

HORNET BANK MASSACRE**October 27, 1857**

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(Read at the meeting of the Society on July 25, 1957.)

The hundredth anniversary of the Hornet Bank Station massacre is October 27, 1857, when eleven white people were murdered by the blacks in the Upper Dawson River locality, then in the Colony of New South Wales. It sent a revulsion of horror throughout the settled districts of the Colony, especially in the northern parts where settlement was extending into areas occupied by hostile blacks.

The original holding where the massacre took place was named "Goongarry" in the Leichhardt district. It was taken up by Andrew Scott who had come out to New South Wales from Scotland in the early 1840's. He tendered for the holding on September 8, 1853, and it was accepted on April 1, 1858, and a lease was entered into on May 30, 1858. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that Scott would be on the holding at least twelve months before he tendered for it as it was the practice in those days for a squatter to find out the full value of a run before he applied for possession. He stocked the station with sheep and soon found out that he was in the centre of an area occupied by a hostile tribe of blacks known as the Jimans. They roamed over about two thousand square miles of country and were known to be fierce and treacherous.

Scott was a man who did not trust the blacks at any time; an early incident in his occupation of this property was when he had a shepherd speared and killed and fourteen hundred sheep were driven off by the blacks. They were in the middle of a great feast when they were surprised by Scott and an officer of the Native Police and his troopers. They rescued the flock and meted out summary justice to the marauders. It was after this experience that he changed the name of the run to "Hornet Bank" as a result of another attack,

but not from blacks this time—but hornets, which left him temporarily blinded.

In March, 1854, he leased Hornet Bank to John Fraser who had a wife and family of five sons and four daughters, but the records of the Lands Department, Brisbane, show no mention of the name Fraser as an occupant. His occupation was stated to be that of a shipwright—a trade of value where heavy timber was used for station buildings. Fraser died later in the year in Ipswich suffering from pneumonia and presumably the lease was carried on by his widow. An odd feature of this occupation was that Andrew Scott had leased Hornet Bank to the Frasers before he was in actual possession of the run himself, and also why should anybody bother to lease a run from another leaseholder when there was so much good country suitable for grazing in the neighbourhood, awaiting selection. Perhaps it was because of amenities and improvements already established, such as the station house, huts, woolshed and yards. Andrew Scott advised the Frasers not to trust the blacks at all and by no means should they be allowed to approach the station which would make them familiar with all its operations. He had given them his system of treatment, which was, certain places on the run were marked off, a ring was made around the homestead and they were not allowed to come any closer. The Frasers disregarded this advice and made friends with the blacks. They had been previously on stations on the Darling Downs where the blacks were of a more friendly nature, as they had rendered assistance to the settlers there. One blackfellow on Hornet Bank in particular had been employed on stations and was regarded by the Fraser family as being civilised and a friend of white people. He was favoured by a name which appears on some records as “Boney” and others as “Joey” or “Ballee,” and it turned out later that he was a traitor and in league with the savages. As there have been many descriptions of the massacre and some of a contradictory nature, I have been able to secure two newspaper reports of the period, one being the “Moreton Bay Courier,” Brisbane, dated November 11, 1857, and the “North Australian,” published in Ipswich on November 10, 1857, both reports are almost identical

and could have been written by the same person. I include that of the "Moreton Bay Courier" only, and in its full text.

"Moreton Bay Courier," November 11, 1857.

Massacre by the Blacks

"Last week intelligence was received of a fearful outrage committed by the blacks under circumstances of peculiar atrocity. A definite plan of wholesale massacre appears to have formed which, with a single exception, was effectively carried out. Of twelve persons residing on the station of Mrs. Fraser at Hornet Bank on the Upper Dawson eleven were barbarously murdered. One only escaped to tell the dreadful tale. The family consisted of Mrs. Fraser, five sons and four daughters. Mr. Neagle also resided in the house as tutor. The eldest son was in Ipswich. From the statement of Sylvester Fraser, a youth about fifteen, the sole witness, it appears that on the morning of Tuesday 27th ultimo, about daybreak he was awakened by the shouts of assailants. On going to ascertain from whence the noise proceeded he found that the house was surrounded by about one hundred armed blacks. Finding that they had obtained an entrance, he seized a gun and presented it at one of them, when he was disabled by a blow from a waddie. He then contrived to secrete himself beneath the bed. His three brothers were then killed, either while still sleeping or before they had time to arise. Their ages were twenty-two, sixteen and seven, respectively. The murderers then proceeded to a hut close by, and dispatched the two shepherds who were living there. Mrs. Fraser and her daughters were afterwards drawn from the house under promise of security. This proved treacherous. After being subjected to gross insult and cruelty, they also were slaughtered, the youngest girl being only four years of age, the eldest about twenty. No provocation seems to have been given to the perpetrators of these acts of reckless cruelty. Nothing had transpired to excite feelings of revenge in the breasts of the savages. Their object was apparently plunder. When they had as they thought completed the work of destruction, they robbed the house of such things as they desired, and taking with them a flock of sheep departed. As

soon as they were fairly off, Master Fraser left his perilous position and hastened to Eurombah station, where he met with Lieutenant Powell and a detachment of Native Police. Pursuit was promptly made after the fugitive natives when they were overtaken after a journey of about ten miles. Unfortunately, by making a precipitate retreat into the scrub, they were lost sight of, and thus escaped. It is supposed that one of the party was a blackfellow who had been living with the family for some years who had left about three or four weeks previously, as young Fraser believes that he distinctly heard his voice, and the whole of their proceedings indicated some acquaintance with the family."

I have been able to secure details about the death of the victims from the Registrar-General's Department, Brisbane, which I have not seen in any published report. They were as follows:

Martha Fraser, aged 43; John Fraser, 23; David Fraser, 16; James Fraser, 6 years and 8 months; Elizabeth Fraser, 19; Mary Fraser, 11; Jane Fraser, 9; Charlotte Fraser, 3; Henry Neagle, 27, a tutor; R. S. Newman, 30, shepherd; and Benmado—no age or initials—a hut-keeper. The "North Australian" newspaper spells the latter's name Bernangle and describes him as a German. The Registrar of the deaths was W. H. Wiseman of Mt. Athelstane, Fitzroy River. He was the Land Commissioner for that part of the Colony and being a Registrar of Births and Deaths would be one of his public duties. The survivors of the family were William Fraser, the eldest, and Sylvester, the one who escaped, about fourteen or fifteen years of age. William Fraser was absent in Ipswich which was two hundred and twenty miles from Hornet Bank. The boy Sylvester Fraser, after reporting the murder and attending the obsequies of his relations, then set out to inform his brother of what had happened in his absence. It was a three-day ride with the use of two horses. William Fraser was loading drays of supplies for the station and also the necessities for a wedding which was to take place between his eldest sister and a Wide Bay squatter in the very near future, the date being fixed and the clergyman engaged for the event. The "Moreton Bay Courier" in the same issue that

reported the massacre had a leading article dealing with the outrage with a heading of two words—"The Blacks." Here are a few extracts:

"They condemn the policy of the Government (N.S.W.) for reducing the Native Police Force; they also claim that an efficient Native Police Force would be a protection for both whites and blacks. Retribute justice should fall with discrimination and on the guilty only.

"We are therefore bound to discover the guilty and failing this we apprehend we are not justified in killing those who may be innocent.

"Can we wonder that the Aborigine turns upon the Intruder when pinched by hunger and depraved by the vices which the white man introduces with his power."

Following the leading article of the "Moreton Bay Courier" dated November 11, 1857, its contemporary, the "North Australian," of Ipswich, replied to the "Courier" with a blistering article condemning the Brisbane paper for its weak-kneed attitude in dealing with hostile blacks. They claimed that strong measures should be taken against them and in the area where the outrages were committed. Two squatters, William Miles, of Kinnoul Station in the Leichhardt district, and Thomas Richard Boulton, of Eurombah Station (who was the Frasers' nearest neighbour), made statements which were published in the paper stating that they had viewed the bodies as they laid around the homestead, and they applied to W. B. Yaldwyn, of Taroom, who was a magistrate as well as a squatter, for advice and assistance. Yaldwyn refused their request and they buried the bodies without any official investigation being held. Other correspondents entered into the fray and C. R. Haly, of Taabinga, and John Scott, of the Leichhardt district, condemned the lack of action by the responsible authorities, and they would be those in charge of the Native Police. One correspondent gave an instance where a band of Native Police in charge of a white officer found themselves with only one round of ammunition among the lot, and they came upon a mob of blacks fully two hundred in number already armed and painted for battle. They refused the blacks' challenge and turned their horses and galloped

away. This event occurred about a week before the Hornet Bank murder and the inference taken was the police were afraid to attack, thus encouraging the blacks to carry out their depredations. In reading these comments in the press it seems that the law of libel did not exist at this period or was very weak in its application. Incidentally, the "North Australian" had a life of only three years from 1856 to 1859, whilst the "Courier," with a couple of alterations in name and designation, is still going strong after a hundred and eleven years of publication.

On receiving news of the massacre William Fraser returned to Hornet Bank from Ipswich, and it is recorded that in view of the graves of his mother, brothers and sisters, with a tomahawk in his hand, which was alleged to be the weapon of murder, he avowed he would not rest until the murder of his relatives was avenged by himself. There was a report in circulation after the murder, and it has reached to the present day, that William Fraser had a licence to shoot blacks for a full twelve months from the date of the murder as a measure of justice for the crime committed. There is nothing to show that he was given this right by the New South Wales Government, and it is certain that no Government would allow him that right. It can be taken for granted that Fraser would carry out this act of revenge as the blacks in those days were regarded by many settlers as vermin—the same as dingoes—and they would receive no mercy from him. It is believed that later William Fraser joined the Police Force and became a Sub-inspector of the Native Police. It would be interesting to know if there are any descendants of the Jiman tribe alive to-day. Fraser died in 1901.

The article by the "Moreton Bay Courier" shows there was a difference of opinion about how the blacks should be treated. The general feeling in the minds of a majority of settlers was the blacks were a menace to settlement and should be destroyed. There was also a reasoning among the blacks as to how the white invaders should be treated, and there is no doubt that a common policy must have been formed by them. It has to be remembered that the custom of triennial feasts of the Bunya or Bonyi nuts was being carried out

during the advance of white settlement. These gatherings had been going on for centuries before ever white people came to settle in Australia. These feasts were of a ceremonial nature and they were held on the Bunya Mountains principally, and on other ranges where Bunya Pines grew. On well-formed and mature trees, some as high as one hundred feet, these nuts grew in clusters and they took three years to form and ripen. When the harvest time was approaching the tribes declared a policy of neutrality and friendliness in their areas to allow all blacks to attend the feasting. Some tribes came from as far as three hundred miles from the grounds. These feasts lasted for weeks, the nuts being nutritious and were usually roasted in ashes, and in the period conferences were held by the tribes and their laws and customs were revised and events and incidents during the preceding three years would be discussed.

The spread of white settlement would be one of the subjects brought up and experiences would be related, the clashes between the whites and the blacks, the shooting and spearing, and the results added up. One particular offence by whites was settling on sacred areas which the blacks had set aside for the purpose of animal, bird and wild fowl breeding for food requirements, also the despoiling of "bora" grounds where the black man's cultural customs were carried out. The white man's occupation would be studied and noted with interest, the convict settlement at Brisbane would be remembered from its inception in 1824 to the free settlement which took place in 1842. The convict settlement was no real menace to the blacks as it was confined to a small area and the white man showed no inclination to move from the river. It was when white settlement took place in the country outside Brisbane that it became a black man's problem. It was common knowledge among the settlers in the "fifties" of the last century that a declaration of war was made on them, and it was believed that the decision was made at one of the Bunya feasts. A succession of attacks took place in the Burnett, Wide Bay and Port Curtis districts when shepherds were killed and flocks driven off. The Hornet Bank massacre would be the worst up to the time it was perpetrated, and it was suspected

that the plans for the deed were aided and abetted by some blacks who were acquainted with white people's habit of living. Leichhardt on his first exploring expedition in 1844 passed through the Upper Dawson country in the neighbourhood of Hornet Bank, and on one occasion he encountered a tribe of blacks who were shy on being approached, but among them was one who had some knowledge of the English language. It convinced Leichhardt that he had been in contact at some time or other with white people. There were also other instances where deserters from the Black Police joined the tribes and they would use propaganda and plan a hostile campaign against the whites. These preparations would be rehearsed before the event took place, and proof of this can be taken from the reminiscences of Mrs. Campbell-Praed who wrote a book entitled "My Australian Girlhood." Mrs. Campbell-Praed was the daughter of a pioneer squatter in the Burnett district named Thomas Lodge Murray-Prior, who later became a Minister of the Crown. She was a native of Bromelton Station, originally called "Bungroopin," in the Beaudesert district in 1849. Later in life she published several books on life in Queensland and was regarded as an authority on the habits of the aborigines. She recounts an incident which happened when she was only eight years of age on Hawkwood Station just before the Hornet Bank murder. Her only playmates on the station were the black piccaninnies in the aboriginal camp. One of them, a boy named Waggoo, about her own age, told her that a corroboree was to take place on the following night, and he asked her to come and see it with him which would have to be done in hiding. She said she dare not ask her father and mother for permission as she was certain it would be refused. She was so interested that she sneaked out of her house when she was supposed to be in bed and accompanied Waggoo and another boy to the camp across the river. Out of sight of the revellers she viewed a horrible scene. There were rows of fires with naked warriors pipe-clayed and adorned with white cockatoo feathers, who were chanting and flourishing their spears and later uttering harsh cries. She recognised the performance as a rehearsal of an attack on some white man's station. There were mock sleepers

lying around—when they awakened they showed signs of horror and alarm. The victims begged for mercy and the next scene was of living terror, rude effigies of women were set up, and saluted with screams of horrible laughter, then the effigies were thrown down and beaten with nulla nullas. The child turned sick at the horrible sight and fled for home and her bed and was afraid next morning to tell her parents of her adventure. In later years, in describing the incident in one of her books, she says, "I have often thought that had I described the ghastly performance to my parents the Hornet Bank murder might have been averted." A further description by Mrs. Campbell-Praed about the attack, and what helped the success of it was the traitor "Boney" who quietened the dogs on the station and let the savages in. Another record says that when Mrs. Fraser appealed to "Boney" to save their lives for the friendship shown him in the past, "Boney's" reply was, "Never mind, Missus, soon you be dead." In the savage mind apparently death was a consolation and an escape from the troubles of this world. Sylvester Fraser, the youth who survived the attack, was deeply affected, and suffered shock for the rest of his life—no doubt from both the blow he received on his head and from the loss of his loved ones. He continued to follow the pastoral industry in different parts of Queensland, but his mental faculties were weak and were a great handicap in his work. Another feature of this murder was revealed by the criminal assault on white women before being killed. This was the first time such action was known to be carried out by the wild blacks, and the Press of the day, after quoting various opinions and records, attributed this to something learned from the white man's civilisation. At this period it has to be remembered that the fight for separation was being waged in the area which is now Queensland. The New South Wales Government of the day was somewhat diffident about spending money for anything whether it was protection for settlers or improvements for their welfare when they would lose all benefit from revenues the new Colony would take over. Separation took place on December 10, 1859, just over two years after this horrible massacre took place.

Since the foregoing paper was written and read at the July meeting at Newstead House, I visited "Hornet Bank" Station on October 27, 1957, the occasion being the unveiling of a plaque to the memory of the Fraser family, who were the victims of the massacre committed by the blacks on that same date in 1857.

In seeking the real reason for the murder whilst I was compiling the paper, I was left in no doubt, after viewing the situation, the homestead was built on the high bank of a beautiful lagoon which must have been much prized by the blacks as a camping ground.

Whether they used the high side or low side, it would be teeming with fish and the water would be of the best.

It would not matter to the blacks what type of whites settled there, whether the Scotts who ringed the station and kept them away, or the Frasers who allowed them into the home area — both would be trespassers on sacred rites and they would have only one object in view, and that was to get rid of them.