

Invasion and dispossession

The Kulin clans who established the Coranderrk Aboriginal station in 1863 were true survivors.

They had inhabited the lands and waters of central Victoria for thousands of years. Yet their world would change forever in 1835, when the first wave of British settlers arrived on their shores. These newcomers occupied the Kulin's ancestral lands and claimed them as their own, bringing with them large herds of cattle and sheep, as well as firearms, alcohol and disease. At the heart of the ensuing conflict was the fundamental issue of land. To the original inhabitants it was an inseparable part of their identity, spirituality and way of life; to the newcomers, it was a vital source of economic wealth, and the primary reason why they had migrated to this part of the world.

The British colonial invasion of Victoria was swift, as pastoralists, squatters and convict workers took possession of vast tracts of land around Port Phillip Bay.¹ The introduction of large-scale pastoralism caused massive disruptions to local hunter-gatherer economies, and although the Kulin sought to defend their lands, they were soon overwhelmed by the sheer number of settlers who continued to arrive. Before long, the settlers had taken possession of most of the habitable land in Victoria, displacing the Kulin, as well as many other Aboriginal nations, and driving them to the edge of survival.

The Aboriginal population of Victoria was greatly reduced as a result of colonisation.² Those who survived were pushed to the fringes of colonial society and were not welcome in the newly founded city of Melbourne. They camped along creeks and waterways on their country and sought to eke out a living as best as they could by fishing, hunting and gathering where possible, or by working for settlers on pastoral stations. Concern for the welfare of these surviving Aboriginal people among influential humanitarian politicians back in Britain led to the establishment of a protectorate in 1838. Five men were appointed as Protectors, charged with the task of defending the interests of the Aboriginal population of Victoria. However, they were largely ineffective.³

From the 1840s, the Kulin sought new ways of ensuring their peoples' survival. The Woiwurrung speaking clans — which included the Wurundjeri clan, whose territory encompassed the city of Melbourne (see pp. xiv–xv) — actively sought to regain access to some of the land lost to the colonisers. To this end, Woiwurrung clan head Billibellary (c.1799–1846), appealed to Assistant Protector William Thomas (1793–1867) for a grant of land, proposing that his people could make a place for themselves in the new colonial order by living sedentary lifestyles and farming the land. The government of the day did not grant this request, but the relationship Billibellary established with William Thomas during this period planted a seed of collaboration which would later lead to the establishment of Coranderrk.

Sixteen years later, in 1859, Billibellary's son Wonga (c.1824–75) approached William Thomas with a new request for land — this time on behalf of his Taungerong kinsmen. Wonga explained, 'They want a block of land in the country where they may sit down, plant corn, potatoes ... and work like white men.'⁴ Persuaded by Wonga's argument, Thomas successfully obtained an interview with the Board of Land and Works and accompanied Wonga and a group of Taungerong men into

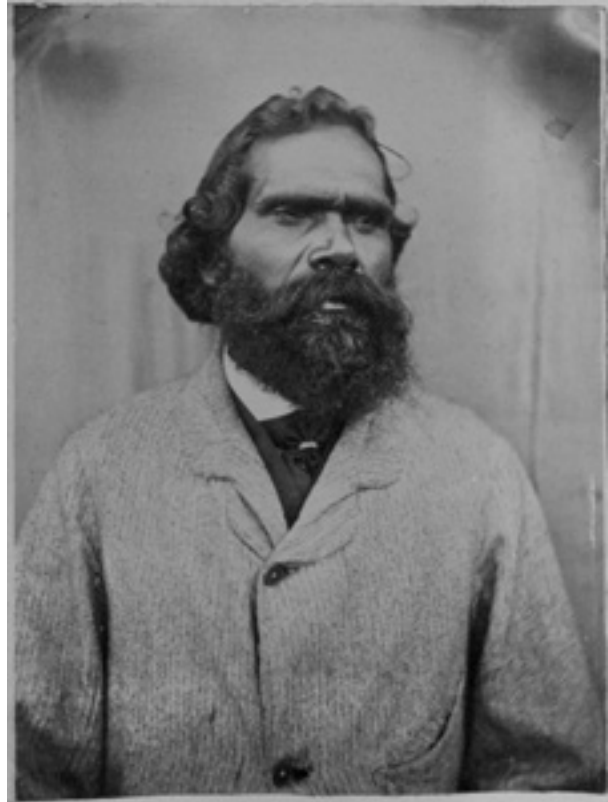


Figure 1. Wonga, the *Ngurungaeta* (clan head) of the Woiwurrung clans, successfully petitioned the colonial government to set aside land for his people at Coranderrk. Photo: Charles Walter (c.1866). Source: State Library of Victoria (H91.1/22).

Melbourne. Wonga, who was regarded as a skilled orator in Woiwurrung and praised by those who knew him as an influential leader with a manner that was ‘always gentle and courteous’, acted as interpreter.⁵ According to Thomas, the Taungerong’s request for land was successful thanks to Wonga’s diplomacy.⁶

As a result, 80 Taungerong established the Acheron station in 1859, on a plot of land north of the Cathedral Range (approximately 150 kilometres north-east of Melbourne) which Thomas assured them the ‘Government would most sacredly retain for them.’⁷ However, in 1860, after they had spent over a year clearing the land, fencing 17 acres and planting seven acres of wheat and vegetables, the Government ordered them to move to another location — the Mohican station, eight kilometres south of Acheron. A group of local squatters had convinced the Government to purchase Mohican as a new reserve for the Taungerong and to sell the Acheron station to them. The Taungerong sent a deputation of men to Melbourne to object to William Thomas that the land they were asked to move to ‘is not the country they selected, it is too cold and blackfellows soon die there’. They had a valid point: the land at Mohican was so cold that no Europeans had been willing to settle there. Thomas pleaded with the Government to intervene, warning that: ‘This, the fate of Aboriginal industry is

enough to deter Aborigines from ever after having confidence in promises held out to them.⁸ But despite their protests, the Taungerong were forced to abandon Acheron. No sooner had they left the station than European pastoralists removed all traces of their presence by breaking down the perimeter fences and allowing their cattle to destroy the crops.

These events set a precedent which the Kulin clans did not forget in years to come when attempts were made to oust them from their settlement at Coranderrk. However, it did not deter them from putting faith in the promises of Europeans. They had little choice.

John Green and the establishment of Coranderrk

The Woiwurrung clans experienced similar setbacks in attempting to secure land on their own country after an influx of settlers forced them to abandon an encampment at Yering (50 kilometres north-east of Melbourne). Their prospects finally improved in 1860, when they befriended two young and energetic allies — Scottish Presbyterian lay preacher John Green (1830–1903) and his wife Mary Smith Benton Green (1835–1919) — who became instrumental in helping them to establish a farming community of their own.

Soon after arriving in Victoria in 1857, John Green worked as a preacher among the Woiwurrung adults at Yering, while Mary established a school for their children (see Scene 21, p. 161). In 1861, Green accepted a job with the newly formed Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of the Aborigines in the position of General Inspector. In that role, he attempted to re-establish the Acheron station as a place where both the Woiwurrung and Taungerong clans might settle. Thus in March 1862, the Woiwurrung families, together with the Greens and their children, walked from Yering to Acheron, cutting a new track through the forest over the Yarra Ranges (see Figure 2, p. 9). However, upon arriving there, they were prevented from settling on the land by a powerful local squatter who challenged their occupation of the reserve. After a year of uncertainty and disappointments, Green applied to the Central Board for permission to return to Woiwurrung country in order to establish a new reserve on the Yarra. The Woiwurrung and Green families were now joined by Taungerong families, totalling 40 men, women and children, as they trekked back across the Yarra Ranges along the path they had created the year before (now known to locals as the ‘Black Spur’). They arrived at their chosen site in March 1863, only to discover that the land set aside for them had once again being claimed by squatters. With nowhere else to go, they set up camp nearby, in an area at the confluence of the Yarra River and the Coranderrk (Badger) Creek. They named their camp site ‘Coranderrk’, which is the Woiwurrung name for the flowering ‘Christmas Bush’ (*Prostanthera lasianthos*) native to the area.

Before they could be sure that they would not be moved off the land again, John Green and the Kulin knew that official confirmation of the land’s reservation needed to be published in the Government’s gazette. In May, Wonga and his younger cousin Barak (nephew of Billibellary) learned that Governor Sir Henry Barkly had announced a public reception in honour of Queen Victoria’s birthday. Seizing this opportunity to present their case, Wonga led a deputation of 15 Woiwurrung,



Figure 2. The Kulin re-enacted the long trek to Acheron for this photo taken in 1865 as a way of commemorating the story of Coranderrk’s foundation. Wonga (far left) leads the way; John Green is third in the line, and women with children are in the background. For a detailed analysis of this remarkable photograph see Lydon 2005, pp. 60-9. Photo: “The Yarra Tribe starting for the Acheron, 1862”, by Charles Walter (1865). Source: State Library of Victoria (H13881/14, La Trobe Picture Collection).

Taungerong and Boonwurrung people, who walked into Melbourne bearing gifts — handcrafted rugs and blankets for the Queen, and traditional weapons for Prince Albert. When the deputation was admitted to the main hall of the Exhibition Building, observers noted that their demeanour was ‘grave and dignified’; and that Wonga addressed the Governor ‘with becoming modesty, and yet with earnestness’. Although he spoke English reasonably well, Wonga chose to deliver his speech in his own language, Woiwurrung, with William Thomas translating into English, thereby asserting his sovereign status when dealing with the Queen’s representative.

The following month, a notice appeared in Victoria’s *Government Gazette* announcing that the Governor had ‘temporarily reserved’ 2300 acres, thereby formally establishing Coranderrk as an Aboriginal reserve (extended to 4850 acres in 1866).⁹ Copies of a letter from the Queen’s Secretary were sent to the Kulin later that year, conveying the Queen’s thanks for Wonga’s address and her promise of protection. This led the Kulin to understand that their request for land had been granted by the highest authority, the Queen herself, via her regent, Governor Barkly. During the troubled years that lay ahead, the Kulin and their supporters repeatedly recalled this historical agreement as proof of their entitlement to this land.¹⁰ The event also demonstrated the effectiveness of deputations and written appeals as means of advancing their cause — a strategy which the Kulin would deploy on numerous occasions as the Coranderrk struggle deepened.



Figure 3. The Kulin deputation went to Governor Barkly's reception to request land, as depicted in an engraving in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post* in June 1863. William Thomas (centre) is acting as translator. Source: State Library of Victoria (IMP25/06/63/1).

Coranderrk was established primarily as a result of the campaign mounted by the Woiwurrung with the support of John Green and William Thomas. But not all Kulin clans were as successful. Only a week after Coranderrk's gazettal, despite vehement protests from Thomas, the Government approved the sale of the Mordialloc reserve which had been set aside for the Boonwurrung on their country south-east of Melbourne. Having been entirely dispossessed of their lands, some of the Boonwurrung moved to Coranderrk where they married and made a new life for themselves; while others chose to remain and die on their country.¹¹

The Kulin families who founded Coranderrk regarded themselves as the pioneers of a self-governing community, and as free men and women. Officially, John Green was the manager of the station and had formal authority over its residents. But the Kulin's intent and desire was to govern themselves as much as possible — something very few Europeans understood and respected. On the whole, Green was an advocate for their self-determination. As he advised the Board, 'My method of managing the blacks is to allow them to rule themselves as much as possible.'¹² To this end, the Kulin formed a court assembly, at which Green sat in, and all the adults participated in laying down

rules of conduct on the station and instituting laws for punishing offenders ‘by administering fines, withdrawing privileges or imposing the ultimate sanction of banishment.’¹³ As the station grew and thrived, the Kulin attributed the success of Coranderrk to their own hard work. And while they accepted the presence of John Green and his assistant Thomas Harris as farm manager, these and other white men and women were regarded as helpers rather than masters.

But most colonial authorities saw things differently. Stations like Coranderrk were places that they themselves had established for the purpose of ‘civilising the natives’ under the strict supervision and paternalistic care of superintendents and managers. When Coranderrk became successful, Central Board members congratulated themselves, claiming that ‘this, the most prosperous Aboriginal station in Victoria, or perhaps Australia, has been managed exclusively by the Central Board and its officers, and is not indebted for its success to any extraneous assistance.’¹⁴

This fundamentally different understanding placed the Kulin and the Central Board on a direct collision course in the years to come, and was the main reason behind the Board’s removal of John Green from Coranderrk.

The Board for the Protection of Aborigines

The Kulin’s successful petition for land at Coranderrk was aided by a resurgence of humanitarian concern for Aborigines in the late 1850s. The steep decline of the Aboriginal population in the wake of the colonisers’ invasion, and the apparent destitution of the survivors, had prompted Victoria’s humanitarians to appoint a Select Committee in 1858–59, which acknowledged that ‘the great and almost unprecedented reduction in the number of the Aborigines is to be attributed to the general occupation of the country by the white population’. The Select Committee advised Parliament to establish ‘reserves for the various tribes, on their own hunting grounds’, where, under the charge of lay or clerical missionaries, the Aboriginal population could be taught to combine agricultural and gardening activities with small scale pastoral activities and thereby be induced ‘to take an interest in the occupations of civilised life’. According to this plan, it was hoped that ‘the remnants of the Aborigines may be both civilised and Christianised’.¹⁵

The recommendations of the Select Committee’s report in 1860 signalled the dawn of the mission and reserves era in Victoria. Six Aboriginal reserves were established on Crown lands during the 1860s: four were Christian missions receiving government aid — Lake Tyers (Anglican) and Ramahyuck (Presbyterian/Moravian) in eastern Victoria for the Gunai/Kurnai clans; Ebenezer (Moravian) in north-west Victoria for the clans of the Wimmera and Lower Murray; and Lake Condah (Anglican) in south-west Victoria. The other two were secular government controlled reserves: Framlingham, which like Lake Condah was established for the Mara-speaking Gunditjmarra and Kirrae-wurrung people of south-west Victoria; and Coranderrk, located about 60 kilometres north-east of Melbourne, for the Kulin clans of central Victoria (see Map 2, p. 4).¹⁶

The missions and reserves were placed under the authority of the Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interest of the Aborigines, which wielded significant powers including the authority

to prescribe where Aboriginal people could reside, the work contracts in which they could be engaged, the manner in which their earnings might be distributed, and how the care and custody of their children should be managed. These powers were later enshrined in legislation with the passing of the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1869* (Vic), and the same year the Central Board was renamed to the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines (hereafter called ‘the Board’).

The Board consisted of seven honorary (unpaid) members and two paid employees: a Secretary, who administered the policies framed by Board members; and a General Inspector, who visited the various stations and collected data and population statistics for the Board’s annual reports (John Green being the first). The Board was answerable to the Chief Secretary (today’s equivalent of the state premier) and required his approval to make major decisions, such as establishing and closing reserves. But as there was little ministerial oversight, the Board became something of a law unto itself. In fact, this small group of Board members who met for only a few hours each month and had little contact with or knowledge of Aboriginal society, had virtually free rein in determining the lives of Aboriginal people on the reserves during the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ And since the 1869 Act made no provision for their removal, members could only be replaced when they resigned or died, allowing them to control Board policies for several decades. Given that almost half the Aboriginal population came to live on missions and reserves by the late 1870s, the Board exercised extensive powers over Victoria’s Aboriginal population as a whole during this time.¹⁸

In establishing the Board and the reserve system, the humanitarians were motivated by a paternalistic belief in the innate superiority of the white man and his supposed duty to ‘civilise’ and Christianise so-called ‘savages’. Their proposal that valuable and increasingly scarce agricultural land should be set aside for Aboriginal people’s benefit was radical at a time when the allocation of Crown Land was a bitterly divisive subject in Victorian politics.¹⁹ Yet, the reserve system was only intended to be a temporary measure: ‘the natives’ were considered to be a ‘dying race’, soon to become extinct. Missions and reserves were merely regarded as a means of making their final days more comfortable.

But ‘the natives’ did not die away as expected. Instead, inspired by a renewed sense of purpose, the Kulin began to transform Coranderrk into a successful farming community for themselves and their children, and for other displaced clans who came to live there.

Coranderrk’s growth: 1863–74

Following the reservation of the land, the Kulin, together with John and Mary Green, enthusiastically embarked upon the task of making Coranderrk their new home. Their vision was to make the station fully self-supporting.

They started by clearing and draining the land, grubbing, ploughing and preparing it for the cultivation of vegetables and fruit trees. They erected a storeroom and a schoolroom, a dormitory for the children, and bark huts for the adults, each with a fireplace. Within ten years, 32 cottages were built in two straight rows forming a central road along a terrace that overlooked the alluvial

flats. They built yards, a stable, a bakery and a brick kiln, erected 4.6 miles (7 kilometres) of fencing to demarcate some of the reserve, placed 160 acres under cultivation, and introduced 450 head of stock to pasture.²⁰

All this was accomplished in the face of significant challenges. Most of the residents were women and children and there were only 20 able-bodied men at the outset who could carry out the heavy work of clearing the thickly forested land. Funds and rations from the Board were minimal, which meant that work was frequently interrupted while the men went out hunting for food or hired themselves out on neighbouring farms to earn money for equipment, seed and stock. To supplement the station's earnings, the women and old men made and sold baskets, rugs and artefacts. John and Mary Green helped by making personal contributions of their own, even though neither received any wages for their work at Coranderrk (John being exclusively employed as Board Inspector). They paid for the first seed potatoes, the first plough and meat rations. They also hired and paid for a farm manager, Thomas Harris, to assist the Kulin with the farm work (see Scene 15, p. 123).

Coranderrk's success was reflected in the quick growth of its population — from 40 people in 1863 to 105 people by mid-1865. As news spread of Coranderrk's achievements, the original Woiwurrung and Taungerong pioneers were soon joined by surviving families from the Dja Dja Wurrung clans to the north-west of Melbourne. Every so often, people were thus reunited with long lost family members. Many women were attracted to the station by the prospect of sharing the company of other women and a renewed sense of community, and the young men were drawn to the station in search of wives.²¹ The next to come to Coranderrk were the surviving families from



Figure 4. Coranderrk in the early days (c.1867). Despite significant challenges, over time, the residents built a thriving community. Photo: Fred Kruger. Source: Museum Victoria (XP1922).

the Wathaurong clans, whose country is west of Melbourne. In 1865, a group of parents sent their children by train and then followed them on foot, arriving at Coranderrk to find their children 'comfortable and happy under the care of Mr Green.' After a four month residence, they returned to inform the rest of their clans about the successful 'blackfellows' township, and on hearing their reports the Wathaurong *Arweet* (clan head) Balybalip moved the whole clan to Coranderrk.²²

Coranderrk reunited the Kulin clans for the first time 'since the great meetings in Melbourne during the 1840s.'²³ As marriages took place and children were born, the population grew, soon forming a flourishing and diverse community. People outside the Kulin confederacy joined Coranderrk too, including Yorta Yorta, Gunai/Kurnai and Burapper men and women, as well as others from even farther afield. Despite the complications this posed, Wonga, and later his younger cousin Barak, shared the Woiwurrung's traditional estate with these clan groups, and the Kulin formed new marriage alliances and kinship ties with the newcomers to the station.

Coranderrk's first decade represented a kind of golden age; a period in which its residents were able to regroup after the initial impact of colonisation and to stake a place for themselves in the new social order. However, this was not a return to living according to pre-colonial ways. The Coranderrk residents knew that their ability to survive required them to adapt to, and to raise their children according to, European ways. Their traditional patterns of land use, lifestyle and many other cultural practices had to be replaced to a large extent by agricultural work, and by Christian and European customs. But in doing so Coranderrk's residents were able to adapt to the new while continuing to practise and maintain key elements of their own culture. They became proficient at farming and growing crops, as well as herding sheep and cattle, while also continuing traditional foraging, hunting and fishing activities. The younger generations learnt to read and write in English, as did some of the adults; but Kulin dialects were also spoken and kept alive. Most of the community practised Christianity and attended regular services with John Green, allowing their children to be baptised, and marrying according to Christian custom. However, traditional kinships systems and structures of political authority also continued to be practised and observed.

European attire and furniture were adopted, and photographs from this period show that the Coranderrk residents took pride in their appearance and dressed with style and elegance. As historian Jane Lydon observes, when we look at their portraits now, 'we are struck by the dignity and strength that radiate from them.'²⁴ But while they adopted elements of European culture, the people of Coranderrk never forgot their respective Aboriginal identities. Collectively, they referred to themselves as 'blackfellows' and never subscribed to the racial distinction which most Europeans imposed on them, such as 'full blacks' and 'half-castes'. The latter were 'their children, born of their women on their land.'²⁵

The ability of the Coranderrk residents to adapt to European ways is reflected in the success with which they turned the station into a productive farm. In 1872, when the Board's Secretary Robert Brough Smyth (1830–89) decided to begin commercial hops farming, they set themselves to the task of making the station profitable. Together with Green and Harris, the Kulin built their own hops kiln of clay and saplings and cut 80 000 hops poles using trees from the bush. At harvest



Figure 5. Coranderrk families fishing at Badger's Creek, Coranderrk (c.1878). Photo: Fred Kruger. Source: State Library of Victoria (H39614/59).



Figure 6. Cricket at Coranderrk (c.1877). Photo: Fred Kruger. Source: State Library Victoria (H33802/23).



Figure 7. Thomas Dunolly aged 11. The literacy skills that Dunolly acquired at Coranderrk became essential in the 'paper war' against the Board from the 1870s. Photo: Charles Walter (c.1866). Source: State Library of Victoria (H91.1/77).

time, the women and children joined the men in the fields; and the results of their hard work were quick to follow. In 1876, the Board was 'pleased to state that the Coranderrk hops [had] realised the highest price of any offered in Melbourne'²⁶ (and in February 1881, Coranderrk would be awarded the 'first order of merit' for hops at the Melbourne International Exhibition). The station was almost self-supporting and it appeared that a model Aboriginal farming community was in the making. Green enthusiastically declared that Coranderrk could eventually be made 'to support 400 or 500 or one half of the whole aboriginal population of the colony.'²⁷

However, this level of independence and economic success was not appreciated by everyone. Coranderrk's industry was starting to compete with local farmers and hops growers, some of whom complained about what they regarded as the unfair advantage enjoyed by the Aborigines at Coranderrk.²⁸ They criticised the Board for financing hops cultivation with public funds intended for the Aborigines' welfare. (In truth, Treasury kept the profits from the first hops harvest and used it to subsidise the Board's management of the other stations.) But the success of Coranderrk did not depend on the Board's meagre subsidies. It originated from the residents' dream for Coranderrk to become a self-sufficient and self-determinant Aboriginal community, inspired by



Figure 8. Robert Wandon aged 11. In maturity, Wandon succeeded Barak as *Ngurungaeta* of the Woiwurrung clans and was a key witness at the Coranderrk Inquiry. Photo: Charles Walter (c.1866). Source: State Library of Victoria (H91.1/76).

Green's promise that if they could make the station support itself, it would never be taken away from them.

John Green's removal

Everything changed in 1874, when the Board orchestrated John Green's removal.

Tensions had been brewing between Green and Board Secretary Smyth over the method of managing the station. While Green was attending to his duties as Inspector at the other Aboriginal stations, Smyth, who had previously praised the success of Coranderrk under Green's tenure, had gradually taken the station's management out of the residents' hands by entrusting the hops plantation to agricultural advisers and allowing them to hire white labour to work in the hops field. This annoyed and alarmed the Kulin, who saw Coranderrk as their own farm. Now they were being told to work under white overseers for no pay. Also, the increased hops work prevented them from dedicating the necessary time to maintain their station, such as tending to their own food crops and maintaining the boundary fences which protected their cattle's pasturage, and therefore their meat supply (see Scene 7, p. 75 & Scene 15, p. 124).



Figure 9. The hops kiln at Coranderrk (c.1870s). Source: Museum Victoria (XP1931).



Figure 10. In the hops fields, Coranderrk (c.1877). Men, women and children worked together during the picking season and Coranderrk's hops fetched some of the highest prices in the colony. Photo: Fred Kruger. Source: State Library of Victoria (H39614/3).

When the Coranderrk residents protested, the Board sought to banish key members of the community who were perceived as stirring up dissent. The station residents regarded this as another direct threat to their autonomy: never before had the decision to punish people by eviction been made by any other authority than that of the Kulin through their own court.²⁹ Green confronted Smyth over his policies, adamant that the station should only employ Aboriginal labour and that the Board should not interfere with his management. But Smyth disagreed with Green's methods and his advocacy for Aboriginal self-determination. He was more concerned with his reputation and with making Coranderrk, now the Board's principal and most valuable reserve, profitable.

Smyth was also succumbing to pressure from influential local land owners to allow the sale of the valuable agricultural land of the reserve, an area described by one visitor as 'first class agricultural land, some of it promising extraordinary richness.'³⁰ For, just as Coranderrk had grown, so too had the settler population and its hunger for land. By 1871, the European population of Victoria had soared to about 750 000, while the Victorian Aboriginal population was as low as 2000. Coranderrk was now surrounded by the township of Healesville (established in 1864), about two miles from its northern boundary, and by white farms all around its perimeter. The populations of Healesville and Coranderrk were almost equal at this stage.

Despite Coranderrk's successful hops growing, many colonists in the district asserted that the land could be made more productive and profitable if owned by whites. Others felt that the sale of the reserve could generate the funds needed to build the proposed railway extension from Lilydale to Healesville. As an article in the newspaper the *Argus* explained, a considerable 'portion of the cost might be met by selling Coranderrk reserve, which consists of 4000 or 5000 acres of excellent land, and is now maintained for the benefit of about 120 blacks and half-castes.'³¹ Some local settlers also argued that most of the Coranderrk residents were not 'full' Aborigines, but 'half-castes', and therefore not entitled to remain on the reserve. The *Argus* published an anonymous article which asked why the Coranderrk children 'with less than a quarter of black blood in their veins' should be allowed to remain at Coranderrk instead of being 'raised in a state school, and given a chance in life away from the stupid and immoral influence of an aboriginal station.'³²

Pressured by powerful lobbies with vested interests in purchasing and settling the prime agricultural land of Coranderrk, the Board began to consider ways of relocating the Kulin. Smyth confided in Green that 'there were influences being brought to bear upon the Board and the Government to have the aborigines removed from Coranderrk ... [and] that they would be well inclined to give way.'³³ But Green and the Kulin had no intention of doing so. Instead, Green opposed Smyth's suggestion that he might try to convince the Kulin to leave the station. His determined, principled stance prompted the Board to remove Green — first from Coranderrk and then from his position as Inspector.

Green's removal was accomplished underhandedly. In August 1874, Smyth visited Coranderrk with a group of Board members in order to investigate the management of the station and seized upon a number of petty complaints as grounds for questioning Green's ability to manage the station. Seven years later, when Green testified at the Inquiry, he revealed that he had been goaded into

offering his resignation as a result of this episode. Not only did the Board subsequently refuse to accept Green's attempt to withdraw his resignation, but by the end of that month, it was already looking for a new manager. As the advert for Green's replacement illustrates, knowledge of Aboriginal culture was not considered a pre-requisite for managing Coranderrk:

Wanted

A person having general knowledge of stock farming and gardening to take charge of an Aboriginal Station.³⁴

The Coranderrk rebellion

The Kulin regarded Green's removal from Coranderrk as a direct threat to their aspirations for autonomy and self-determination. They responded to this event by launching a sustained campaign to protest the Board's takeover of Coranderrk and the ousting of the Greens.

The Board described their campaign as a 'rebellion', suggesting the strength of their fears that Aboriginal quests for self-determination might spread to other reserves. It regarded every protest, strike, insubordination, letter and deputation to ministers as an act of insurgency against the system of governance that had been imposed on Aboriginal peoples during the reserve era, and therefore as a threat to the Board's own existence. Such fears were justified: the Coranderrk campaign helped trigger a Royal Commission into the condition of the Aboriginal population of Victoria in 1877 and four years later, a Parliamentary Inquiry into the Board's management of Coranderrk itself, at which the residents openly called for the removal of the Board.

In her detailed history of these events, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, historian Diane Barwick described the battle between the Coranderrk residents and the Board as a 'paper war'.³⁵ In order to advance their cause, the Kulin successfully adopted the written word and white political tactics such as letters to allies and the press, strikes, petitions and deputations to ministers (see Scene 12, p. 105 & Scene 22, p. 172). While the men formed deputations, the women played a central role in letter writing and campaigning for better conditions at Coranderrk, as well as on the other reserves (see Scene 14, p. 119 & Scene 18, p. 145). The Board, unable to either silence or ignore these protests, responded by intercepting communications, threatening letter writers and members of deputations, and sought to dismiss their petitions by disputing their authenticity. Yet with skilful diplomacy and persistent activism the Coranderrk residents bypassed the Board, as well as the managers hired in Green's place, by taking their case to the highest seats of political authority in the colony.

The Kulin's determination to keep their land at Coranderrk is best illustrated by the numerous deputations they sent to Melbourne to lobby for the assistance of the Chief Secretary over the following years. Wearing their best suits, the men repeatedly walked 120 kilometres to and from Melbourne, which sometimes meant walking through most of the night without food — and on at