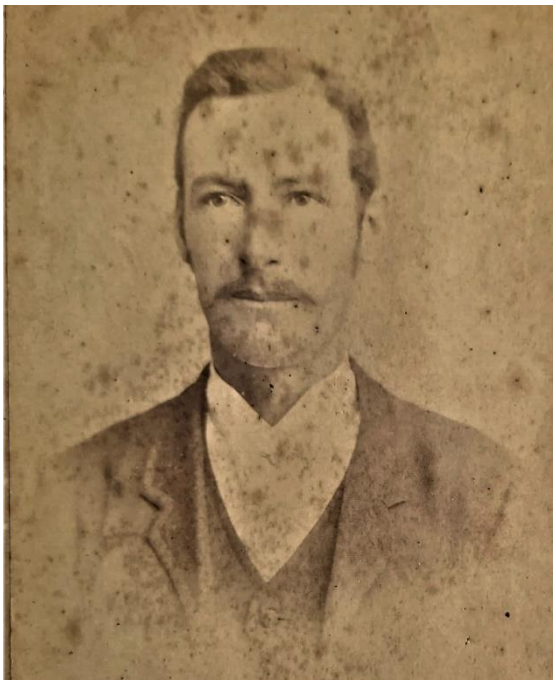

Image of J. M. Kenny (Sydney NSW circa 1890).

In 1895, he gained a position in Toowoomba as a Clerk and Collections Officer at The Downs Mercantile Agency in Margaret Street, where he remained until applying to join the Queensland Police Force. A strong swimmer and rower, he also joined a local Gymnastic & Athletics Club. In his application to join the Queensland Police, written on 3 August 1896, he asked for and was provided with good character references from his Toowoomba contacts (W. Boyce Solicitor, his employer E. Sims), and from the President of the Gymnastics & Athletics Club, also from his hometown in Ulmarra NSW (Storekeeper J. Retallick and Postmaster J. McCallum JP.)[6]

CONSTABLE J. M. KENNY

John Kenny was sworn in as a Constable in the Queensland Police Force on 24 December 1896, aged 24. After basic training and outfitting he shipped out to Cooktown on the 23rd of January the next year. Later that year, he was transferred west to Highbury on Cape York, manning the Station for six months and gaining valuable experience working with the Native Mounted Police, learning the different languages and habits of the local Indigenous groups.[7]

His next posting was to Eight Mile Police Station (north of Cooktown near Cape Bedford) on 18 April 1898, where he was made the Officer-in-Charge. Meanwhile back in NSW, John Kenny Senior, now aged 58, was having serious health problems and almost blind. John Snr. and his daughter Sarah

[6] Queensland State Archives, Police Staff Files (AF Files.)
[7] Queensland State Archives, Police Staff Files (AF Files.)

moved up to the Eight Mile Police Station in 1898 staying with Constable Kenny and his children at the Station.

Map Cooktown and Cape York, courtesy *Google My Maps* accessed January 2022.

John Kenny Senior's health did not improve in the North and he was admitted to Cooktown Hospital in June 1899 with a stomach complaint. He remained there for six days. The father's ill-health and Sarah's low tolerance for the North Queensland climate eventually forced them both back to live in Grafton, NSW. Constable Kenny had to make several trips south to sort out the sale and acquisition of family property issues during 1898/99, travelling by a combination of horseback and coastal steamer.[8]

Cape Bedford Mission circa 1909. *Handwritten on reverse View from the beach with Curry's and our houses in front*, JK.

[8] Queensland State Archives, Police Staff Files (AF Files.)

Police patrols in far north Queensland at the time covered enormous areas and dealt with all sorts of strife created by man-made and natural disasters. This was only possible with help of the local Native Troopers/Trackers who knew the languages and the country they patrolled. As well as trying to keep the peace, the Police had to be good bushmen, competent horsemen, and know some of the local languages and customs.

In late February 1899, Constable Kenny was tasked to apprehend a South Sea Islander who had deserted from the northern pearling fleet and who could have witnessed a murder around the Barrow Point area, on the Cape York eastern coast. The sailor may have moved on to the Starcke River goldfields, but initially they searched the coastal areas.

The Constable was searching on horseback with four Indigenous Troopers for the potential witness in the area near Princess Charlotte Bay, when a cyclone neared the coast on 4 March 1899. They were among the few to survive the next 48 hours. Despite being a kilometre inland and camped on a 14 metre high ridge, the tidal surge roared through the camp in the pre-dawn twilight. The waves reached as far as five kilometres in land, leaving them struggling in waist deep water and drowning two Troopers plus losing several horses who were killed after being struck by flying timber.[9] This was the category 5 Cyclone *Mahina* which is now known to be the deadliest and most severe cyclone recorded in the European history of Australia.

Unknown to Constable Kenny and his four Native Troopers, as they rode off with their pack horses loaded with patrol equipment on the morning of 28th February, they were on a collision course with disaster. The cyclone swept across the Coral Sea through Bathurst Bay, wreaking havoc between Coen and Laura before crossing Cape York to almost dissipate around Burketown on the 10 March, then reforming and heading back to the East coast. At anchor in the Bay and also just across to the West in Princess Charlotte Bay was a pearling fleet of over 82 vessels all sheltering from the constant southerly winds.

The larger ships, usually schooners, each ran a small flotilla of 6 to 18 luggers, all skippered by a diver and manned by up to eight native crew. All the mother-of-pearl shells were processed on the decks of the schooners by their crew of around 18. In the shallower waters, independent rigs worked alone around the Great Barrier Reef islands. On board the ships were around 350 men, women, and some of the children of the Pacific Islander, Japanese, and European crews.

Late on that black Saturday night, the wind increased significantly, the sky was heavily overcast with a lot of lightning cracking and occasionally, for mere seconds, it would illuminate the fleet. Early on Sunday morning, the wind now reached speeds of more than 100 knots (185 kph). In the wheelhouse of one of the schooners, *Crest of the Wave*, the barometer dropped to 914hPa. For comparison: Cyclone *Yasi* was down to 929hPa and some historians say *Mahina* may have dropped below 900hPa at its peak. The 1918 *Innisfail* cyclone got down to 926hPa.

As *Mahina's* eye passed over the ships around 4:30am Sunday, there was a momentary calm for 15 minutes until the wind came back with a vengeance from the north-west. Wild seas swept decks clear of rigging and many crew members were swept overboard, most to their deaths.

[9] Hector Holthouse, *Cyclone*, Rigby (Adelaide) 1971, p. 13.

There were many acts of bravery and some remarkable swims in the dark and treacherous seas. A young woman, Muara Lifu, was washed overboard and set out to swim four km across Princess Charlotte Bay. While battling to make headway and blinded by the lashing rain, she was struck by the wreckage of a lugger. She swam on though, finding two floundering men and supporting them throughout the desperate swim for their lives. They all eventually made the shore after five hours of exhaustive struggle. She was later awarded a Gold Medal by the Royal Humane Society.

A few, like Muara Lifu, survived with some incredible feats of endurance against howling winds and spray in mountainous seas, only to make landfall on a desolate coastline.

Meanwhile, Constable Kenny's patrol on their search for the escapee who had reached the coast about 30 km south of Bathurst Bay at Barrow Point. Apart from light rain, there was yet no indication of a cyclone. Kenny's report of the events makes for an interesting read:[10]

> Left the Eight Mile on the 28th February, with four native troopers and 10 horses. Proceeded to the Munburra goldfield, on the Starke River, and then struck to the coast and went searching for the mate of a South Sea Islander. The two Islanders had landed a dinghy near Barrow Point and the blacks had speared one of them. The other escaped and reached Munburra in an exhausted state.
>
> I reached Barrow Point on Saturday the 4th March and camped about 6pm on a ridge fully 40ft above sea level, and about half a mile from the beach, with a scrub and high sand ridge between the camp and the beach. A light southeast breeze was prevailing with drizzling rain.
>
> About half past eleven pm it came on to blow very stiff from the south-south-east, increasing every minute. At 12 midnight the troopers tent was carried away and they came into my tent; and about 10 minutes after this, it was demolished by a limb falling right across it, and smashing through my hammock, as the rain was pouring on it and caused a tent peg pulling up. When the tent collapsed, all hands made for the biggest open space near, guided by very rapid lightning which occurred at intervals. Here it was necessary to cover up face and hands in a blanket to keep off the pelting rain, which seemed to hit as hard as hail.
>
> About 2am the wind veered a couple of points and blew with hurricane force. At 5am it shifted to the north east, and blew harder than ever with torrents of rain. Shortly after the wind shifted to the north east, with a roar, an immense tidal wave swept inshore and reached waist deep on the ridge with the camp on it, completing our misery and spoiling my watch. Here the wave stretched two to three miles inland.
>
> Judging by the appearance of the sun, it was not properly daylight till about 10am on Sunday Morning the 5th March. Spent Sunday looking round and picking up fragments of camping gear and putting same in a place of safety as I found was impossible to travel with the horses on account of the rivers. On mustering the horses four were found to have been killed by trees.

[10] *Cyclone 'Mahina' Bathurst Bay March 1899, Australia's Worst Natural Disaster, A Centennial Memorial*, Queensland State Emergency Services, 1999, pp. 5–7.

> On Monday morning a start was made for Munburra on foot. Saw no boats and very little wreckage but saw a dinghy on the beach. Dead fish were piled up, including porpoises, sharks, dugong, sea-snakes and also sea birds, land birds and wallabies. When these animals and fish began to decay, the stench was pretty considerable.
>
> Reached Munburra on Friday, 10th March, having only native tucker (including yams, wallabies, iguana, carpet snake and sugar-bag) for four days. Horses were procured at Munburra and Eight Mile was reached on Monday the 13th March after an experience I would not like to repeat. The force of the wind was so terrific that the trees had leaves, twigs, branches and bark stripped clean off, and the country presents a brown and desolate appearance.
>
> On Monday we had to swim 13 rivers, creeks and gullies, next day 6, next 2 and the next 4, swims which in themselves were a pretty tidy day's work.

Further north on Sunday morning when the cyclone was still at its worst, Aborigines from a camp at Cape Melville (the southern point of Bathurst Bay) were helping exhausted pearling crews ashore. The back surge of the wave that smashed it's way inland caught many unawares, resulting in an estimated 100 being swept further out to sea and drowned.

The local tribes had not only lost family members but also their few possessions including spears, canoes, and axes. With the loss of so much vegetation, in some places even the grass had been blown out of the ground, there were few native animals left to hunt and nothing to hunt them with.

The Queensland Government and inhabitants of the far north very much appreciated the efforts of the Aboriginal people in rescuing and caring for the shipwrecked survivors as well as their care for the deceased. This resulted in shipments of clothing, flour, tomahawks, tobacco and pipes, and knives being delivered to help them through the next few months, averting further loss of lives.

The toll of Cyclone *Mahina* was over 100 vessels sunk and 307 known lives lost.

Large group on fallen timber. Cape Bedford Mission circa 1909.

Policing in the northern frontier also involved adjudicating disputes between the white farmers and the Indigenous settlements. Some whites treated their Indigenous employees very badly. Constable Kenny had to remove a young women from a Mr. Wallace's property and place her in the care of the nearby Hopevale Mission. These orders came from the Northern Division Chief Protector Roth. The same Charles Wallace had previously whipped a male employee, and he was also illegally running his cattle on the Mission grounds.

Constable Kenny, through his hospital visits to check on his father and others, had known Nurse Mary Alwood for some time and they were married in Cooktown 10 May 1899. A son Martin John Collin, known as Jack, was born the following year and in December 1902 a daughter, Kathleen Yolande, was also born at the same hospital.[11]

Cooktown in the peak of the Palmer River gold rush in the mid-1870s was the second largest city in Queensland after Brisbane and an important port. It was considerably reduced by 1900 yet remained a bustling town and was the local administrative centre for the State's northern Government departments. The government agencies provided for the Police patrols into Cape York Peninsula and the administration concerning the significant amounts of gold, tin, and other minerals moving through this port. There were also large numbers of travellers and adventurers who passed through this major shipping venue with supplies for the goldfields and young settlements.

Wedding J. M. Kenny and Mary Alwood, 10 May 1899 Cooktown. Front marked *H. Staines the well-known lightning photographer*.

The next few years saw a very busy period in the Kenny family. Apart from the birth of children, there was the death of John Senior in Grafton, leave of absences to sort his estate, and a hospital trip to Brisbane with a foot injury. As the Station at Eight Mile was closing down, there was a transfer of John and his young family to Coen Police Station and a promotion to Constable First Class on 12 September 1904.

There was dispute in the Police Department about the amount charged for the freight of the family's belongings to the new posting at Coen. After arriving by ship at Cooktown the furniture and

[11] NSW and QLD Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

belongings had to be freighted by horse-drawn dray. Finding suitable horses proved difficult, as it was over 80 kilometres overland on rough tracks with around 30 kilometres of hilly country.

It was difficult to be reimbursed for these significant expenses from Police Headquarters in Brisbane. As well as these problems, Mary's health was beginning to deteriorate.[12] Needing a more settled life and with an offer of better pay, he resigned from the Police Force in October 1905 and took up the Chief Engineer's position at the nearby *Great Northern Gold Mine*. The mine was still producing over 2000 ounces of gold in 1907and employed 20 men, despite the occasional flood damage from heavy rain. One of the advantages of mining was working underground in summer, avoiding the 40ºC temperatures.[13]

Constable J. M. Kenny, Mrs Mary Kenny, son Martin commonly known as Jack, Cooktown circa 1903.

Mary passed away in 1906, leaving John Kenny with two young children to care for.

Although no longer with the Police Force, John was still a much sought-after and knowledgeable local identity. He was fluent in several Aboriginal languages, was accepted by them to an extent, and knew the Cape York country well. July 1907 saw John and Sgt. Whiteford, his previous boss from the Coen Police Station who had bought along extra horses, travel through the scrub to meet up with Richard Howard (Chief Protector of Aboriginals). They met up on the prearranged date, 25 July to explore the area north-west of Cape Bedford, around Lockhart River/Iron Range for its suitability as an Aboriginal settlement. The next day the party explored the coast to the South, finding Moreton Bay Ash (Bloodwood) forests and sandy soil. It was agreed it was a suitable site. Howard caught the government ketch, *Melbidier* back to Cooktown and the Police party travelled back overland to Coen. It was a tough trip in mostly unfamiliar country with occasionally hostile Indigenous inhabitants to deal with.[14]

[12] Queensland State Archives, Police Staff Files (AF Files.)
[13] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918. (1907).
[14] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918. (1907).

HOW THE SETTLEMENTS STARTED

The creation of settlements such as The Hull River Aboriginal Settlement were controversial, even when they started. It is no surprise that Governments never considered consulting with the First Nations people to understand what options suited them best. They did not even consult with the settlers it seems, but settlers had a vote and the First Nations people did not. There is a need to look at the thinking and events of the time to gain some inkling of why these settlements came into being and what the government's aims were.

The second half of the 1800s saw a period of enormous growth and mineral discoveries in Australia. The European population tripled in 10 years from 437,665 in 1851 to well over a million in 1861. The state of Queensland separated from NSW in 1859 and the goldfields now extended from central NSW north into Queensland where Charters Towers and the Palmer River became the homes to adventurers and fortune seekers. Chinese-born immigrants were in large numbers around the goldfields which caused racial tensions. There were also problems with opium, especially among the Aboriginal populations, where it was used by Chinese fruit farmers as payment for labour. That was particularly evident in the Tully River valley area.

Both the Queensland Police Commissioner, William Parry-Okeden, and the Northern Protector of Aborigines, Walter Roth, recommended in writing that the State Government could achieve a 'better deal for the aborigine'. In 1894, Archibald Meston was commissioned by Horace Tozer, Colonial Secretary in the Nelson ministry of the Queensland government, to prepare plans for improving the conditions for Queensland Aboriginals.[15] Many of his proposals were embodied in the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* of 1897. Meston was not without his own controversies and while he advocated for them on one hand, according to his Australian Biography, he also exploited them for personal gain:[16]

> *From the 1880s Meston had taken an interest in the culture, languages, and welfare of Aboriginal people, and by 1891 he was promoting himself as an expert in their ethnology. Although sharing many of the racist assumptions of his time, he challenged prevailing social Darwinist views and argued that Aboriginal people were physically superior and intellectually equal or superior to whites. His reports to Tozer provided evidence of atrocities being committed against them in the State's north, including murder, rape, kidnapping, and effective enslavement. Meston's humanitarianism, however, coexisted with exploitative and paternalistic conduct. Having used Aboriginal people as live exhibits in ethnological lectures from 1891, he sought to profit from a travelling show, `Meston's Wild Australia' (1892–93), featuring a troupe of men, women, and a child; the group appeared in tableaux vivants and performances illustrating traditional life and frontier violence.*

The Act was assented to on 15 December 1897 and it established six large, self-sufficient, closed reserves and 10 small ones. This legislation was much more restrictive than those in Victoria and New South Wales, implementing a system of tight controls. Segregation was strictly enforced by police

[15] S. E. Stevens, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, *Meston, Archibald (1880-1924)*, accessed December 2021 at https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/meston-archibald-4191
[16] S. E. Stephens, *Meston, Archibald (1851 – 1924), Australian Dictionary of Biographies*, Volume 5, 1974, accessed March 2022 at: https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/meston-archibald-4191

'protectors'. *It shall not be lawful*, the Act decreed, *for any person other than an Aboriginal, not being a Superintendent or a person acting under his direction, and not being a person authorised under the Regulations, to enter or remain or be within the limits of a reserve upon which aboriginals are residing*.[17] These policies are still in force to some extent today.

Dorothy Jones in her regional history book, *Cardwell Shire Story*, goes to some length trying to explain the motivations for setting up the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement:[18]

> *Arising in part from the influx of the Chinese to the Tully River was the decision of the Government to establish a mission for the control of Aborigines of the Cardwell Shire. Although it was illegal for Chinese to employ Aboriginal labour, segregation of the two races was impossible while the Aborigines roamed at will. The Chinaman found that his opium was the most acceptable bribe to procure illegal labour and various services from the natives. Opium addiction among Aborigines became a serious problem, and worse still, they were only supplied with the poisonous opium charcoal or 'unchee' after the Chinaman had his fill. For opium pipes the blackfellow used old glass bottles with a hole drilled in the bottom.*
>
> *Other factors influencing a decision for a mission were the spread of settlement, continued complaints of thieving, infection with the various social diseases and complaints from some areas that certain people held a monopoly over black labour to the detriment of other settlers. From the latter reason at least the settlers felt that the Mission arose out of what they considered petty blackmail. It was not a wholly popular decision which produced a great deal of inconvenience to settlers wishing to employ Aboriginal labour and as far as the Aboriginal himself was concerned much could be marked in the debit account.*
>
> *However it was the best means at hand to deal with the problem of the Aboriginal and it would have been hard to offer a substitute suggestion at that time. The mission finally broke up the tribes.*

Jones uses language typical of the year, 1961 which is offensive to modern day readers; I capitalised some words but left the text largely as she had it. In hindsight, it is not difficult to think of alternative solutions. The focus was on opium poisoning and addiction, but these were impacts caused by the greater problems of Aboriginal dispossession and all that followed it. She goes on to discuss how the settlement started which adds insights on how the Government was thinking (or not thinking):

> *At first the local Aborigines dreaded it, but by the end of the year [1914] Kenny reported that forty-one had 'joined' of whom ten had been signed on at regular work. Not all were voluntary recruits as settlers can remember natives handcuffed and chained to be driven to the mission which seems to have been also a penal settlement.*

Dorothy Jones' version of events was largely confirmed by later testimony from Cardwell. On a tour of North Queensland around 1940, author Jean Devanny interviewed *the oldest identity in Cardwell* who said:[19]

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[17] Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier*. Boolarong Press, 2nd Edition, 2017, p. 217.
[18] Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, The Jacaranda Press (Brisbane), 1961, pp. 304 – 311.
[19] Jean Devanny, *By Tropic Sea and Jungle*, Angus and Robertson, 1944, p. 20.

> *I remember … when there were half a dozen tribes of aborigines in this area. Some lived in the hills but most of them stuck to the coastal flats. It was the influx of Chinese that wiped them out. The Chinese grew bananas on the Tully River and employed [Aboriginal people] almost entirely. They paid them a small wage and got it back by selling opium to them after they themselves had smoked it. This, together with venereal disease and influenza, wiped them out by the hundred. The poor devils would soak the opium charcoal in hot water and drink it.*

As a result, the now opium-addicted locals were a ready source of cheap labour. Naturally European farmers complained officially that they couldn't hold their workers with only payments of food, clothing, and utensils; and that the Chinese had an unfair advantage.

The C4[20] (*Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation*) website account explains how Aboriginal people were taken into the Reserves:

> *Many Aboriginal people of the district had a great fear of being removed to the settlement, some hiding in the rainforested mountains for months to avoid being taken there. Most removals were forced and arrests were affected by the police. For example, in May 1915 near Cardwell, the mounted police surrounded a camp and took the people to the lock up in Cardwell and from the by launch to the Hull. A few people did go voluntarily, to join family who had been taken there, but deserting was also common.*

That account is in line with current day evidence from Djiru people who say that there are many Djiru living in nearby towns such as Tully and Innisfail, so not all Djiru people ended up in the transfer of the Hull River settlement to Palm Island in July 1918.[21]

Some idea of how the farmers in the district viewed the legislation is found in settler correspondence to the press. The largest employers of Aboriginal labour in the Clump Point District in the period between when the Aboriginal Protection Act was enacted (1897) and when the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement was established (1914) were the Cuttens at *Bicton* in Bingil Bay. Len Cutten wrote to the newspapers often and had strong views on Aboriginal labour. He undoubtedly shared many of the racist assumptions of the time and was focused essentially on the success of his farming ventures, yet he also had some empathy for the First Nations people and their rights. In 1901 he wrote:[22]

> *I have had the pleasure during the past 15 years of seeing a good many young men and women grow up in the tribe located here, largely at our expense, the women to become prostitutes for the Chinamen, and Kanakas, and others, the men to become workers for others, after being taught how to become useful workers by us. It is altogether an unreasonable and ridiculous method of dealing with the [Aboriginal]….*
>
> *The situation would be greatly altered, and much better, if the Colonial Secretary were to instruct the police magistrates to treat the [Aboriginal] in every respect as a white man in regard to agreements made with them, always satisfying himself that they understood the*

[20] C4 website, *Hull River Aboriginal Settlement*, accessed December 2021 at https://www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au/indigenous-history.html.
[21] Conversation with Djiru Elder, Leonard Andy, 2021, Ken Gray, Mission Beach Historical Society.
[22] Leonard Cutten, *The Case of the Aboriginal, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 17 August 1901.

> *nature of an agreement with an employer, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they thoroughly do. Added to this it would be easy for the Aboriginal Protector [Dr. Roth] to arrange that those employing the men of a tribe should look after the welfare of those too old or too young in the tribe to be useful workers. This ought really to fall within the scope of the present existing Act. Leonard M. Cutten, Bicton, Clump Point, 30th July.*

There were vastly differing opinions on how the government should act. Len Cutten wrote again in 1904 confirming that the opium was an immense problem yet declaring the 'Aboriginals "Protection" Act' to be ineffective:[23]

> *Sir, Will you permit me to draw the attention of the public generally and the Home Secretary in particular to the shocking methods of administration – or want of administration – of the Aboriginals Protection Act in this district. Well might the blacks exclaim, "I have forty protectors, and no one to protect me." It is a fact that from Cardwell to Cairns it is as easy to obtain opium as it is to purchase a stick of tobacco. The natural result is that the blacks are being rapidly done to death. That is no sentimental grievance, witness the fact that three old men lately died in this camp from opium poisoning in one week, the week before Christmas. Three younger men were at the same time lying deadly sick in the camp from the same cause.*

Len Cutten wrote to the press on the subject many times, emphasising the failings of the police and the state government in enforcing the law. The police responded in kind when Galbraith, the Townsville Inspector of Police, asked his people for comments from locals in the Clump Point area then read a damning report in Parliament, claiming that the police upheld the Act well in Tully but that Mr. Cutten (a JP) was paying his 20 Aboriginal workers in rum and allowing his employees to live with two 10-year-old Aboriginal girls.[24] By 1905, the Cuttens reported that they were struggling to pick the coffee crop as their Aboriginal labourers were enticed to the Tully River by the opium[25]. The coffee plantation had employed up to 30 Aboriginal workers at its peak[26] (some say up to 70).

To put the whole thing in context, the First Nations people of the Clump Point area, known as Djiru, had their population decimated with the, often violent, displacement by Europeans and Asians. The invasion caused massively adverse outcomes on all levels for Aboriginal people across the continent. The devastation was similar here to elsewhere in Australia and possibly the State Police had more of a hand in the violence (murders, dispersals, camp burnings etc) in North Queensland than elsewhere.

By 1917, only around 90 of the original estimated 450 population of Djiru people remained.[27] In 2021, Djiru Elders estimate that only 11 of their people lived on their Traditional Lands.

[23] Leonard Cutten, *Aboriginals "Protection" Act, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 27 February 1904.
[24] *The Worker* (Wagga), *Treatment of Blacks*, 27 October 1910.
[25] *The Evening Telegraph* (Cairns) 5 August 1905.
[26] *Aboriginals Protection Act, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 27 February 1904.
[27] Unpublished estimates from research papers accessed by Ken Gray, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2021.

SUPERINTENDENT KENNY 'MISSION' BEACH

As well as the Government Settlements, which were not religious establishments, there were several Church-run Missions in North Queensland. A Lutheran missionary, George Schwartz from Hessen in Germany, established one with his wife in 1887 at Cape Bedford (not far from the Eight Mile township) and remained there for over 50 years. With the help of the local Aboriginal people, they planted coconuts, banana, and pineapple and in 1907, sisal hemp (for rope) was tried successfully. Thresher machinery was required to prepare this product for market so equipment had to be shipped in, set up, and operated.

George Schwartz and John Kenny knew each other well and John took up George's offer to be the Assistant Superintendent at the Hopevale Mission. This was a much better option than living in the mining camp with two young children. John Kenny, with his knowledge of the culture and languages of the local people and his engineering skills, was a good fit. The concrete base that he laid for the sisal thresher was still there over 100 years later.

In 1910 Schwartz reported, *The staff of the station had no change during the year; it still consists of myself, my able assistant Mr Kenny, and Mrs Schwartz in charge of the school to which she was appointed by the Government in May 1900*. John Kenny also managed one of the outlying Lutheran Mission stations at McIvor River during his stay.[28]

It was during 1910 that John convinced Elizabeth Daley, from Ulmarra NSW, not far from where he spent his earlier years, to come up and join him in northern Queensland. They were married at Cooktown in the same year. Elizabeth became the stepmother to young Martin (called Jack) aged 9, and Yolande Kathleen aged 7. A son named Victor Joseph was born the next year.

The family remained at the Cape Bedford Mission until 1914 and the outbreak of the First World War, when George Schwartz was interned because of his German birth.

Cape Bedford Mission? Circa 1909, Yolande Kathleen Kenny right side aged 7 years

[28] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918. (1910).

Acting on information from Cardwell and Innisfail Police, the Queensland government had gazetted and set aside a Reserve for the protection of the Djiru people. This was shown on a cadastral map (18 May 1921) as R.211 *Reserve for the use of the Aboriginal inhabs of the state*. The Hull River Aboriginal Settlement land as it was to known, ran from the foothills of Mt Douglas east to the coast, bordered north by George Webb's banana and coconut plantation (Lot 115), and ran south down to Porters land on the Hull (Lots 483 D etc, ie that was before they relocated to Lots 1-4v on the Shire boundary.)

Cadastral map of Clump Point district 18 May 1921 with shaded area being the Aboriginal Reserve land that was used for the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement. Map provided by Tully Library; Cardwell Shire Council 1974.

The reserve covered was over 2,900 acres (1177 hectares) and that was later increased to 3,259 acres[29]

In 1912, Richard Howard, the then Queensland Chief Protector of Aboriginals, in the company of Mr. E. J. Banfield of Dunk Island, and Captain Smith of the ketch, *Melbidier*, explored the area. Howard reported,[30]

> *I landed about two miles to the northward of Tam O'Shanter Point, in close proximity to the spot where the unfortunate explorer, Kennedy, landed many years since. Striking a course almost due west, after a walk of about five miles through a good deal of devil-devil country, often for over a mile up to our waists in water, and in pouring rain, we arrived at the Hull River, and an opportunity was given me to see the land and satisfy myself it was above flood*

[29] *Daily Standard* (Brisbane) 27 November 1914.
[30] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918. (1912 and 1914).

> *level. The reserve is admirably adapted for a settlement, with patches of rich scrub, suitable for agricultural purposes, and areas of open forest for grazing.*

Early in 1914, the Queensland government decided to go ahead with this settlement.

Before that, in January 1913, John Kenny, hearing about the planned Hull River colony, wrote to Richard Howard, Chief Protector of Aboriginals and Queensland Minister responsible for Aboriginal issues. John proposed that he be considered as the Superintendent of this endeavour. Shortly after receiving the application, Howard wrote to The Under Secretary Home Department:

> *I may say I have known Mr Kenny for some years, and consider he is eminently fitted for the position, besides having years of experience amongst the natives, he speaks their language, and is an Engineer by profession, an excellent bushman and horseman, and can handle an ordinary lugger. Mr Kenny has for some time been employed at Cape Bedford Mission Station and has often taken charge of the place during Mr Schwartz's absence.*[31]

Yolande Kathleen Kenny with her father, John circa 1914 (Coraki NSW?)

John was officially appointed Superintendent of the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement on 7 February 1914.[32, 33] John Bleakley was appointed the Chief Protector Aboriginals on the same day after the resignation of R. B. Howard. By early March, John Kenny had visited the site and submitted a report on the proposed site.[34] The Kenny family travelled down by coastal steamer for meetings and interviews and lived in Brisbane and the family home at Coraki in northern NSW until John had arranged for building supplies, fencing, tools, food and a small boat to be shipped north to the new settlement. His young family remained down south until the settlement buildings were completed.

[31] Queensland State Archives, Police Staff Files (A F Files.)
[32] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918. (1914).
[33] *Daily Mercury*, Mackay, 7 February 1914.
[34] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 21 March 1914.

Kenny family circa 1914 (Coraki NSW?) L to R: Victor, Elizabeth, Kathleen, John, dog and Jack.

The administrative buildings and living quarters were not on the banks of the Hull River but a kilometre or two north on a hill overlooking (now) South Mission Beach. The staff, consisting of Assistant Superintendent Mr Hazeldeane and Aboriginal workers, cleared scrub, felled trees, and erected the bungalows, a shed for tools, and another for harness. Large, corrugated iron water tanks were supplied to store the rains expected later in the year. A wide path was cleared down to the beach where a motorboat was moored.

Clearing looking towards the sea and Dunk Island circa 1915. Handwritten text on reverse: *This is the view standing on our verandah looking over to Dunk Island*, JK.

Initially, 41 Djiru people were 'recruited' to 'join' the settlement. Later, Police rounded up more, many of them in poor condition, to occupy the new camp. By the end of 1915, the population was estimated at 400 with many from other districts like Mourilyan, Tully and the Murray Rivers. In 1916,

82 Aboriginal people were removed from North Queensland communities *for disciplinary reasons* and taken to this settlement. Some inmates deserted and hid in the forest to avoid recapture.

These people built their own quarters, some of them proper huts with thatched roofs, and they also assisted in the erection of the settlement infrastructure. A large boiler was installed on the beachside and that provided tea for those with billy's. The residents were expected to supplement food supplies by gathering bush tucker and going fishing (using the Settlement boats).

Major constructions were completed before the wet season. By the time WWI broke, the Settlement was functioning and the Kenny family had settled in.[35] However, their residence was not completed until December 1914 according to a report by *The Queenslander*.[36] There were three cottages for the Kenny family and the staff. In 1915, Jack Kenny taught Aboriginal students while they waited for the appointment of a teacher and government doctors and nurses attended the institution regularly.

The decision to build the Settlement was not popular with everyone. Some Aboriginal people were led there in chains. Some settlers didn't like having to now ride to the Settlement and negotiate for a properly hired worker, when previously the workers had come to them.

Some people were highly critical of the injustices caused by Aboriginal Settlements. In July 1914, a correspondent using the nom de plume, *Vagabond* wrote a harsh assessment of the policies governing these Settlements, saying that the Aboriginal people were far better protected by staying in their own country rather than being arrested and sent to far off prisons.[37] He also advocated that the Aboriginal people should be allowed to continue to use their own laws for tribal disputes. This was not a criticism of the administration of the Settlements but of the policies that created and governed them.

In a similar vein, a Clump Point settler wrote to the papers[38] in 1915 about, *Aboriginal Scandals*, *Iniquitous Internment of Natives*, asking, *what is the Home Secretary doing to remedy the abuses?* This person also wrote anonymously as, *Anti-Humbug*. It says much of the level of emotions around these debates at the time that people were not prepared to use their own names. This critic stated that the Aboriginal people in the Settlements were treated unjustly in many ways such as: being held in unsafe conditions (predicting the losses of life that did occur in 1917 due to diseases), that Aboriginals were living in fear of lifelong transportation away from their Traditional Lands, were paid no wages and had no protection from visiting magistrates as occurs in other prisons. The writer gave examples of Aboriginal people who escaped from the Settlement and walked over 1,000 miles to their country only to be arrested and sent back to the Hull.

By 1914, there was a significant social life in the Clump Point district, with newspaper reports of combined picnic and sport events *including horse racing, foot racing, spear and boomerang throwing, buckjumper riding, log chopping, and various humorous events*. On one occasion, Superintendent John Kenny used the Settlement's launch to rescue Ted Garner's boat carrying a full load of picnickers when the vessel was

[35] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918. (1914).
[36] *The Queenslander*, Brisbane, 5 December 1914.
[37] "Vagabond", *Treatment of Aboriginals, The Northern Herald* (Cairns), 24 July 1914, accessed on *Trove* March 2022 at: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42892729?searchTerm=Aborigines%20Vagabond
[38] "Anti-Humbug", *Aboriginal Scandals, Iniquitous Internment of Natives, Truth* (Brisbane), 14 November 1915, accessed on *Trove*, March 2022 at: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/203046271?searchTerm=Aboriginal%20Scandals%20Anti-Humbug

stuck on a sandbar at the mouth of nearby Maria Creek. After the successful rescue they all made it back in time *for a hearty lunch* after *submitting to the camera.* [39]

The 1915 Annual Report stated,[40]

> *As expected at the outset, on the new Settlement at Hull River some trouble has been experienced with a number of natives, addicted to opium and drugs, who were removed during the year; but the sympathetic tact in dealing with these cases and vigilant supervision of the aliens outside, who still try to carry on their old traffic, have done much towards reducing the evil. Unfortunately, some whites – themselves not above suspicion of exploiting these unfortunate wretches – often do much to make the task of protecting the natives from abuses more difficult.*
>
> *The population now numbers over 400, being considerably augmented by drafts from other districts during the year. Though the drought considerably curtailed planting, it was favourable to scrub-felling and clearing, and it was taken full advantage of in this duration. In addition to 4 acres of citrus fruit trees, 11 acres of bananas, 10 acres of pumpkin, and half an acre of sweet potatoes, which has already yielded 2 tons of food, another 25 acres is cleared and ready for planting with bananas.*

Kenny family boating day with staff and residents of the Settlement, circa 1915.

The 1915 report indicates that Jack Kenny was teaching pupils in the Settlement by then. There were 76 Aboriginals who had trust accounts set up with £126 deposited in total at Hull. 139 Aboriginals were employed. 265 Aboriginals were removed from areas beyond Clump Point *for disciplinary reasons* and taken to this Settlement.

By 1916, the Settlement was exporting bananas to the southern markets via a boat to Dunk Island, just four kilometres off-shore, where it was unloaded onto a coastal trader. Additionally, it was producing tons of pumpkin and sweet potato, pineapple, melons, yams, taro, cassava, tobacco, coffee,

[39] *Clump Point Notes, Cairns Post*, 4 May 1915, p. 3.
[40] *Annual report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for the year 1915: Hull River, J M Kenny*, accessed at https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/digitised_collections/remove/63995.pdf

citrus, coconuts, etc for local consumption. The Settlement was becoming self-sufficient which was one of the directives encouraged by the Chief Protector of Aboriginals.[41]

Newspapers published an article[42] that year on Tommy and Mary Rossa, inmates of the Settlement escaping with their baby and returning hundreds of kilometres to their home in Winton. The journalist was focused on the *amazing home instinct and bushcraft of the Aboriginal race* musing about how quickly they made it back to their Traditional Lands. As an afterthought, they stated that the baby died on the journey. One cannot help wondering what the article would have been focused on if the escapees were white. Perhaps the focus would have been on the sad loss of the baby's life with questions being asked about why that happened. These were very different times.

Local Cassowary conservation group, C4, has a web page with an excellent account of the Settlement's history and they describe access to the site:[43]

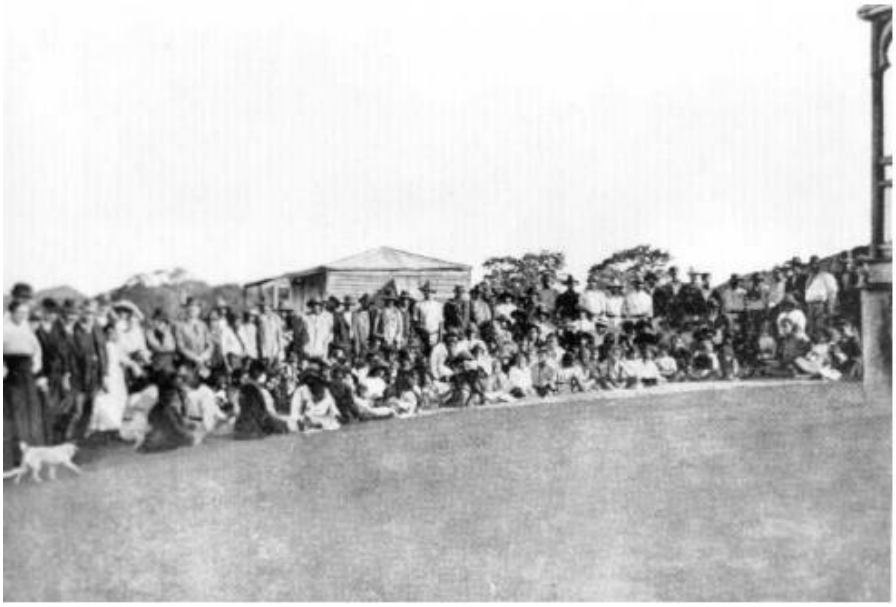
> *The community was quite remote. A rough bridle track linked the Hull River to Banyan (forerunner of Tully) and other access was by sea. When a telephone line was proposed from the settlement to Banyan, the track had to be cleared through the swamp and scrub and the line erected. It was completed just before the fateful cyclone of 1918.*

Circa 1909 Cape Bedford. Written on back: 'Fred Muary spearing fish'

The Aboriginal people living in the Settlement provided plenty of dugong, fish, and turtles for the Settlement. It was not possible to run beef cattle, though a couple of milking cows were supplied. Two new staff cottages were approved and a regular village with a wide street of dwellings on stumps had sprung up with proper sanitation on a pan service. A retail store was established and had the effect of reducing the temptations to spend wages earned as Police Trackers, labourers, gardeners, or

[41] Noel Loos*, Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier*, Boolarong Press, 2017 (2nd Edition), p. 171.
[42] *Aboriginal's Homing Instinct, Glen Innes Examiner*, 24 July 1916, accessed January 2022.
[43] C4 website, *Hull River Aboriginal Settlement*, accessed December 2021 at https://www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au/indigenous-history.html.

domestic help on gambling, opium, and alcohol. A large ketch had been bought to ferry stores across from Dunk Island and south to Cardwell.



Large group at the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement 1916.

Medical and dental care was difficult with Tuberculosis, Whooping Cough, and other diseases common among the Aboriginal population, especially in the newer arrivals. John Kenny wrote to the Department urging the establishment of the hospital on Fitzroy Island to isolate the infectious patients. Malaria in particular caused a lot of fatalities at the Settlement in 1916-17.[44]

Banana plantation circa 1915.

One of the Settlement's residents, Peter Prior, told of coming to the Settlement in 1917 aged 12. He and his father would go to sea in flat bottom punts made by his father, to spear turtles. Coming back to shore one day, they saw Jack Kenny and Jimmy Banfield (taking the surname of his employer Edmund Banfield) fighting on the beach. No-one seemed to know what it was all about; earlier they had been out gathering bladey grass used to thatch huts. It went on for a while until one said something which made the other laugh and they both ended up rolling around on the beach.

[44] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918.

There was a shortage of labour by now as most young men were away fighting in WWI. Even the Kenny's northern neighbour and ex-Police Officer, George Webb was away serving overseas until he was invalided home in January 1918.[45] Shipping problems also worsened as the War continued and the cultivation of bananas and other crops dwindled. Even the Chinese left the area and abandoned their gardens, and by 1918 there were fewer than 30 European adults remaining in the Clump Point and Hull River district. Many of those listed in the electoral rolls of 1919 were not residing in the area in 1918 when the cyclone came.[46]

At the Hull River Settlement in 1918 were 200-300 Aboriginals with John Kenny, his wife Elizabeth, Kathleen aged 15, and Victor 6 years. Jack was away visiting some friends at Cardwell. He was enrolled in a Charters Towers boarding school and was only home on holidays. The Assistant Superintendent, Mr John Hazeldeane and his wife, the Accountant/Storeman Mr E. W. Tedman, and Mr J. Hamilton in charge of the boats, made up the rest of those at the Settlement.[47]

[45] Cardwell Roll of Honour, *George Henry Webb*, accessed December 2021 at https://www.cardwellhistory.com.au/cardwell_roll_of_honour/webb_gh.html

[46] Commonwealth Electoral Rolls for Innisfail and Cardwell districts accessed by Ken Gray, December 2021.

[47] Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, The Jacaranda Press (Brisbane), 1961, p. 309.

1918 CYCLONE

In 1934, W. T. Johnstone wrote an article about the neglected graves of Clump Point. He did not think to speak of the large number (around 200) of Aboriginals buried in 1917 having succumbed to what was most likely a severe strain of Malaria while held in the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement. Further, he made no mention of the graves of other Djiru people buried over the millennia on this land. However, he provided an interesting insight to the happenings at the start of the 1918 cyclone:[48]

> *Lonely Grave Sites: Northern Cyclone Victims. 'A big sea is coming in. I do not like the look of it.' Thus Superintendent Kenny, of the Aboriginal mission station, telephones Mr Dean, then postmaster at Banyan (Tully).*
>
> *Strangely enough, the telephone had only been connected that day – and as later events proved the first message was its last. It was on March 10, 1918, the night of the great northern cyclone.*

The telephone line to Tully referred to was judged as not repairable after the cyclone. It wasn't until the 1960s that the community was once again connected by line to the network.

Sunday morning 10 March 1918, North Queensland received the following communication by telegraph and radio: *Disturbance this morning NE from Townsville and approaching the coast between Cooktown and Bowen. It appears to be dangerous*. About 4pm came the final warning *This new disturbance is a dangerous cyclone. The centre at 3pm today is East from Cairns, probably less than 70 miles. It is apparently moving South-Westwards. Advise the public urgently.*

This 1918 *Innisfail* Cyclone is regarded as the second most severe in European history to cross the east coast of Queensland. It caused most damage on the coastal strip between Tam O'Shanter Point and Innisfail. The cyclone crossed the coast at Innisfail and the heaviest damage in tropical cyclones was south of the crossing point. The coastal areas that suffered the worst were without the protection of any high ground, and the heavy rain was constant all that night.

On Dunk Island, Banfield wrote:[49]

> *Early on the morning of Sunday 10th March, the sky became overcast, a fresh southerly had sprung up during the night. A short, confused sea tumbled in the channel, and the usually placid bay mimicked it's sport. With fearsome steadiness of purpose, the wind developed as it veered to the East. At 5pm it was travelling at furious speed, twisting branches from trees and thickening the now gloomy skies with leaves. Consistently with the strength of the wind, the barometer fell, until, between 9 and 10pm, when, with a conglomeration of terrifying sounds varying from falsetto shrieks to thunderous roars, the centre of the cyclone seemed to bore down on the very vitals of the island.*

When dawn came, Dunk Island was a leafless wilderness and the work of 30 years in the district was almost wiped out and returned to jungle. Most houses disintegrated early on Sunday evening and men,

[48] W. T. Johnston, *Lapped by the Ocean, Lonely grave sites, northern cyclone victims, Sunday Mail* (Brisbane) 13 May 1934.
[49] Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, The Jacaranda Press (Brisbane), 1961, p. 308.

women, and children sought shelter where they could. This meant being exposed to dangerous flying tree limbs, timber, and lethal corrugated iron. The Hazeldeane's cottage collapsed resulting in the deaths of three Aboriginal residents sheltering under it. One account said that one of the three Aboriginal deaths cited was caused by drowning during the storm surge. Later research suggests that the toll of Aboriginal people was higher than the three dead reported at the time. The C4 site says:[50]

> *Estimates vary, with official reports concluding that 12 died, but it is more likely that about 50 Aborigines died and were buried at the site. Accounts differ on the exact location of the graves but they seem to have been close to the beach. Kenny and his daughter were buried separately on the crest of the hill near their house.*

Almost all buildings were blown off their timber stumps and the native huts at the beach were destroyed. A tidal surge swamped the beachside village leaving them up to their waists in water, rushing 90 metres up past the high water mark.

The survivors' misery was made worse by the cold, wind-driven rain, the shrieking of the winds, the totally black night, and when daylight arrived they had no homes, no dry clothes, and little to eat.

The Settlement suffered badly. Like many others, John Kenny, Elizabeth, and the two children (Jack was at Cardwell) ran for cover when their house disintegrated around them. There are varying accounts of what happened to the Kennys during the storm, but we can rely on the words of Edmund Banfield who was on the scene the next day and spoke to Mrs. Kenny and other survivors:[51]

> *It was not long before the house began to sway and totter. Mr Kenny with his wife, daughter and a young son, the eldest 'Jack' being on a visit to Cardwell, did not leave until the walls began to collapse. They determined to force their way against the wind, if possible, being conscious of the dangers of fleeing in the opposite direction. Several coloured girls had rushed to the house when the storm began to assume its true character, and they, under Mr Kenny's direction struggled down the slope. It was found impossible to stand against the wind. The situation was untenable and Mr Kenny, with his wife and children, returned to the site of the house, and passing behind it for a time, became separated as they struggled over logs and fallen timber.*
>
> *Having found one another they went even further down the slope and huddled together in the open out of the violence of the blasts but directly in the line of the shower of falling debris. It was not very long before all, save the child, who was squeezed between his father and mother, were struck by a heavy piece of wood. Kathleen cried out that something had fallen on her, and asked that it should be taken off, and having made another exclamation was silent. Mrs Kenny was helpless, her right arm having been severely torn, while her husband was lying across her left. When her left arm was freed, she felt the face of her daughter. It was cold.*
>
> *Soon after the timber had fallen she had asked her husband if he was hurt, and he replied, 'Only a little bit'.… during a lull a girl named Maud crawled to the spot, and Mr Kenny asked*

[50] C4 website, *Hull River Aboriginal Settlement*, accessed December 2021 at https://www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au/indigenous-history.html.
[51] E. J. Banfield, Townsville Daily Bulletin, *The Storm Wind* by the Beachcomber, 27 March 1918.

her to lift him up. She attempted to do so and cried out that there was something wrong with him, laid him down again, and he died. One of the girls took the child away to keep him warm, and Mrs Kenny lay beside her dead, until just before dawn.

Elizabeth had fractures and a gaping wound to her right arm when she sheltered behind a fallen log close by her, now deceased, husband and step-daughter. It wasn't until the next morning that some shelter could be provided for her and a fire was available to make a warm drink. It was three more days before Elizabeth could be shipped to the nearest hospital at Townsville for medical treatment.

The Cassowary Coast Regional Library Heritage Collection generously provided these images of the Superintendent's home before and after the cyclone. The house was substantial (see top image) yet none of it remained after the cyclone (lower image).

Hull River Mission, superintendents Quarters c1915

Remains of Mission Station after the 1918 cyclone

Photos courtesy of Cassowary Coast Libraries, Heritage Collection

Aboriginal Settlement resident Peter Prior, aged 13 at the time, remembers,[52]

My brother Silas was bought back from up in the bush safe and sound by old man Yorkie, and Mum, Dad, and everyone was crying, because we didn't know if they were safe or not. During the next few days, we all had to start cleaning the place up, and the bodies had to be

[52] Tully Library (Cassowary Coast Regional Council), Hull River Aboriginal Settlement file, excerpt from Renarta Prior, *Straight from the Yudaman's Mouth: the life story of Peter Prior*, JCU, Townsville, 1993.

> *buried. We only had about one hundred and fifty people left out of nearly two hundred of us.*

Their neighbour, George Webb, was the first white men on the scene; his diary states:[53]

> *Fri 1st March. Bought coconuts up from beach.*
> *Tue 5th Mar. Finished setting coconuts. HOT.*
> *Sun 10th Mar. Terrible cyclone.*
> *Mon 11th Mar. Great damage. Mr Kenny, Kathleen, & 3 coloured folk killed at Settlement.*
> *Wed 13th Mar. Got Mrs Kenny away on the "Gowrie".*

A brave trip was made by Constable Dan O'Reagan of Cardwell Police, an old friend of John Kenny. He travelled 50 kilometres along the beach, swimming swollen creeks to reach the Settlement.

The coastal trader, *Innisfail* was anchored on the leeside of Dunk Island after the cyclone and the crew loaned Ted Banfield one of their two boats so he could get off the island to check on the Settlement. He and another well-known man, Chris Wildsoet, crossed to the mainland once the sea had calmed a little to assist the survivors.

John, aged 46, and his daughter Yolande Kathleen 15 years, were buried on the hill in the centre of the property not far from their destroyed home. Their graves were marked by two large trumpet shells and decorated with smaller seashells by some Aboriginal girls. After the burial, Constable O'Reagan returned to Cardwell with the terrible news for Jack. Others remained to salvage what they could and to give some aid to Mrs. Kenny and other injured residents.

Seeing the smoke from a steamer on the horizon, Ted Banfield and Chris Wildsoet sailed out with a crew into the shipping channel to intercept the *Lass O'Gowrie*. It wasn't until Wednesday around noon that Mrs. Kenny boarded for Townsville Hospital and telegrams were sent to relatives. This ship had been approaching Innisfail when it was hit by the cyclone. Even with two bow anchors and engines at full steam, she was still blown 35 km before the wind.[54]

Tired, battered, and bruised people went from clearing to clearing checking on neighbours and erected temporary shelters while children slept. Rare tins of canned beef and butter that survived were all there was to eat along with roasted green bananas from the flattened orchards.

Elizabeth Kenny, in the early stages of pregnancy when the cyclone hit, recovered enough to return to her family in NSW after three months in hospital in Townsville. Her daughter, Eugenie Mary (commonly called Jeanie) was born at Coraki on 20 August 1918. Mrs. Kenny, while fortunately surviving the cyclone, had her right arm so damaged from the incident she had to learn to write all over again, this time with her left hand.

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[53] *Diary of George Webb*, who was there during the cyclone and visited the Settlement the next day, by permission of Mr. Peter Wheatley. The diary's of George Webb are soon being published by Mission Beach Historical Society in a story by Ken Gray, *George's Diary,* H024, 2022.
[54] Dorothy Jones, *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas: The Story of Innisfail and the Shire of Johnstone North Queensland*, G. K. Bolton Printers (Cairns), 1973, p. 321.

AFTERMATH

Medical assistance did not arrive at the Settlement until 31 March (three weeks later) when 50-60 minor injuries and five severe cases were treated.[55]

A resident, who was later to be a Birri tribal Elder, Peter Prior, observed:

> *After a while the authorities were going to send us all to a place called Hinchinbrook Island to live, but they decided that it was too close to the mainland for us and thought we might try and run away. Anyway, the next thing we knew, we were all bundled up again, same as before. All the women and children had to follow behind because we still had the white man's guns on us.*
>
> *We were put onto two boats called the Lasagara [Lass O'Gowrie] and the Kuranda. All we knew was that we were being taken to a place called Palm Island, which is about one hundred and ten miles south east of Mission Beach and thirty-seven miles north east of Townsville*.[56]

Aboriginal people would not go near the Settlement for a long time afterwards. It was considered unwise to build on the same site, so a new reserve was established on Palm Island. After salvaging any worthwhile stores from the old Settlement, the material and the residents who had not fled were shipped to Palm Island on large flat bottom punts.[57]

As for the Kenny gravesites, the following is part transcript of a letter from Mr. Martin, Land Ranger, to the Land Commissioner in Innisfail, dated 20 August 1925:

> *Dear Sir,*
>
> *In respect to reserve no 211 Parish of Rockingham which I have just inspected. From information received I understand that on top of the hill fronting the coast and on ground which was cleared by the Aboriginal settlement, that the late Supt Mr Kenny and his daughter who were killed during the cyclone were buried. The grave is almost beyond recognition and is unfenced. Horses and cattle are continuously grazing over the grave.*

Martin went on to recommend the grave be fenced with wood or iron palings. An addendum was added by the Land Commissioner and forwarded to Cardwell Shire Council on 27 August 1925 agreeing with the Ranger's comments and adding that … *your Council might kindly express their opinion regarding this letter too*. After a few more reminders from the Lands Commissioner, a Council reply was eventually received in October 1925. It stated:

> *I am directed to inform you that from enquiries made by my council understand that it is the intention to shift the remains to Palm Island Settlement at an early date, if this is so, there will be no need for any action about the present graves.*

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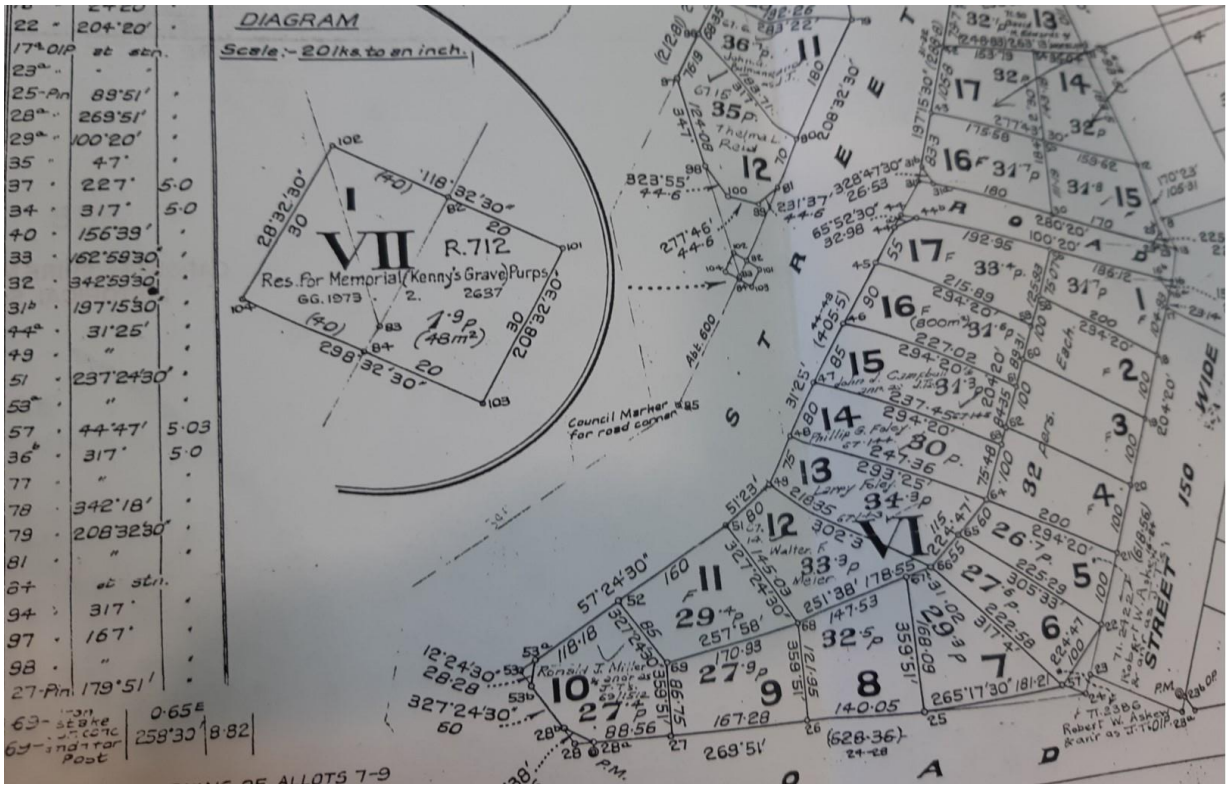
[55] C4 website, *Hull River Aboriginal Settlement*, accessed December 2021 at https://www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au/indigenous-history.html.
[56] Tully (Cassowary Coast Regional Council) Library, *Hull River Aboriginal Settlement File, excerpt from* Renarta Prior, *Straight from the Yudaman's Mouth: the life story of Peter Prior*, JCU, Townsville, 1993.
[57] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918, (1918)

The letter was signed by the Shire Clerk, Cardwell Shire Council, Mr P. J. Hull. Nothing was done at that time. Another effort for a suitable memorial was reported in the *Cairns Post* in 1939:[58]

> *… it was unanimously decided to approve of the proposal of the Lands Department to establish a township in the area (by making available forthwith over 30 town allotments0 and for the town to be known as Kenny. Cr. Peter White in referring to the sad occurrence thought that the council should have some form of memorial placed over both graves which were situated on a hill overlooking Rockingham Bay.*

A December 1965 Survey Plan for the subdivision of part of the land at the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement shows that Council had allowed an area of 48 square metres for a Kenny Memorial, but it was half on the street and never eventuated:



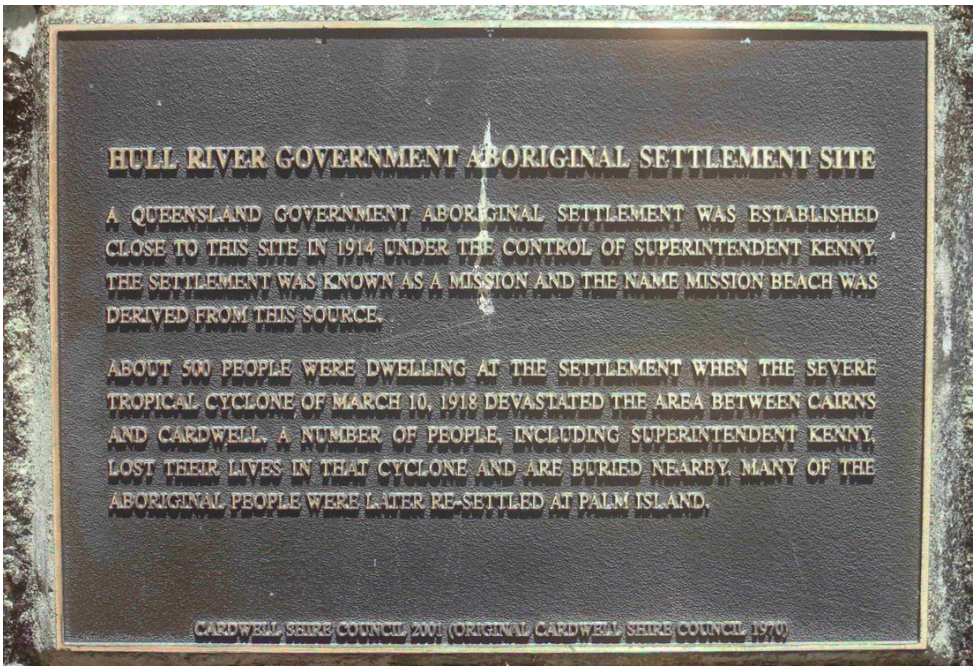
Survey Plan South Mission Beach, photographed by Ken Campbell from the Cassowary Coast Regional Council Tully Library Hull River Collection.

By 1967, the village of *Kenny* had, by common usage, become known as *South Mission Beach* and it was later gazetted as such. The main access road, once known as *Kenny Drive*, in the same manner became known as *Tully Mission Beach Road*. There was, however, a small allotment of land set aside later by the Council for a memorial. This memorial and information board was generously provided for by the Mission Beach Lions Club. There is a listing of the memorial on *Monument Australia*.[59]

[58] Cairns Post, *Cyclone Recalled. Clump Point Township*, 19 January 1939.
[59] *Monument Australia*, accessed December 2021 at https://www.monumentaustralia.org.au/display/92008-hull-river-settlement-monument

Photo of *Mija* Memorial or Hull River Aboriginal Settlement Monument from Monument Australia, image by Ian Savage, 02 September 2016.

C4 has an Indigenous page on its website with an account of the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement.[60] They have images including one of the plaque mounted on a large rock at the memorial, shown below.



Plaque at Hull River Aboriginal Settlement Memorial courtesy C4 Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation.

The *Mija Memorial* provides a permanent keeping place for the story of the settlement as told by First Nations people. It is also a memorial to the many Aboriginal people who died there during its four years of operation. Some of the recollections of Aboriginal families involved are recorded and a few examples of their experiences are outlined below.

[60] C4 website, *Hull River Aboriginal Settlement*, accessed December 2021 at https://www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au/indigenous-history.html.

John Andy's story

John Andy is a *Djiru* Elder. His grandmother Minnie and her sister were sent to the Hull River Settlement between 1914 and 1918. They ran away from the settlement, crossed the mouth of the Hull River and headed south towards the Jingalinga Beach area. John said they deliberately walked in the water along the beach to ensure they didn't leave behind any tracks, as they were afraid of being tracked down and sent back to the settlement by the Police. They then headed towards Murray Upper (Jumbun) and were accepted into, and adopted, by the *Girramay* people of the area even though they were *Djiru* people.

Doris, Marjorie and Clarence Kinjun's story

Doris and Marjorie Kinjun's grandfather, Jimmy, was sent to the settlement in 1915 and three years later, their parents, Joe and Maggie joined him. Soon after arriving, Joe and Maggie ran away, crossed the mouth of the Hull River at low tide and returned to the Tully River as they didn't want to attend the school at the settlement. They were eventually tracked down by the police in 1921 as they were considered deserters and sent to Palm Island.

Claude Beeron's story

Claude Beeron is a *Girramay* Elder. His grandfather, Jimmy Beeron, his grandmother Bella and his father Paddy were all sent to the settlement. They eventually escaped and went back to Warrami where most of the other *Girramay* people where living at that time.

Peter Prior's story:

Peter Prior was born in Bowen in 1905 as a member of the *Birri* tribal group. He and his family were captured by police in 1917 and sent to the Aboriginal reserve at Yarrabah near Cairns. They and many others escaped but were recaptured weeks later by troopers with guns near the Tully River and transported in chains to the Hull River. Peter's people called the 1897 Act, the Dog Act* because they were treated like dogs. Peter recalled that many people lived at the settlement in huts along the beach made of grass from Tam O'Shanter Point. Peter's father sometimes hunted for turtle to feed the settlement. People stayed in their tribal groups and did not mix together.

*In 1897, under the new Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, Aboriginal people became wards of the state. They were prevented from marrying without consent of the state, from maintaining their own finances and from drinking alcohol. A system of Aboriginal reserves and settlements was planned.

The Impacts of Removal

The removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands during the last century had an enormous impact on them. As they had an extremely close relationship with the land and the environment, both physically and spiritually, their forced removal resulted in substantial changes in their way of life. Their cultural and social systems began to break down. Their languages began to disappear and the maintenance and teaching of their sacred laws and responsibilities diminished. Many people believe that the forced removals from their traditional country over the last century are one of the root causes for the loss of their cultural practices and knowledge today.

JOHN KENNY: THE MAN

John Kenny was well thought of by many locals.[61] This comment was from one of Cardwell's longest standing residents:

> *The 1914-18 war finished the banana growing for the Chinese, but by that time most of the (Aboriginal people) were dead. In 1916-17 the police rounded up the rest and settled them by force at Clump Point under a man called Kenny, an ex-policeman. He was an iron-hand man, but good to the blacks. He taught them to grow fine orchards of citrus fruits, bananas and acres of potatoes. They soon picked up in health without the opium and grog. The young ones were coming on fine, but in March 1918 the big cyclone destroyed the settlement.*

In his position as the then Queensland Government Minister for Aboriginal Issues, Mr. J. W. Bleakley in his Annual Report of 1918 stated to the Under Secretary Home Affairs:

> *I could not close this part of the report without paying a tribute to the memory of Mr JOHN MARTIN KENNY, late Supt of Hull River Settlement, who lost his life in the terrible cyclone of 10th March 1918, which entirely demolished that institution; and in which disaster Mr Kenny's young daughter was also killed, and his wife (the Matron) seriously injured. In Mr Kenny's death the Dept suffered a severe loss, for the deceased was an officer with a wide and lifelong experience of aboriginals, gained by years of service in the Northern Native Police, and as an industrial missionary at Cape Bedford Mission. He was a man of fine character, strong personality, and indomitable courage. His whole heart was in his work and his people, whose absolute confidence and respect he enjoyed; for he shrank from no sacrifice of health or comfort in the earnestness of his desire to better their conditions. He was a loyal and zealous officer, and was esteemed by all who came in contact with him.*[62]

Edmund Banfield, also known as *The Beachcomber* of Dunk Island, wrote:[63]

> *Few managed boats better than the 'Boss' who in the days of his youth had run away to sea, and had learned the ropes under tough conditions. Among horses and cattle he was considered an authority, and in all athletic sports – boxing, running, rowing, swimming, football, cricket ... he had more than the ordinary amateur's success. A good all round man, a loving husband, a tender father, all who knew him will remember him with aught but sincere regret for the manner of his death. Just when all his ambitions were ripening.*

Banfield was not one to mince his words or praise the unworthy. He also enjoyed insights that few others had for he knew the Kennys well and was with Elizabeth Kenny for a considerable time while arranging her rescue. Most importantly, Banfield was on excellent terms with the Djiru people and often advocated for them. He wrote a long piece for the paper he had worked for earlier, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* which described details of the cyclone and its impacts on the settlement. His comments on the character of John Kenny were telling (same article as cited above):

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[61] Jean Devanny, *By Tropic Sea and Jungle*, Angus and Robertson, 1944, p. 20

[62] Queensland Parliamentary Papers: *Reports upon the Operation of Certain Sub-Depts of the Home Secretary's Dept*, 1906 – 1918.

[63] *Townsville Daily Bulletin, The Storm Wind, By the Beachcomber*, 27 March 1918, p. 3, accessed on *Trove*, March 2022 at: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62264509?searchTerm=The%20Storm%20Wind

…let an attempt be made to indicate some of the excellent qualities of this strong and determined man, who sleeps amid the wreckage of his designs and hopes. Having had years of experience among the blacks of the North, being familiar with more than one of their dialects, having travelled to remote parts with the first Chief Protector (Dr E. Roth) on several occasions, and possessing the gift which excites confidence and respect among the members of the race, he was the ideal officer for the head of the proposed new establishment. He at all times proclaimed that the interests of the blacks were his chief concern. There can be no doubt of his popularity among them, and of the zeal with which they rendered him ready obedience. He went among them and worked with them, exacting respect for his word and seldom having to enforce it. He was their only doctor for two years.

It should be said of Edmund Banfield, that he was a close friend of former Aboriginal Protector, Richard Howard who stayed with the Banfield's once for Christmas at Dunk Island. Howard had set up the Hull River Settlement, so Banfield was not entirely without bias on the subject.

Of course we are without much of the most vital input of the Aboriginal inmates of the establishment or of their descendants who will know the oral history, yet we hope that by publishing this account of the life of John Kenny we may hear more from some of the First Nations people with knowledge of the experiences and feelings of people who lived in this establishment. Valuable input was provided in a Foreword by Djiru Elder, Leonard Andy and more oral histories may hopefully be included later.

There was an informal yet independent evaluation of the Settlement and its leadership published by a visitor in 1915. This was reported in the *Cairns Post*: *Hull River Mission; Impressions of a visitor* and is quite revealing. Excerpts are shown here:[64]

The initial labours and general disposition have in addition to supervising and attending the wants of Aboriginals, absorbed the greater part of the time of the superintendent, Mr. J. M. Kenny, who, up to the present, has been conducting the institution therewith singlehanded. [He did have his wife acting as Nurse for the residents and son as teacher in 1915].

Comment has been published in regard to the application of methods adopted by police in rounding up Aboriginals in the Cardwell district, but expressed opinions do not convey the impression of being actuated by purely philanthropic motives.

The removal of the [Aboriginals] has, in some instances, originated sentiment entirely hostile to the institution and its objects, but if this remuneration could be accepted as a criterion of the actual value of the services then the loss is indeed trifling.

The appearance and general demeanour of the residents at the settlement – particularly the appearance of those there for any length of time – permits a very optimistic view of the future of the establishment and under the experienced supervision of Mr. Kenny, typically the right man in the right place, the prospect of the settlement ultimately being self supporting does not appear remote. The [Aboriginals] are under practically no restraint or close discipline but enter cheerfully upon the task of clearing the scrub and making preparation for extensive

[64] *Hull River Mission, Impressions of a Visitor, Cairns Post*, 16 August 1915, accessed on *Trove* March 2022 at: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42932426?searchTerm=Hull%20River%20Mission%20Impressions%20of%20a%20visitor

> *planting. Instead of desertions, both north and south, the numbers have been very largely augmented by voluntary additions …*

In 1917, an unnamed local resident wrote to the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* with a glowing report of the progress[65] that J. M. Kenny was making:

> *The district has a very good friend in Mr. J. M. Kenny, the superintendent of the Hull River Aboriginal station. He is always ready and willing to help us in any way he can, and, my word, he is doing good work among the Aboriginals in the little time he has been here. … He has had an uphill fight, but I rejoice to say that he is succeeding in uplifting the Aboriginals … I know most of the blacks and it makes my heart rejoice to see the great improvement… May the good work continue.*

There can be no doubt as to the bravery of this man. When his wife, Elizabeth, in the height of the storm, asked John Kenny if he was hurt,[66] he had replied, *Only a little bit*. He died shortly after from his wounds yet did not want to alarm those around him.

One can only imagine the challenges that were faced by John Kenny, his family and his Settlement's residents. The Aboriginal people had faced so much injustice during the 50 years following the invasion by alien people who ruthlessly dispossessed them of the land they had lived on for eternity. Then they were being carted off the land and placed in 'reserves' whether they liked it or not. Many were no longer living on their Traditional Lands; they had been totally severed from the thing that mattered most to them. Their culture was destroyed and their tribes and law systems were broken. Now, the government was bringing Aboriginal people in from far and wide and mixing tribes without a thought of the consequences of that radical move. How it did not end far worse than it did is a testament to the Aboriginal people and the leadership of John Kenny. He had some understanding of the culture and language while his employers demonstrated little knowledge of or concerns about such enormous issues.

However, one suspects that it was not only John Kenny that made this Settlement work better than one could have ever dreamed. The oldest resident of Cardwell in 1940 spoke to Jean Devanny of the Aboriginal people and this reveals a major reason why the Settlement did not implode:[67]

> *Left to themselves, the Aborigines were the best self-governed and biggest souled people you could meet. They were thoroughly reliable, honest and kindly. And it was astonishing how quickly they picked up our language. Their own language was far more descriptive than ours relating to places. The [Aboriginal women] on the fighting grounds were fluent and poetic. Some of the whites were frightfully brutal with them …*

Edmund Banfield had the last say on John Kenny with these words from the same news article cited above:

> *As he lived so did he die – without pain or moan – brave in the last, with lips expressing concern for his wife and bairns. John Martin Kenny was a man.*

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[65] *The Hull River Mission Station, Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 19 January 1917.
[66] *The Storm King's Wrath, Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, 21 June 1918.
[67] Jean Devanny, *By Tropic Sea and Jungle*, Angus and Robertson, 1944, p. 20.

THE FAMILY

Elizabeth Kenny (nee Daley) (wedding photo?) 15 June 1910. Front marked, *Federal Studios, Townsville*.

Elizabeth Kenny returned to her family in Coraki three months after the cyclone. She did not remarry and lived to the age of 79 years. She died in Evans Head, NSW and was buried in her hometown of Coraki, NSW.

Mrs. Kenny's stepson, Jack took up sheep farming in NSW, served in WWII and was repatriated out as a Totally & Permanently Incapacitated (TPI) soldier. He raised a family in Sydney.

Victor Kenny stayed on at Coraki, NSW where he ran a successful small business for many years. He had much to do with the nearby Indigenous people at the Box Ridge settlement.

Eugenie (Jeanie) Kenny married Ray Campbell a local Norco (NSW dairy farmer cooperative) Manager who was also a WWII veteran, raising a large family on the North Coast of NSW. Eugenie died at only 40 years age and was buried in Coraki, NSW.

Kenny Family Tree