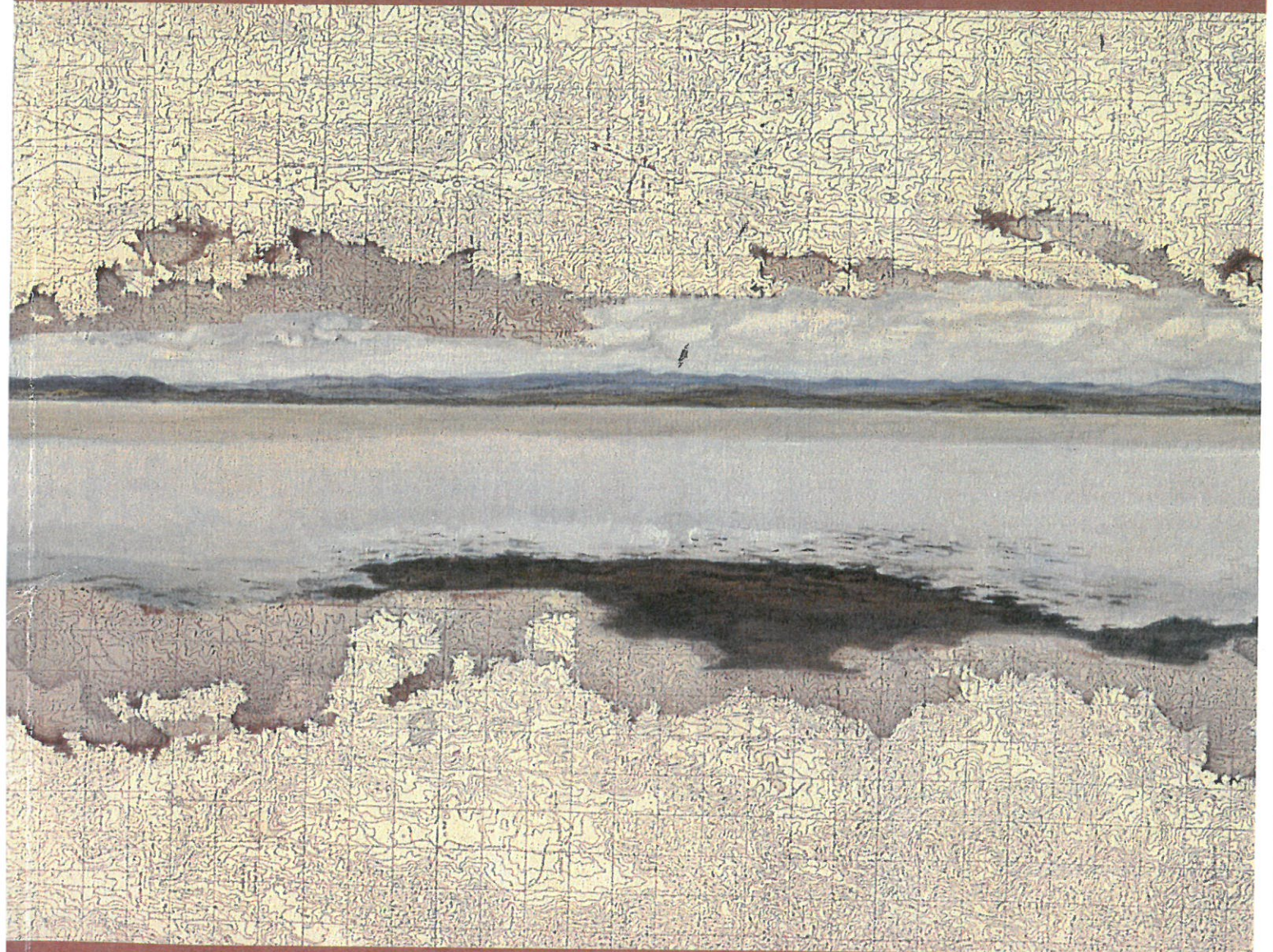


Weereewaa History Series Volume 1

The Kamberri

A History of Aboriginal Families
in the ACT and Surrounds



Ann
Jackson Nakano
Aboriginal Monograph 8

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The Kamberri

The Kamberri

A history from the records of Aboriginal families in
the Canberra–Queanbeyan district and surrounds
1820–1927, and historical overview 1928–2001

by Ann Jackson-Nakano

Aboriginal History Monograph 8

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Disclaimer

This is a work of scholarship and as such the author exercises her right to academic and intellectual freedom in assessing and interpreting the historical evidence she has collected over a ten-year period of research.

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Plate 1: Breeding Ground, Lake George by Christine James 1998.

Reproduced by permission of the artist, with grateful thanks.

Dedication

This volume is dedicated to Kamberri families in the 19th and 20th centuries and to their ancestors and descendants. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to four generations of Kamberri men who carried the name Harry Williams:

+

Harry 'Crow' Williams (1946–1994).
his father, Harry Douglas Williams (1923–1979)
his grandfather, Harry 'Lightning' Williams (1888–1959)
and his great-grandfather 'Black Harry' Williams (1837–1921).

+



Plate 2: Kamberri group photo taken at Lanyon circa 1896

Kamberri group: Sarah McCarthy Duncan (seated left), Dick Lowe (standing right) and some of their children, with Nellie Hamilton (seated right with dog) and King Billy of the south coast (standing left). Sarah was the daughter of Nanny and the granddaughter of a union between a Kamberri woman and James Ainslie. King Billy was the third husband of Nellie Hamilton. Taken in front of the scarred tree at Lanyon, circa 1896. From the De Salis Family Collection, reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.

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*Awake to the reality of life and know what you are in the
context of your surroundings.*

Gautama Buddha

Acknowledgments

My first acknowledgment is to Kamberri ancestors, in whose traditional country I live and work and to whom I pay my respects.

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Ironically, perhaps, I must also acknowledge and thank the Kamberri's non-Aboriginal contemporaries for their efforts in keeping alive over a period of 180 years or so, through oral and written histories, tales of Kamberri individuals and family groups and their descendants. These include James Ainslie, John Blundell, William Bluett, Martin Brennan, William Broadribb, James Cooper, William Davis, George De Salis, John Gale, John Glover, Mick House, Edward Lee, Samuel Shumack and members of the Bagnall, Bootes, Brayshaw, Brooks, Brown, Campbell, Cotter, Crawford, Cummins, Franklin, Gillespie, Green, Gregory, Kenny, Maxwell, McCarthy, McDonald, McKeahnie, Moore, Mowle, Murray, Oldfield, Osborne, Sykes, Tong, Webb and Wright families.

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I pay tribute here also to that inspirational storyteller and multidisciplinary, Greg Denning. His work influences mine and I hope the contents of this volume are the better for it.

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Ann Jackson-Nakano
Canberra, Australia
October 2001

Foreword

The main focus of each volume in the Weereewaa History Series is on an Aboriginal group that once claimed Lake George (which Aboriginal peoples referred to as *Weereewaa*) as part of their country. This volume, the first in the series, includes an introduction to the history of Weereewaa and to the groups that once lived around it, and focuses primarily on the Kamberri, who resided to the west and southwest of the lake. Much of this district now incorporates the Australian Capital Territory. The name of the capital, Canberra, was derived from the name of the place and the people who once claimed it as part of their territory.

I do not pretend that this is an Aboriginal community history written from the perspective of an Aboriginal person. Traditionally, Aboriginal groups would not have used written records to record their past, nor would their histories try to be so precise in linking the modern generations of an area with those of its ancestors. The dialectic of change was no doubt as evident in pre-European¹ Australia as it has been in human history all over the world, even if it was not as abrupt as it was from 1820 for the community I refer to in this volume as the Kamberri. As I have indicated in the main body of this work, change *per se* was not an alien concept to the Kamberri. Their country would have expanded and contracted due to intermarriage, war and other forces of change and, in historical times, there is evidence to suggest they made conscious decisions on their response even to the settlement of Europeans on their lands. Historians interpret evidence differently from anthropologists and researchers from other disciplines mainly because the focus of history is change rather than continuity, although we remain interested in the dynamics between the two.

Most readers would have no idea of the size of the crowd reading over my shoulder as I write this. In the course of researching and writing this history, the pressure of modern politics has been exerted on me time and again from various quarters but, so far, I have resisted the temptation to give in to those pressures and sacrifice the *historical* record.

When I first started researching the history of Aboriginal families in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounds, back in 1991, there was general acceptance in the community consciousness of this region that the 'original Aboriginal people' had all 'died out' in 1897. My task, as I explain in more detail in the Introduction, was to prove otherwise with the support of European-Australian historical records as evidence. When I reached the point in time at which people and events still survived in the living memories of my older informants I began cross-checking their stories, with

1. I am using the term 'European' in this volume initially to refer to a people whose culture and influences evolved in Europe. In later chapters I begin to refer to Australians of European descent, whose culture is still the dominant one in Australia, to distinguish them from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. I mean no disrespect to Australians of European descent by using this term. The distinctions are necessary in the context of this volume.

their permission, with the information in the records. This was a painstaking exercise that took a decade to piece together. There are those, I know, who feel left out of this process. If I had the choice and the time, my preference would be to spend yet another ten years or more trying to recreate with greater accuracy a moving picture of the past. But I have been urged to publish the evidence I have collected so far, and I am doing so only on condition that readers accept that this is still a work in progress. This is a work of scholarship that also engages relevant Aboriginal people who have been quite willing to have the accuracy or otherwise of their own stories put to the test in the interests of reconstructing historical truths and dispensing with historical lies.

While it is true that my historical research and genealogical databases have been utilised to support Aboriginal land claims in the area under study in modern times,¹ the main focus of the research presented in this volume has never changed. My main aim has always been to build a foundation of historical evidence that links Aboriginal families still living in the modern Australian Capital Territory and surrounds today with ancestors who were in the same area when the Europeans first arrived in their country. In the context of whether or not such families were 'landholding groups' or otherwise, anthropologists and other researchers might interpret the available evidence differently and therefore arrive at different conclusions.

In this volume, my focus is on Aboriginal families who can demonstrate a continuous link with Aboriginal individuals² or groups who were in the district southwest of Weereewaa at the time Europeans first arrived at the lake and began settling in this region. Such links are supported by historical evidence. By so doing, I do not mean to exclude others who believe they have claims to custodianship of this district. It is neither my role nor responsibility to get involved in modern Aboriginal community disputes. I have emphasised continuously that my main aim is to provide historical proof that, far from becoming extinct in 1897, Kamberri families survived and even increased their population. To that end, it is necessary for me only to profile families for whom there is strong historical evidence of such survival.

My use of the term 'Kamberri'

Aboriginal family groups within the Canberra-Queanbeyan district and surrounds were known by many different names in the early 19th century, but local Europeans who knew them best referred to them as the Kamberri – also spelled Kgamberri, Kamberra and even Nganbra. I use this term for the group under study from the very beginning of the volume to provide consistency, even though I am aware that the group was referred to by a variety of names throughout the 19th century. Such names would have been used in a variety of contexts. It is the preference of descendants that I use the term *Kamberri* to refer to the people and *Kamberra* to refer to the geographical heart of their country, which was centred around the area now referred to as the Acton Peninsula.

I use the term 'group' to describe the Kamberri at the suggestion of Dr Nicolas Peterson, a senior anthropologist, who advised me of the complications of using alternative terms such as 'clan', 'tribe', 'mob', 'horde' or even 'community'.²

Some Kamberri individuals intermarried with neighbouring *Ngunawal*³ families from the 1880s and some descendants of such marriages re-identify in modern times as *Ngunnawal*, using the double 'n' spelling. It is not unusual for Aboriginal people – or, indeed, any human being – to have multiple identities. While maintaining their distinct association with the ACT and surrounds, members of Kamberri-Ngunnawal⁴ families might also identify personally as Ngunawal, Walgalu or even Wiradjuri through their familial links to these other communities. The historical evidence available suggests that individuals within 19th century Kamberri groups also had personal links to other groups and rights to country outside those of their main group due to their kinship connections. It is quite possible, therefore, that the concept of multiple identities within the modern Kamberri-Ngunnawal group is an example of continuity rather than change.

As an historian I am limited to presenting the story of the Kamberri as analysed from the available historical (mostly written) evidence, which is derived predominantly from European-Australian records. As in the case of many individuals and communities, Kamberri descendants had lost track of much of their history due to the historical forces that (often deliberately) destroyed many of their traditions. Many Kamberri descendants today have only fractured knowledge of people and events in their past and have responded with fascination to the volumes of historical information available in the European records about their ancestors. We have worked together to present a version of their history that reflects both their own fragmented memories and information available in extant records. These historical records provide an important knowledge transfer, however inadequate and, at times, inaccurate, and serve to provide unbroken links through non-traditional means to Kamberri children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren down the family lines to the modern era. I have consulted closely with members of the Kamberri-Ngunnawal community during the course of researching and writing this volume and have been assured by them that, overall, this is a version of their history they are prepared to accept. At some stage in the near future they will produce their own historical stories.

Black Harry Williams and Black Dick Lowe

Almost from the time the first European accounts of the district west of Weereewaa were published, claims have been made that the area either never had an Indigenous population or, if it did, that those groups soon became extinct. With the support of the voluminous historical evidence available, I will demonstrate a very different historical reality. I will show that there are Aboriginal families living in the Australian

2. Peterson, Nicolas, 1999, pers. comm.

3. There are various spellings for this linguistic name.

4. This is a term that has come into recent usage.

Capital Territory and surrounds today who have close links with Aboriginal families who witnessed the first Europeans arriving in their country. .

From the year 1897, when the Kamberri were alleged to have become extinct,⁵ I have concentrated my research on two 19th century Kamberri families whose tracks into the 20th and 21st centuries have been easier to follow than others: 'Black Harry'⁶ and Ellen Williams, and 'Black Dick' and Sarah Lowe.

The descendants of Black Harry Williams and Black Dick Lowe alone are so numerous that it would be impossible to include them all in this volume. I am currently compiling detailed genealogies for each of these and other relevant families which will not be available until they are complete and until I have the permission of each living person for use of their information for the family tree. Subject to consultation with each family, I will make these publications available on either a limited or a general basis. The genealogical research I have compiled so far proves that, far from becoming extinct in 1897, or even earlier according to some accounts, Kamberri survivors began increasing their population from that time.

The main consultant representatives of the families profiled in this volume from the early 20th century are Nurri Arnold Williams, the Coordinator of the Ngannawal Local Aboriginal Land Council in Queanbeyan; Matilda Williams House, Chair of the Land Council; Harry 'Crow' Williams (to whose memory this book is partly dedicated); Rosemary Connors nee Williams⁷ (now deceased); Elizabeth Homer nee Grovenor; Pearl Williams nee Simpson (now deceased); Bruce Merritt, a Lowe descendant and member of the Ngannawal ACT & District Indigenous Peoples' Association; Paul House; and a number of other members of the now greatly extended family groups who share Black Harry Williams and Black Dick Lowe as an ancestor. I thank you all for your cooperation and support.

In later chapters of this volume I have indicated also how and when Indigenous Australians coming to the capital from all over Australia began bypassing local traditional power structures in Kamberri country to assert issues relating to national Indigenous sovereignty. I have also documented the emergence of distinct *Ngannawal* and *Ngannawal* family groups from 1967 onwards.

No group calls itself by the name of Kamberri any more (although, in recent times, Kamberri descendants have begun to refer to themselves as Kamberri-Ngannawal), but such a distinct group lived once — and still does in the spirit of its renamed descendants. Hopefully, after you read this volume, members of this group will continue to live within you, too, and in our communal memories.

5. This is the year that other researchers have claimed the Aboriginal people of the Canberra-Queanbeyan district became extinct because the 'last of them' passed away in Queanbeyan. I refute this conclusion using the evidence presented in the text.

6. These are the names they were known as by their European contemporaries and, with the permission of descendants, I have retained these names in the text.

About the author

Ann Jackson-Nakano (BA, M Litt) is an English-born writer, journalist, historian and media and public affairs consultant. She worked as a journalist and freelance foreign correspondent in Japan for eleven years and published a number of books before arriving in Australia in December 1984.

Ann became interested in the Ngunnawal people while writing on Lake George (Weereewaa) in 1991. According to all contemporary accounts, the Ngunnawal (Ngunawal) had 'died out' with the death of a Queanbeyan woman, Nellie Hamilton, in 1897. With the support of the administrators of the Ngunnawal Local Aboriginal Land Council, over the next two years Ann unearthed historical evidence to prove that, far from becoming extinct, the people who now refer to themselves as Ngunnawal or Ngunawal greatly increased their population and descendants still live in or near their ancestral country.

Her M Litt thesis, 'Death and resurrection of the Ngunnawal: a living history', coincided in early 1994 with the implementation of the first Native Title Act. In 1997, she was asked by the Ngunnawal Native Title Committee and the New South Wales Land Council to provide evidence that confirmed the historical association of the Ngunnawal with the Australian Capital Territory and surrounds and linked descendants with their ancestors in this region through a substantial genealogical data base that is still a work in progress. Based on this historical research, the ACT Government opted to negotiate a regional agreement (signed in April 2001) with the Ngunnawal outside the Native Title process that offered the Ngunnawal Joint Management of Namadgi National Park.

This volume on the Kamberri is Ann's first academic publication. She was an Honorary Harold White Fellow with the National Library of Australia in 1996, and a Native Title Research Fellow in the Native Title Unit of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in 1997. From 1998 she has been running her own small business as a media and public affairs consultant.

Introduction

The central concern of volume I of this history series is to demonstrate that:

- Aboriginal groups who resided in the area that is now the Australian Capital Territory and surrounds at the time of first European contact did not 'die out' or 'become extinct' with the death of Nellie Hamilton, the so-called 'last of the Queanbeyan tribe', in 1897;⁷
- they not only survived but increased in number; and
- many of their descendants still live in their ancestral country.⁸

Who are the Kamberri?

According to the records left by the first waves of European explorers, travellers, settlers and administrators who wrote about Aboriginal groups in the district southwest of Weereewaa [Lake George], there is a consistency in the names of the individual Aboriginal people they came to know. They called the groups to whom these individuals belonged by various names but those who knew them best in the earliest period of settlement referred to them as the Kamberri, Kgamberri, Nganbra or even Nganbra-Pialligo and became able to distinguish members of this group from their frequent visitors from other areas.⁹

In Part I, I trace the history of the Kamberri according to the historical documents I have located so far for the period from the 1820s to the 1860s when the first generation of Kamberri who witnessed the arrival of Europeans in their country had mostly passed away.

In Part II, I continue tracking Kamberri survivors through time from the 1860s to the 1920s. During this period, new waves of European migrants who knew little or nothing about the Kamberri arrived in the Canberra-Queanbeyan district. Local

7. The argument that Nellie Hamilton was the last of the 'Queanbeyan tribe' or, following the publication of Norman Tindale's *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* in 1974, the last of the 'Ngunawal' or 'Ngunnawal', has been put forward by a number of writers, historians and even anthropologists, most notably Bell, DR, 1975, *From moth hunters to black trackers: an interpretive analysis of the black and white experience*, p 1; Gillespie, L, in various publications e.g. *Aborigines of the Canberra Region*, 1984, pp 54-65; and Lea-Scarlett, E, 1968 *Queanbeyan District and People*, p 21.

8. It must be noted that there are, in fact, numerous claimants to this area in modern times and I do not wish to interfere with Aboriginal community business by seemingly supporting one group's or family's claim over another. This volume on the Kamberri is a work of scholarship, which means it relies mainly on historical documents as a source of evidence. The use of the word 'scholarship' should not be misinterpreted to mean that I consider this approach a cleverer form of relating history than a traditional Aboriginal one. It is up to Indigenous claimants to persuade each other of their superior historical claims to this country. At one time such arguments might have been settled through battles or through agreements forged at a corroboree. In modern times, physical battles for leadership within a community have been replaced by the superiority of numbers voting at community council elections, but agreements about land and other matters between community councils still rely to a large degree on evidence. Hence, in reality, in modern times the Indigenous and non-Indigenous approach to compiling an Aboriginal community history are not so dissimilar.

observers who wrote about the Aboriginal groups in the district under study began referring to Kamberri groups, as some earlier observers had also done, according to the areas local to their residences. Thus, in this period, Kamberri families became known as the Queanbeyan, Ginninderra or Murrumbidgee 'Blacks' even though they all belonged to one core group. In the first 20 years of the 20th century, most of the country of the Kamberri became the Federal Capital Territory and the national seat of government. At that time, the non-Aboriginal population of the Canberra district soared, with more new settlers arriving who knew nothing about the local Kamberri survivors and cared less.

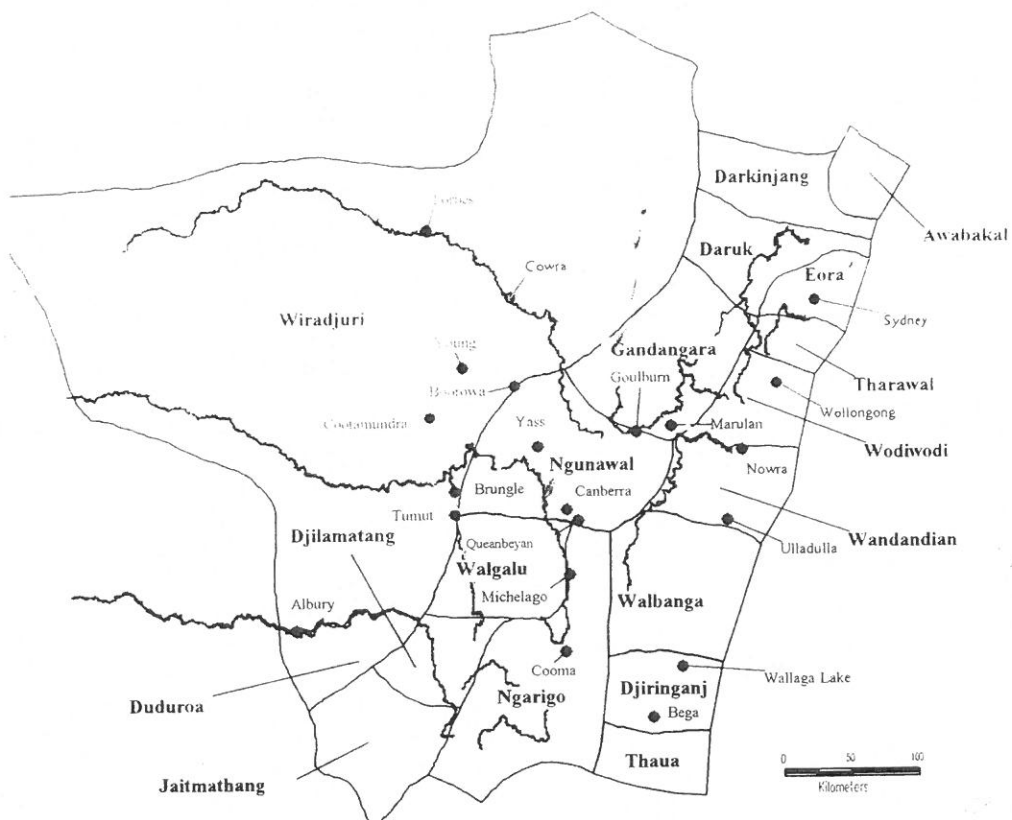
In Part III, I present an historical overview of the fate of Kamberri descendants from the 1920s to the modern day with an explanation of how and why they re-emerged as an affiliate group of the neighbouring Ngunawal using the distinctive double 'n' spelling of Ngunnawal.

In the latter part of this volume, I have concentrated mainly on Black Dick Lowe and Black Harry Williams as they were the last known Kamberri to maintain their connections to their country. Descendants of both these families maintain the connections of their paternal ancestors to the Canberra-Queanbeyan districts in modern times. Black Harry's descendants in particular can assert a continuous family connection at least from the time their ancestor entered the historical records to modern times.

I acknowledge that there is still much we do not know about the Kamberri. There are still a number of historical gaps in the text, at which point I have been forced to use my imagination and speculate in order to move the narrative on. These gaps mark the spots where further historical research is required. It would have been my preference to hold up the publication of this volume until such time as I could fill in all those historical gaps, but I have been urged to publish the research to date, and have been persuaded that every work of scholarship is a 'work in progress'. In subsequent editions, I hope to replace with concrete evidence those areas where I have been forced to speculate in this edition.

On the other hand, I believe that the evidence presented here describes accurately who the Kamberri were. I hope that, by analysing carefully the extant records, I have been able to bring Kamberri families into focus for the reader. This group and their descendants deserve the right to reclaim their unique place in the history of the Australian Capital Territory and surrounds.

9. See, for example, Wright, William Davis, 1923, *Canberra*, and Bluett, WP, 1927, 'Canberra Blacks in early settlement days', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May. Both William Wright and John Blundell, who was the main source for Bluett's various publications, grew up with Kamberri children.



Map 1: Tindale's linguistic map of southeastern Australia

Based on map and spelling by Dr Norman B Tindale, 1974, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*. Reproduced courtesy of Grazyna Majchrzak-Hamilton and David Singh of the Statistical Services Branch of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission,

Where is Kamberri country?

Kamberri 'territory' or 'country' is not easy to define with exactitude. In the 45 years between 1820, when European explorers first set eyes on Weereewaa, and circa 1865, when the two most notable patriarchs, Onyong and Noolup, had both passed away, Kamberri elders had experienced much change (see Part I).

The older generation, including Onyong and Noolup, were clearly linked through kinship networks to a number of neighbouring Aboriginal communities. They had particularly close relations with groups in the 'Murrumbidgee mountains' at least as far as Tumut to the west and maybe even as far southwest as the headwaters of the Murray River. As individuals, Onyong, Noolup and others also had close links with groups on the eastern side of Weereewaa as well as on the Monaro and on the south coast as far as Eden and Bega.

One wonders if it was because of their extensive links that Onyong and Noolup became leaders of their family as well as community groups at quite young ages.

Dr Norman Tindale,¹⁰ in his linguistic research on Aboriginal tribes in Australia (see Map 1), concludes that:

- the group that identified with the country between the Upper Murrumbidgee and the Tumut rivers was *Walgalu*-speaking;
- the Lake George Aboriginal communities were *Ngunawal*-speaking; and
- the groups that roamed the corridor on the right bank of the Murrumbidgee as far as the Shoalhaven River from the Monaro to Queanbeyan were *Ngarigo*-speaking.

In my Master of Letters sub-thesis,¹¹ I accepted Dr Tindale's assertion of *Ngunawal* or *Ngunnawal* supremacy in the northern Canberra district. Additionally, I extended the *Ngunnawal* 'boundary' to include the districts between Boorowa and Cooma and Goulburn and Tumut because Aboriginal families living in this area in modern times identify as such.

While it is certainly true that groups calling themselves the *Ngunnawal* or *Ngunawal* now claim custodianship of the district that includes the Australian Capital Territory and surrounds, as my research progressed I realised that this had not always been so. Furthermore, as I have argued within this volume, at the time of European settlement *Ngoonawal*¹² was not a language spoken by any of the five main Weereewaa groups (see Map 3), although it was intelligible to other groups on its frontiers, including the Kamberri. In fact, the earliest extant historical sources suggest that the

10. Tindale, NB, 1974 (see Sources at the end of this volume for full references):

11. Jackson-Nakano, Ann, 1994b.

12. I am using this spelling for the language because it is neutral in contrast to the other two versions.

common language spoken by all Weereewaa groups was *Gundungurra*¹³ and that, by the time the Europeans arrived, the groups northwest, west, southwest, south and southeast of the lake had developed their own dialects. This suggests that over a long period of time Aboriginal settlement took place inland from the coast, possibly following the Shoalhaven. The distinct Ngoonawal, Walgalu and Ngarigo dialects were probably named after the distinct communities that spoke them, but I will leave further research on this subject to the linguists.

By 1820, a series of groups had been established around Weereewaa who may have been linked by language, ancient customs, ceremonies and kinship networks up until the Europeans arrived. The Kamberri was one such group, but, like other Aboriginal communities in southeast Australia, it was not just linked with the Weereewaa communities but also with groups with whom it shared frontiers in other parts of Kamberri country, particularly the Walgalu to the west of the mountains. Territories within these regions probably expanded and contracted over long periods of time.

I have argued within the body of this work that the Kamberri was a 'multilingual' group by 1820, that is, they were able to speak the 'languages' or 'dialects' of neighbouring groups on their frontiers. As the Europeans further encroached on their territory, Kamberri individuals and families who were being pushed off their land made the choice to join friendly neighbouring groups with whom they may have had kinship ties. Towards the late 19th century, the frontiers of the Kamberri and surrounding groups had become so fluid they were almost indistinguishable. Although some Kamberri and other families from surrounding areas clearly maintained their connections to their country, it was not until a century later that descendants began renegotiating their frontiers.

Unfortunately, many Aboriginal communities, not only in southeast Australia but in other parts of the continent, tend to utilise Tindale's map to argue the precise geography of their traditional identity, which, in many cases, causes 'Black' to fight

13. In the formal report of his trip around southeast Australia, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson, claimed the language of these groups was Gundungurra — information he may have received from Terence Aubrey Murray, who spoke the languages local to the Canberra district and had properties at Lake George, Yarralumla, Cooleman and Mannus on the upper Murray River. Murray settled at Lake George when he was a young man of 19 and his closest friends were local Aboriginal people. No doubt he would have noticed a similarity between the language of the Aboriginal communities as far west as the upper Murray River at Tumbarumba and Mannus, which was then Walgalu country. Robinson also claimed that the language of the 'natives' on the Monaro was quite different to that of 'natives' on the southeast coast between Eden, Bega and Cape Howe. See Mackaness, George, 1941. Further historical evidence regarding the similarity of language between Ngoonawal and Gundungurra is presented within the main body of this volume. I must emphasise, however, that while Ngoonawal, Walgalu and perhaps even Ngarigo may have derived from Gundungurra, these communities were quite distinct by 1820. In the 20th century, many Wiradjuri words were added to the Ngoonawal language due to the settlement of Wiradjuri-speaking families in the Yass area from the 1880s. I have referred to this development in more detail in Parts II and III of this volume.

'Black' in modern times. I will argue that Tindale was not accurate in his linguistic groupings around Weereewaa.

My own research suggests that, although the country of the Kamberri expanded and contracted within historical times, its core country was constant until the 1880s. It stretched roughly from southwest of Weereewaa [Lake George] to Kiandra and the upper Murrumbidgee, down the Goodradigbee River to the south Yass Plains, south of the Yass River through Ginninderra and Gundaroo and across Canberra and Queanbeyan to the Gaurock Ranges (see Map 2).

In Part I, I have presented evidence to suggest that within the first 50 years of European settlement the Kamberri shared its frontiers with neighbouring groups with whom they may have negotiated rights of passage. As with other groups in southeast Australia, the Kamberri group was not restricted to its own 'territory' but visited or fought other communities, some of whom were quite some distance away. Due to kinship connections and individual birthplaces, some individuals within the Kamberri group had claims to areas that other members of their group did not share (see Part I). Conversely, survivors from surrounding groups were joining or rejoining the Kamberri.

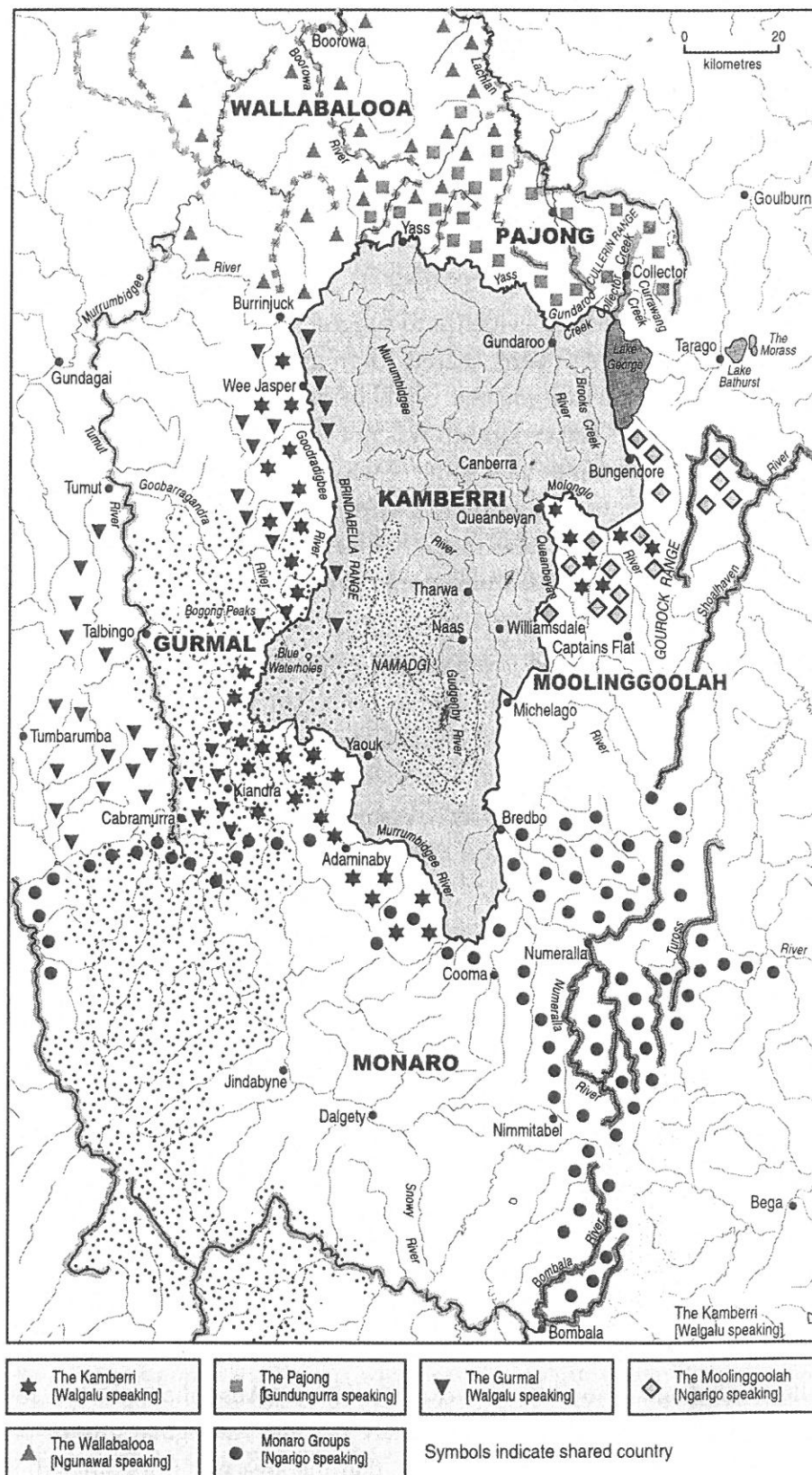
In this volume, I do my best to demonstrate that Dr Tindale's 'tribal' boundaries for the 'Ngunawal', Ngarigo and Walgalu incorporated a number of distinct groups that became 'buried' in history on the publication of Dr Tindale's tribal map. Tindale's linguistic divisions across the modern Australian Capital Territory, for example, created the impression that three distinct 'tribes' held parts of this district at the time of European settlement. I have argued throughout Parts I and II that the reality was quite different.

Since the main focus of history is change, I have made an effort to provide historical evidence that demonstrates how the forces of change following the earliest arrival of the Europeans affected the Kamberri and the responses by members of this group to those changes. I hope that by so doing I can present to readers a dynamic community that struggled and survived through various means. Most previous accounts of the Aboriginal people of the Canberra-Queanbeyan district have tended to present this community as stagnant or passive, with the last 'full blood' member of the 'tribe' obligingly passing away by the end of the 19th century. By presenting historical evidence that argues differently I am asserting that the extinction scenario belongs in the realms of fantasy, not fact.

Kamberri population figures

The earliest Europeans who settled in areas of southeast Australia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries had a tendency to declare that the Aboriginal groups of those newly-discovered districts had already fled, that the area was unpopulated, or that their estimate of local Aboriginal numbers was 'about 500'.

Throughout the early period of European contact with the Kamberri, as covered in Part I, all three of the above declarations were made about the Aboriginal inhabit-



Map 2: Core Kamberri country with surrounding frontiers, 1820s–1880s
 Compiled by Ann Jackson-Nakano from contemporary historical sources. Map reproduced courtesy of the Cartography Unit, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), Australian National University.

ants of the districts southwest of Weereewaa. To some extent, all such claims were at once partly true but mostly false.

Even before the Europeans arrived on their horizon, a number of Kamberri had already passed away from sicknesses introduced by Europeans in New South Wales in 1788. These sicknesses soon spread throughout the trading routes in the inland areas.

There is much debate about whether smallpox existed in Australia before the landing of the First Fleet since Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities had been trading with other nations on Australia's northern coastline long before 1788. Travellers such as Dr George Bennett and Dr John Lhotsky, who passed through the areas west of Weereewaa in the 1830s, and the Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson, all remarked on the fact that Aboriginal groups in the Yass area in particular had smallpox survivors among them. It is natural to assume, therefore, that quite a number would have also died of this disease, but whether smallpox was introduced by Europeans in 1788 or existed before their arrival at Weerong (Sydney Cove) is still open to question.

There is certainly evidence that diseases such as measles and influenza – or catarrh as it was then called – caused the demise of a number of Aboriginal individuals in the district west of Weereewaa soon after the arrival of the Europeans. Charles Throsby, who financed the first expeditions to find the lake, was held personally responsible for spreading this latter disease in the country of the Kamberri while on an exploratory trip to the area with Joseph Wild and others (see Part I). During one of his early expeditions, Wild found the remains of a Weereewaa family who had only recently died of influenza. Wild rescued the only survivor of this family, a little boy of about four, and took him away from his country to be brought up by Europeans. The boy was also suffering symptoms of influenza but was later nursed to health.

Therefore, while it is true that a number of Aboriginal individuals living in the district west of Weereewaa died in the early days of European contact, this did not render all Aboriginal people in this district 'extinct'.

It is also true that, as the first waves of Europeans encroached on their hunting grounds and gradually dispossessed them, many individuals and families connected to Aboriginal groups local to the district southwest of Weereewaa fled and hid in the mountains or joined friendly groups in surrounding districts. The Kamberri did not get pushed off their land in one fell swoop. Faced with few alternatives as the winds of change engulfed them in various periods of the 19th century, some Kamberri individuals and families made choices their descendants might regret. It is now up to the Kamberri descendants of those who opted to stay on their land the longest to decide whether the descendants of former Kamberri families who left their district can be reincorporated into the modern community.

From the 1850s and 1860s onwards, new waves of British and European migrants were arriving in the districts west of Weereewaa. After the introduction of Robertson's Free Selection Act in 1861, these migrants were able to take up small

selections released from some of the vast tracts of land granted originally to the first wave of European 'landowners'.¹⁴ From this time onwards Aboriginal groups in the district became increasingly irrelevant to these later settlers – who were mostly ignorant and even dismissive of the area's Aboriginal history.

The immigrants focused on fighting each other or the bigger 'landowners' on matters relating to land. They helped establish various political parties and played a major role in electing new candidates to represent them against the old guard. They did not need to forge interdependent relationships with local Aboriginal groups as the first 'landowners' had done. The later immigrants showed little interest in Aboriginal people other than to disparage them or complain the Aboriginal 'tribes' were a nuisance.

Few of the later immigrants could tell one local Aboriginal identity from another, so they would not have discerned the constant movement of Aboriginal individuals and groups in the country of the Kamberri. Some of the Aboriginal visitors stayed on and joined existing groups, eventually merging as one dominant group, while others acknowledged their status as visitors and moved on. A few Aboriginal individuals arrived with European 'landowners' who continued to uproot themselves and move further inland, forever in search of new and bigger tracts of land. When those European 'landowners' settled in new areas their Aboriginal workers protected them from local 'wild blacks', or 'myall', in the surrounding districts.

By the end of the period covered in Part I, quite a number of the younger Kamberri were breaking away from the core group to forge their own individual paths once their parents and grandparents had passed away. Many of this later generation were among those who moved on to other areas with European 'landowners' they had come to know and trust.

While it is true that some individuals seem to have joined the Kamberri group in historical times, we do not know for sure what pre-existing relationships these individuals had with the Kamberri. Perhaps they were relatives? Perhaps they were individuals or whole family groups who had previously fled but then came back? The fact that the Kamberri accepted them into their group suggests a conscious community decision that non-Aboriginal outsiders in the modern age should accept. As I have argued throughout the text, the Kamberri community was no stranger to change. It is idealistic to expect any Indigenous community to have survived throughout the centuries with a pristine culture and people unchanged since the Dreamtime. The archaeological record provides the strongest evidence of Indigenous historical movement and settlement patterns over the Australian continent, including the areas at and surrounding Weereewaa. The dialectic of change incorporates continuity as well as change and results in a synthesis in most, if not all, human societies and cultures, including the Kamberri's.

14. I dislike the term 'landowners' in the context of Europeans who were granted or claimed or purchased Aboriginal land, but can think of no alternative description. Therefore, throughout the text, I have used this term in inverted commas.

The reasons for the expanding and contracting numbers in the Kamberri group, not only in the period covered by Part I but also in later periods, are manifold. Early European observers often tried to relate the truth as they saw it but did not have the knowledge or cultural understanding necessary to interpret all Aboriginal responses to historical change. They neither understood nor studied, for example, the changing social relations with neighbouring groups that were emerging during the first century of European occupation, so it is difficult to interpret the movement of people to and from the Kamberri district with much accuracy other than to estimate numbers. Non-Aboriginal observations of Aboriginal groups still tend to be computed through Eurocentric world views and related accordingly. In presenting some of the historical evidence available on the Kamberri over the last 200 years, I am hoping that scholars in disciplines other than history can provide more accurate interpretations of Kamberri population changes over time.

By the 1840s, when local or visiting administrators began making attempts to write down the names and 'tribal designations' of members of local Aboriginal groups southwest of Weereewaa, more accurate numbers of local Aboriginal people were emerging. Utilising historical documents such as the blanket distribution lists, but bearing in mind that such lists did not include everyone, we can ascertain that, about 25 years after the group first had contact with Europeans, those identifying closely with the Kamberri probably numbered about 100. The historical evidence for this estimate is presented in Part I.

According to European settlers, this local group could count on raising from 500 to 1000 warriors for their battles with other groups – which were still going on as late as the 1850s. Surprisingly, perhaps, the historical evidence does not support theories that massacres of local Aboriginal people were carried out by European settlers in this district. Rather, internecine wars with their neighbouring groups quite often diminished numbers of the Kamberri and their supporters. Additionally they often had fights between themselves, which occasionally ended in death for some members of the group. It also seems that, following the arrival of the Europeans, the birth rates of Kamberri babies skyrocketed from an average of two or three per family to an average of five to ten! Therefore, Kamberri numbers continued to both expand and contract throughout the 19th century. Historical evidence supporting these statements is presented in Parts I and II.

By the end of the period under study in Part I, the core Kamberri group had already begun to disintegrate and, as already stated, some individuals and families simply moved away. The small core group that did stay together, at least until the 1920s, probably numbered about 15–20 on average, joined, on occasion, by relatives and other visitors who kept in touch. Some previous researchers have ignored this surviving core group because most of its members had a mixed heritage. Regardless of who could identify as Aboriginal according to contemporary Europeans, in more enlightened modern times a person is considered to be Aboriginal if she or he so identifies, is identified as such by his or her community and can demonstrate he or she is of Aboriginal descent. The historical evidence demonstrates clearly that Kamberri

individuals and families, whether of mixed heritage or otherwise, met all three of these criteria. I have ignored, therefore, the contemporary European 'classification' of a so-called 'true Aborigine' and, regardless of their so-called 'degree of Aboriginality', I have followed the tracks of Kamberri survivors into the 20th century in Part II.

The genealogies I have compiled for surviving Kamberri families – including the descent lines of Nanny, Black Dick Lowe and Black Harry Williams – demonstrate the degree to which a handful of 19th century Kamberri survivors increased the population of their community.¹⁵ Their descendants over just three or four generations doubled or tripled this number so that the Kamberri population in the 20th and 21st centuries far exceeds that of the original group who witnessed the Europeans arriving in their country from Lake George. Most Kamberri descendants intermarried with Aboriginal people from regions immediately surrounding their traditional country, thus complicating, to some extent, their claims to Kamberri country in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

My estimate of the number of 21st century descendants of 19th century Kamberri identities is that they are in the hundreds and still increasing rapidly. When I complete the full descent lines I will have a census that will suggest how many known Kamberri descendants are living in their traditional country or surrounding regions in modern times.

15. These genealogies will be published separately.