Map of Aboriginal reserves in N.S.W. that existed during the tenure of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection/Welfare Board, 1883-1969

Introduction

The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board (APB) was first established in 1883 in response to concerns from the N.S.W. Parliament about the ‘Aboriginal problem’ and the need to ‘provide for the protection and care of the aborigines.’ The Board’s policy of segregation and ‘protection’ resulted in decades of government control over Aboriginal people’s lives, significant restrictions placed on their movements, and what little liberties they were free to enjoy, effectively curtailed. Families and communities were disrupted as they were forced to move to and from reserves and stations created by the Board and children were removed to government or religious-run institutions to be trained as domestic servants, labourers, and farmhands for white families. With the passing of the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act 1940, the APB was replaced by the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB) and a policy of assimilation was pursued and implemented. This period of the Board’s history was characterised by a focus on housing construction initiatives on stations, reserves and town housing programmes as well as additional funding to assist Aboriginal people find employment, maintain and assist them while employed, or otherwise to facilitate the process of assimilation. Most notably, the AWB also oversaw the development of ‘Exemption Certificates’, or ‘dog tags’ as Aboriginal people referred to them. The Exemption Certificates were designed as a reward for Aboriginal people who had cut themselves off from their family, country, and culture and gave them access to social security benefits otherwise unafforded to Aboriginal people.

This history will largely be captured in an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded Discovery Project – The N.S.W. Aborigines/Protection Welfare Board, 1883-1969: A History (DP 150100247). The map, which is the focus of this report, was a by-product of this larger project, and contains the locations of former Aboriginal missions, stations, reserves, children’s homes and some unofficial settlements in N.S.W. during this period.

Methodology

There have been attempts in the past to list all of the reserves in N.S.W. using archival records, including annual reports from the Board. Tobin and McGuigan have both made attempts to list the reserves in N.S.W. using archival records. Goodall suggests that by 1911, there were around 115 reserves in N.S.W., including former missions such as Warangesda, Brewarrina and Cummeragunja.

In response to the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report, the N.S.W. Department of Community Services (DOCS) published the Connecting kin; Guide to Records. The publication included a list of hundreds of Aboriginal reserves that were gazetted in the Government Gazette of N.S.W.

Philip Felton, a former Welfare Board officer, carried out a review of this guide for DOCS in early 2000 and highlighted a number of factual errors and inaccuracies. Instead of the 350 odd reserves listed by DOCS, he estimated that there were somewhere between 600-650 reserves in N.S.W. Unfortunately, Felton passed away a few years ago without publishing his manuscript; however his work was an important foundation for this mapping exercise.

Alongside Felton’s work, the N.S.W. Office of Environment and Heritage State Heritage Inventory contains a map of Aboriginal Places (see Figure 1) and was useful in locating a number of former reserves and unofficial settlements in N.S.W.
The Historical Land Records Viewer (HLRV), which contains over 35,000 early edition parish and pastoral maps online, was another crucial resource for this activity, detailing locations and boundaries of Aboriginal reserves, reserve numbers, acreages and other useful information. An example of a parish map outlining the gazetted details of the Aboriginal station of Warangesda (A.R. 3160 and A.R. 2684) can be seen in Figure 2 below.
Figure 2: New South Wales Department of Lands 1900, ‘Parish of Waddi, County of Boyd, Narrandera Land District, Central Division’, 2nd edn, Department of Lands, Sydney.

Drawing on this range of scholarly work and utilising these various government databases, an Excel database containing the following information was generated:

- Type of reserve, whether it was a mission, station, unmanaged reserve, children’s home, camp or unofficial reserve;
- locality/name;
- Aboriginal Reserve (AR) number (if applicable);
- names associated with the reserve (i.e. local Aboriginal references or names);
- the year during which the reserve was gazetted/established and date of closure;
- years of operation for Aboriginal stations;
- latitude and longitudinal coordinates;
- literary references; and
- parish map references.
Using the free mapping tool Google Earth Pro, a digital map was created using information from this database. What follows next is a breakdown of the various layers of the map, including a summary of the type of reserves that were in existence between the years 1883-1969.

**Missions**

Below is the first layer of the map highlighting the locations of Aboriginal missions that existed during the Board’s tenure. Missions were created by religious institutions or individuals with the aim of ‘Christianising and civilising’ Aboriginal people. By 1894, all of the remaining missions in N.S.W. were taken over by the Board and became Aboriginal stations.

![Aboriginal missions, 1883-1894](image)

**Stations**

Stations were managed reserves, established by the APB and managed by officials appointed by the Board. Some of the earliest stations included Warangesda, Brewarrina and Cummeragunja (all of which were former missions). Aboriginal stations raised crops or livestock. Education, rations, housing, etc. were all provided to the residents. Stations typically had a station manager and a teacher (sometimes the manager was both), with the manager rigidly controlling the lives of all Aboriginal people on the station. Below is the second layer of the map outlining the locations of reserves that operated as stations at various times during the Board’s existence.
Figure 4: Aboriginal stations, 1894-1969, Southern N.S.W.
Figure 5: Aboriginal stations, 1894-1969, Central and Northern N.S.W.
Reserves

Reserves were parcels of land held by the Crown and set aside for Aboriginal people to live on. From 1883 onwards, Aboriginal people living on these reserves received rations but were responsible for their own housing and were generally left unsupervised.11

Figure 6: Aboriginal stations, 1894-1969, North Eastern N.S.W.
Aboriginal reserves, 1883-1969

Figure 7: Aboriginal reserves, 1883-1969, Central and North Western N.S.W.
Figure 8: Aboriginal reserves, 1883-1969, North Eastern N.S.W.
Figure 9: Aboriginal reserves, 1883-1969, South Eastern N.S.W.
Aboriginal Children’s Homes

With the passing of the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1909*, the Board had the power to bind under apprenticeship conditions any child of a ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal person or the child of any person having ‘an admixture of Aboriginal blood’. Thus, Aboriginal children came into the care of the Board by administrative action and were placed in institutions for Aboriginal children or apprenticed out for employment with non-Indigenous families. The three main homes that existed during the Board’s tenure can be seen below.
Camps and unofficial Aboriginal reserves

There were numerous camps, fringe settlements and unofficial reserves in N.S.W. As they were not generally documented in the official record, it is hard to say definitively how many there were unless local community and family histories are taken into account. For the purposes of this project, the camps were mapped according to references from other reports or individuals, as well as those documented in the N.S.W. State Heritage Inventory of Aboriginal places. It is anticipated that the number of ‘camps’ shown on the digital map will increase as these places are uncovered through local historical records and family and community oral histories.
Figure 12: Unofficial Aboriginal reserves, 1850s-1969, North Eastern N.S.W.
Summary

The map provides a dynamic, searchable, and easily accessible research tool as well as a useful publishable product. Additionally, there is an opportunity for this map to be an effective family history resource. Aboriginal people doing their own family histories, or the AIATSIS Family History Unit supporting individuals and families doing their family histories, could utilise this map. The map provides the framework for adding further details from the AIATSIS archive and community archives, including links to photographs, audio or visual material as well as specific reports or publications that relate to a particular reserve. Input from community will be essential to the process of building on and refining the map. Local community histories (including oral histories), as well as input from Aboriginal land councils will be integral to the accuracy of the names of both the official and unofficial reserves, the historical experiences Aboriginal people had living on the reserves and various fringe camps, and the contemporary relationship they and their descendants might have with the area.

1 Aborigines Protection Act 1909
4 Tobin, P 1972, Aboriginal land rights in N.S.W.: demands, law and policy, Abschol, Carlton, VIC and A McGuigan 1984, Aboriginal reserves in N.S.W.: a land rights research aid: a listing from archival material of former Aboriginal reserves together with information required to access them, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, Sydney.
References

- Aborigines Protection Act 1909

- Felton, P 2013, ‘The “lost” Aboriginal reserves of New South Wales: what became of the former Aboriginal reserves of New South Wales, 1883-1980?’


- McGuigan, A 1984, Aboriginal reserves in N.S.W.: a land rights research aid: a listing from archival material of former Aboriginal reserves together with information required to access them, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, Sydney.

- New South Wales Department of Community Services 1998, Connecting kin: guide to records: a guide to help people separated from their families search for their records, New South Wales Department of Community Services, Sydney


