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Charles Walter, German Networks, and First Nations Australians

Abstract: German photographer Carl (Charles) Walter photographed the Kulin residents of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station during the 1860s for international and intercolonial exhibitions. He was networked into German scientific circles, and his work circulated around the world. Yet today we may see a more complex network of encounters and attitudes recorded in his portraits of the diverse group of First Nations peoples then living at the settlement. Here I review changing ways of understanding colonial photography as context for the significance of Walter's work in nineteenth-century Victoria. I briefly sketch his photographic career and networks and conclude by summarising his enduring value for descendants today. We can see Walter's work and its deployment by First Nations descendants as a form of 'visual citizenship', and a way of creating relationships between people and the state through dynamic visual practices. The changing value of the images, from science to family portrait, demonstrates the fluidity of visual meaning.

Once colonial photography was considered a destructive and oppressive medium, implicated in colonialism and its regime of surveillance and control. Within the dominant theoretical paradigm that emerged during the 1980s, photographs of First Nations Australians were understood solely as an expression of contemporary racial thought, which some believed should remain safely locked away in the archive. More recently, changing approaches toward interpretation acknowledge the mobility of images as they cross genres, appearing in diverse contexts which shape their meaning and impact.¹ Where the photograph was once analysed in semiotic terms, as a representation, attention has shifted to its social impact, asking what people *do with* images, and attending to the diverse material, social, and cultural circumstances in which we view them.² These ways of interpreting photographs emphasise the instability of visual meaning and value, as images move through phases of production and consumption, across visual forms, and through diverse cultural settings.³ These shifts have allowed us to see how those

- 1 See e.g., Thierry Gervais (ed.): *The 'Public' Life of Photographs*. I have explored these processes in relation to Coranderrk in more detail in Jane Lydon: *Eye Contact*. I acknowledge the deep generosity and kindness of many Kulin Nations people I have learned from over many years, and particularly senior Wurundjeri Elders Auntie Jessie Hunter and Uncle Bill Nicholson, Senior.
- 2 Some have even assigned the image agentic qualities in locating it centrally within the complex relations between humans and nonhumans, people, and things, although not in the field of visual citizenship. Key overviews include Elizabeth Edwards: *Objects of Affect*, pp. 221-234; Costanza Caraffa: *Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space*, pp. 79-96; Geoffrey Batchen: *Vernacular Photographies*, pp. 262-271; and see Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (eds.): *Photography's Other Histories*.
- 3 For recent discussion see Thy Phu, Matthew Brower (eds.): *Circulation*.

seeking recognition, and inclusion within imagined political communities use visual practices to assert an array of rights and claims, including citizenship.⁴

Such relationships in contexts of unequal power relations also apply to the ‘post-colonizing’ nation of Australia.⁵ We can see interactions between photographer and Indigenous people express the historical process of cross-cultural exchange, as well as grounding the rich and vital meanings photographs have today. In the present, there is considerable evidence for Aboriginal people using photography for different purposes: photographs of people are valued as family portraits, and especially prized in the wake of assimilation policies known as the Stolen Generations. They document genealogies of kin and culture and can demonstrate the continuities that ground native title and other processes of acknowledgement and authenticity in the modern nation state.⁶ In this overview of the work of Charles Walter in nineteenth-century Victoria I examine changing ways of understanding colonial photography as context for his significance. I briefly sketch his photographic career and archives and conclude by summarising his enduring value for descendants today.

Coranderrk Aboriginal Station was established in 1863 on the Traditional Country of the Woi-wurrung language group, at the junction of Badger Creek and the Yarra River, around 50 km north-east of Melbourne (Map 1). It was home to a wider group of First Nations Aboriginal people, from across the modern states of Victoria and New South Wales, who had survived colonisation and its impacts. Working with the station’s first white manager, Presbyterian minister John Green, the residents successfully built homes, farmed, and educated their children; they were politically astute, and throughout Coranderrk’s life advocated in powerful terms for their rights.⁷

An important aspect of the Coranderrk community’s political strength was its understanding of colonial politics and its own place within colonial society. The residents’ acute awareness of how they were perceived by settlers allowed them to represent themselves in ways that asserted their dignity and sovereignty. They also engaged quickly with photography and took opportunities to secure portraits of themselves and their families. In 1865 one visitor to the homes of Coranderrk residents noted that ‘on most of the side mantelpieces were photographs of the ladies and gentlemen of the establishment’.⁸ These were probably the first portraits made by Charles Walter, whose records of the station were published in the Melbourne illustrated newspapers.

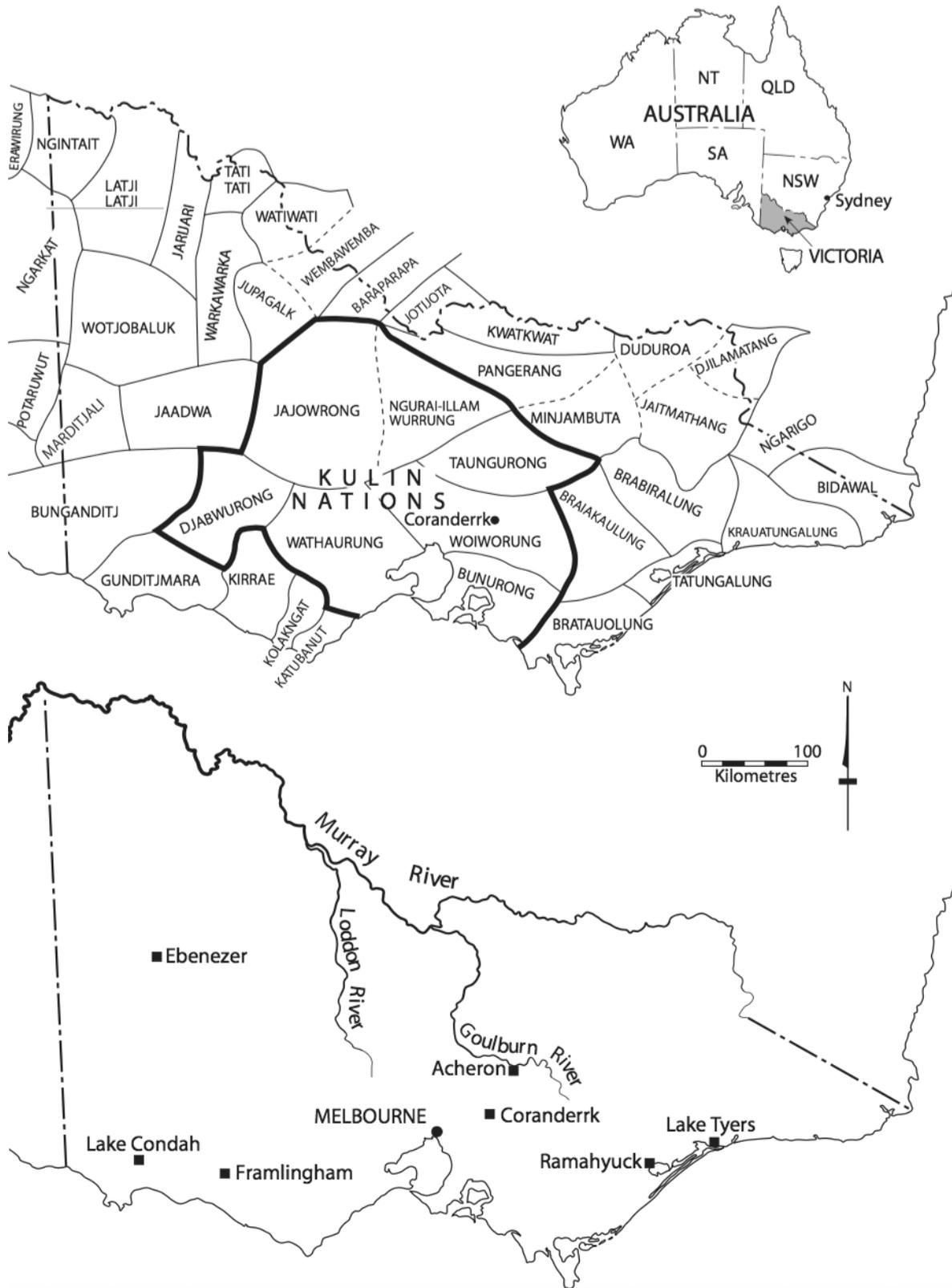
4 See Ariella Azoulay: *Civil Imagination*, 5; Ariella Azoulay: *The Civil Contract of Photography*; Jane Lydon: *The Flash of Recognition*; Darren Newbury, Albie Sachs: *Defiant Images*; Jennifer E. Telesca: *What is Visual Citizenship?*, pp. 339-343, 339. See special issue of *Australian Historical Studies*, 54, 2023, 2, pp. 183-382.

5 See Aileen Moreton-Robinson: *The White Possessive*.

6 See Jane Lydon (ed.): *Calling the Shots*.

7 For histories of Coranderrk see especially Diane Barwick: *Rebellion at Coranderrk*; Jane Lydon: *Eye Contact*; Jane Lydon: *The Experimental 1860s*, pp. 78-130; Richard Broome: *There Were Vegetables Every Year Mr Green was Here*, p. 43.1; Barry Judd: *It’s Not Cricket*, pp. 37-54.

8 Board for the Protection of the Aborigines: *Fifth Report*, p. 4; *Australasian* (Melbourne), 5 May 1865, p. 135 (*Country Sketches: The Blackfellows’ Home*).



Map 1: Victoria, showing the Traditional Country of the Kulin.

German photographer Carl (Charles) Walter (1831-1907) was one of Australia's first professional travelling photographers, and his extensive work at Coranderrk with the residents formed the basis for numerous newspaper features, several photograph albums, and an exhibition panel. Walter was born in Mecklenburg, Germany, and travelled to Australia around 1856, where he worked as

a botanical collector and photographer. He collected plant specimens for Victorian Government Botanist, Ferdinand von Mueller (1825-1896, born Rostock, Mecklenburg-Schwerin), as well as accompanying other scientific expeditions.⁹ Through von Mueller's active German scientific and imperial networks, Walter's work circulated globally. His outdoor photographs formed the basis for engraved drawings that were widely circulated by the colonial press, including landscapes, sights of geological and natural interest, and colonial 'progress'. Walter is largely remembered today because of his 1860s photographs of the First Nations residents of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station. These were commissioned for international and intercolonial exhibitions, within an increasingly racialized Western paradigm. However, for the Wurundjeri, Kulin, and other First Nations subjects of these photographs, they constituted powerful portraits of family. Today they provide important representations of Kulin Nations leaders which are displayed on websites and at public events.

Walter's photographic work with Aboriginal people circulated very widely throughout colonial and global networks and have remained influential public representations of First Nations Australians. From within a few years of the station's establishment, illustrated colonial newspapers published a series of stories about the new 'civilising experiment' outside Melbourne, accompanied by engravings based on Walter's photographs.¹⁰ In 1866 the President of the Intercolonial Exhibition, Redmond Barry, commissioned Walter to make a series of 106 portraits of the residents, which was incorporated into a panel displayed in the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866. These images were also made into albums, such as for the family of John Green, the station superintendent.

Walter arrived in the country in 1855 from Germany and was collecting for botanist von Mueller by 1856. His earliest known photograph is dated 1862, and he was advertising as a 'Country Photographic Artist' by 1865. He was innovative in producing outdoor scenes of Victoria for the illustrated newspapers, who reproduced his photographs of remote and picturesque places.¹¹ He used a more portable stereo camera for most work but also produced half-plate and whole-plate negatives. He was an explorer who collected both plants and images, whose work satisfied an urban need to experience the bush. Walter became known in Victoria, then as now, for these early and powerful records of a significant moment in Aboriginal history. His personal relationship with Coranderrk and its residents points to mutual sympathy. Walter's work must be understood against the context of long-standing interest in photographing First Nations Australians. In the 1850s in Victoria photographers began to record the colony's Indigenous people still living on their Country, as well as undergoing transformation as they adjusted to white incursion. With the emergence of the cheap, palm-sized carte

9 For biographical information see Design & Art Australia Online: Walter, Charles; see Alan Davies and Peter Stanbury: *The Mechanical Eye in Australia*.

10 *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 August 1865, p. 91 (The Aboriginal Settlement at Coranderrk). See for example *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 24 March 1866; *Australian News for Home Readers*, 25 August 1865; *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 September 1865, pp. 1, 10; *Illustrated Australian News*, 11 June 1866, p. 8.

11 Bill Gaskins: Walter, Carl, pp. 834 f.; Gael Newton: *Shades of Light*, p. 50; Isobel Crombie: *Victorian Views*, p. 1; Linden Gillbank: *Charles Walter*, pp. 3-10.

de visite in the mid-1850s, portraiture became an international craze, permitting collectors to obtain examples, or 'types', of different peoples from around the world. Photographers recorded diverse Indigenous Australians in images that found their way into scientific collections across the globe. In Victoria the six major reserves established around 1860 became places of contact and exchange between black and white, generating thousands of photographs.

Walter took his first Coranderrk photographs before mid-1865, when one newspaper noted that the First Nations residents' homes "were tolerably well furnished, the seats and tables being made of rough bush timber, and the walls decorated with pictures cut out of the 'Illustrated London News' and the illustrated newspapers published in Melbourne. There were also several photographs, which were highly prized."¹² The following year another visitor noted that the huts "were all partially papered with that ubiquitous periodical the 'Illustrated London News', and on most of the side mantelpieces were photographs of the ladies and gentlemen of the establishment" – thus suggesting that Walter had passed on the results of his work at the station.¹³ Other newspaper accounts of the station emphasised that it was an 'experiment' where the Aboriginal people of the region were adopting Western culture, learning to farm and support themselves, while their children were attending school.¹⁴ Engravings based on Walter's photographs enhanced the message of order, but also provided a short biography of the settlement's Wurundjeri leader, Simon Wonga, as a cultural mediator.

Walter's Coranderrk images of around 1865 were collated in a commercial album titled 'Australian Aborigines Under Civilization' (AAUC), the title pointing toward its status in documenting cultural transformation. Like the popular newspaper reports, the album suggests the progress of Christianity and civilisation at Coranderrk and tells the story of hardships overcome by Aboriginal settlers whose attachment to a new home symbolises commitment to Christian values of religious devotion and hard work. As is common in missionary photography, tradition is contrasted with Western order and industry, attachment to place and their new home. At Coranderrk, panoramas became a popular way to emphasise the settlement's order and productivity, and here Walter chose to foreground the schoolhouse, and the missionary Green's home. Family groups standing outside their neat slab huts were accompanied by the Green family, imposing the European nuclear family upon the community – but also asserting that Coranderrk was their home.

One unique photograph re-enacts the story of establishing Coranderrk. 'The Yarra Tribe starting for the Acheron' (figure 1) commemorates the moment the Wurundjeri, led by Simon Wonga and John Green, set off from their camp at Yering in their traditional country to join the Taungerong, already settled at the Acheron, in February 1860. William Thomas, Guardian of Aborigines, told how "a deputation of five [Taungerong] and two [Wurundjeri people] waited on me

12 Board for the Protection of the Aborigines: Fifth Report, p. 4.

13 Illustrated Australian News, 25 August 1865; Australasian (Melbourne), 5 May 1866, p. 135 (Country Sketches: The Blackfellows' Home).

14 The Rev. R. Hamilton of Fitzroy was the newspaper's informant. See Illustrated Australian News, 25 August 1865.



Fig. 1: Walter, C. (1860). The Yarra Tribe starting for the Acheron. 1862

at my residence on 28th February 1859, their object was to have a block of land on a particular part of the Upper Goulburn, on the Acharon [sic] River, set apart for them."¹⁵ The Acheron River headwaters rise on the north-west slopes of the Yarra Ranges, descending to the Goulburn River, in the north-central region of Victoria. In March, Thomas and the Taungerong set off to select 4, 688 acres, and on his return to Melbourne, Thomas met groups of Aborigines "wending their way to their Goshen." He saw a parallel with Moses leading the oppressed Israelites out of Egypt, through a period of exile in the desert, finally to Canaan ('Goshen'). The men assured Thomas that they would "set down on the land like white men."¹⁶ But they were moved from the Acheron in August 1860 to another reserve, the Mohican, where they were joined by the Wurundjeri in 1862, and finally to Coranderrk in February-March 1863, as recounted by Simon Wonga. The photograph commemorates the Wurundjeri decision to join forces with another clan, adopting a settled, agricultural way of life as a response to invasion and colonisation (Fig. 1).

15 Aldo Massola: Coranderrk, p. 7; Board for the Protection of the Aborigines: First Report, Appendix.

16 Thomas to Brough Smyth, 20/7/1860, NAA: CRS B 312, Item 3, 6/912, cited in Jane Lydon: Eye Contact, chap. 3.

This historical recreation of the almost mythical story of the station's foundation reflects the extreme importance of this event to the Kulin residents of Coranderrk, and reflects an Aboriginal perspective. The line of men and women are posed as if in the act of taking their first step, led by Simon Wonga – including John Green, carrying a staff. The women in the background carry swags and children, wearing blankets in place of the traditional possum-skin cloaks. This story was translated into biblical figures of speech, predicated on Coranderrk as a 'Goshen', a land of light and plenty. Despite traditional links to different territories, as the speeches of Wonga testify, there was a firm alliance between the Kulin clans, the Taungerong, whose land at the Acheron the first reserve had been established on, and the Wurundjeri, whose territory Coranderrk lay within, and agreement to share the reserve. This early image, belonging to the experimental days of view photography, adopts a formal and symmetrical structure – like ceremonial performance, asserting knowledge, claiming rights, and legitimising and negotiating authority over specific countries.

Other photos show the residents in Christian worship, while portraits of well-known individuals contrast tradition, represented by Mrs Cotton and "Mr Cotton, the oldest Native in Victoria", with the younger generation's achievements in learning Western ways. Typical of missionary photography, the album's narrative structure emphasises domesticity and a western notion of the family, a settled lifestyle, the education of children, and material progress. The album combined a range of popular and local ideas about Coranderrk, framed by Christian rhetoric. The 1865 images produced by Walter celebrate Victorian Aboriginal people in this period, shaped by humanitarian perspectives.

Walter's 1866 Portraits of Coranderrk

In 1866, Walter was commissioned to make a series of 106 portraits for the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition, in turn intended as a practice run for the 'Exposition Universelle' in Paris in 1867. His remarkable portraits remain dignified portraits of the Kulin community.¹⁷ The 1866 exhibition aimed to present "the various industries and productions" of participating countries, as its Official Catalogue proclaimed, designed to reveal "the richness of their resources and enterprise of their populations".¹⁸ Walter responded enthusiastically to Barry's request, writing that he would be "most happy to comply to the wishes expressed by Sir Redmond Barry" and explaining that he planned to take single portraits of both sexes and all ages from infancy (6 month) "up to old age (80 years!)", and of the "different tribes". He explained that there were 123 First Nations residents of Coranderrk, "belonging to about 10 or 12 different tribes". They would be bust portraits each "the size of a half a crown piece", and could be "arranged according to the tribes ages & sexes on different large plates holding from 12 to 24

17 State Library of Victoria (SLV), Australian Manuscripts Collection H17247, Exhibition Commissioners' Letterbook, Intercolonial Exhibition 1866-7, p. 85.

18 Intercolonial Exhibition: Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia 1866, pp. 9 f..

different portraits, as might be suitable for framing". Walter signed himself, 'Photographic Artist'. In October 1866, the month the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition opened, Walter, presumably having overseen the installation of the series, wrote again to say that he had "Returned to my residence amongst the Natives here, I intend to make up now the Collection for Paris".¹⁹ Walter requested that the Commission prevent his photos being copied, as he could not obtain Copyright for them: he wrote, "If desired by Parties interested in the Blacks, I shall be most happy to furnish duplicates of the whole collection at a moderate Charge, but I do not wish my black friends to be sold in every shop at the rate of 6d. each!"

Walter's surviving lists record the English name, native name, tribe, and age of each of the 104 sitters, starting with the eldest men, progressing through younger and younger men, to end with no. 50, baby Thomas Harris (sitting on his mother's lap), aged three months. Then it continues with the 'Female Sex', from the oldest woman (51, Old Mary, age 60, Jim Crow tribe) to youngest (80, Minnie, Yarra Yarra, nine months). Then there is a section headed 'Half Castes', starting with men (81, Dan Hall, Loddon, twenty years) descending in years to the boys (91, Alfred (Quadrone) 93, Lake Mering, five years - father a native of Ireland. Jemmy Davis), then "Female sex, half castes!", beginning with 92, White Ellen, Carngham, 21 years down to 104, Nelly Bly, Wimmera, two years.²⁰ The concern with these categories of 'tribe', 'blood', gender and so forth reflected contemporary ideas about human difference. Walter may have seen this collection of ethnographic information as similar to his botanical collecting for Von Mueller.²¹

The surviving exhibition panel is now held by the State Library of Victoria, and measures 176 cm wide by 123 cm high. A central title reads "Portraits of ABORIGINAL NATIVES Settled at Coranderrk, near Healesville, about 42 miles from Melbourne. ALSO VIEWS Of the Station & LUBRAS BASKET-MAKING". The small portraits are arranged according to 'blood', with older men occupying the top left hand quarter of the panel, boys below, and the adult women the top right. As the panel was 'read' downwards, it finished with the youngest and seemingly whitest residents, predicting the future of the race. In Paris, Walter's 'Portraits photographiques des naturels et des races mélangées' were displayed alongside sculptor Charles Summers' sixteen life-cast busts of Aboriginal people at Coranderrk, and a vocabulary of Aboriginal languages was also prepared.²² Walter's portraits received merely an Honourable Mention, "For a collection of Aboriginal portraits, on account of the interest they possess, although exhibiting little merit as photographs".²³ However Walter's images were widely circulated, appearing also at the 1872 London International Exhibition and the 1873 Vienna

19 PROV: VPRS 927, unit 3, Notes and letters Oct-Nov 1866.

20 Album PRM.AL.56, Photograph Collection, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. The second list includes only the 80 so-called 'full bloods'. See: Photograph Collection, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. These two lists appear to have been sent to the Pitt Rivers Museum, but copies are also accessible through Museum Victoria's files.

21 Lydon?; Elizabeth Edwards: *Photographic Types*.

22 Gerald Hayes: *London, Paris, Philadelphia ... Victoria at the Great Exhibitions*, p. 4; *La Commission Impériale: Exposition Universelle de 1867 a Paris*, p. 322.

23 *The Argus Supplement*, 14 February 1867, p. 2 (List of Awards): Newspaper cuttings MS SLV 13/8/99, 12900 Ms Folio Intercolonial Exhibition.

Universal Exhibition, celebrating imperial achievement.²⁴ After the exhibitions closed, Walter's photographs and Summers' busts were sent to Europe to participate in scientific debates about human evolution. The series was subsequently used by von Mueller as a token of exchange with colleagues around the world – this series is held in Russia, Italy, Oxford, and elsewhere.²⁵ As Walter's work demonstrates, the collection and exchange of photographs was central to the formation of anthropology and a disciplinary visual culture over the second half nineteenth century.

Walter and German networks

Walter's role within German scientific and collecting networks remained significant, especially through government botanist Ferdinand von Mueller, who had established a large network of collectors across Victoria. One example demonstrates the nature of these German-Indigenous connections: the young Anatole von Hügel collected in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa, and Java from 1874 to 1878. Anatole had access to a network of influential connections forged by his father, the world-famous Austrian horticulturalist Karl Von Hügel.²⁶ Anatole was twenty years old when he arrived in Melbourne in September 1874 and spent around four months in the colony.²⁷ Von Hügel's travels in Victoria echoed that of many a scientific visitor before him – and, as Nicholas Thomas has suggested, was in part an 'act of homage' to his father Karl's extensive travels.²⁸ Anatole's connections were noticeably German and Catholic, and von Mueller played a particularly important role in his visit, supplying him with contacts, information and even lending him £165.²⁹ During his visit Anatole explored the natural sights surrounding Melbourne, later recalling, "I passed three pleasant months in Victoria, shooting and collecting among the beautiful Dandenong Mountains north of Melbourne." During this time Anatole's constant guide and companion was Walter, and as for many visitors to Victoria at this time, photographs of the tree fern forests of the Dandenongs constituted a lasting memento (Fig. 2).³⁰

24 Louise M. Partos: *The Construction of Representation*, p. 60.

25 See Jane Lydon: *Eye Contact*.

26 Dymphna Clark: *Nova Hollandia Huegelli*, pp. 1-15. Karl had spent almost a year between 1833-34 travelling in Western Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales, New Zealand, and Norfolk Island, collecting botanical specimens.

27 VH1/2/23 Papers... 'Notes on various places ... maps ... Australia' Brown envelope: 'Notebook 1874 Voyage from Plymouth to Melbourne. Notes for 1874', Archives of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

28 Nicholas Thomas: *Von Hügel's Curiosity*, pp. 299-314.

29 At this time Von Mueller was at a difficult stage of his career, having been replaced as Director of Melbourne's Botanical gardens in July 1873 in controversial circumstances.

30 VH1/2/24 'Document – Blue box marked no. 4 MS1 Australia to Fiji, Levuka, Fison Row. 27/4-18/6/75. MS2 Rewa trip. 18/6 - 4/8/75 MS3 Nasova, Bau. 5/8 - 10/9 75 MS4 Nasova, Navuso and field book. 12/9 - 31/10/75', Archives of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge. A rather turbulent relationship developed between the two, especially on their subsequent Pacific voyage together on the Wesleyan Mission barque, the John Wesley, which sailed to the Bismarck Archipelago in PNG via Fiji and Samoa.



Fig. 2: Charles Walter, Fern trees in Dandenongs

Anatole Von Hügel was later to become the founding director and first Curator of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University (MAA), established in 1884, donating his own collection of artefacts from the South Pacific.³¹ MAA holds a large series of Walter's photographic work, including a handsome album commissioned by Anatole that he gave to his mother. This contains scenes of the nascent towns and landscapes of the colonies he visited – especially Melbourne – and complements the letters and diary entries he wrote for his mother and his fiancée. The album echoes Anatole's experiences, including visiting Coranderk with Walter. On Monday 2nd October 1874, Walter and Anatole set off by Mail-coach from Melbourne, where he was staying at the Menzies Hotel, to Lilydale, arriving at noon.³² After lunch, "we packed a few things in my cartridge bag & W's knapsack, & the latter insisted on my loading him like a packmule with my guncases &c", they walked through a rainstorm up the Dandenong range to Harmony Vale, where he saw his first wallaby, black cockatoo and tree ferns – of course deeply admired for their aesthetic qualities at the time.

31 See Victoria Ebin, Deborah A. Swallow: *The Proper Study of Mankind*. See also ms Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology: History, St Edmunds College, Cambridge University.

32 'Document – Blue box marked no 3 scraps, cuttings, ?meke. Notes on various places, letters in Fijian, sketches, Miss Gordon Cumming, meke notes, map of Nasaucoko. Australia and New Zealand', VH1/2/23, Archives of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.



Fig. 3: View of Lilydale

He noted "There I shot my first bird a species of wagtail but I lost it in the creek & in looking for it very nearly had a swim."³³ He described a wallaby hunt, sighting a native bear, the fern tree gullies, and meetings with various local figures.³⁴ By November, he was "feeling very miserable and blue", "but then there was Fernshaw with its giant trees to see & the Black Station (Natives) to go to and work to be done in both. Mr Walter too was getting fidgetty as he could be of great use to me in both places." On Monday 9 November Anatole organized a "German party", with Baron Von Mueller, Walter, the German Consul, and three German botanists, Carl Groener, Shafer and [?]Victor.³⁵ The group enjoyed a walk up Black Spur, admiring its "quaint timber and lovely gullies". Anatole saw his first kangaroo rats and several new birds. He described this gathering as a "German tea party", and concluded, "Evening very jolly."

Two days later, he rose early and walked through the bush to the 'Black Station', Coranderrk. Like many others before him, he saw Coranderrk as a site of ethnographic information – but his comments related more to his admiration for the settlement: his brief notes comment on the "Beauty of Blacks' village", and he noted in his diary, "night prayers and singing, shaking hands".³⁶ His mother's album holds this view of Lilydale, signed by Walter (Fig. 3). The black settlement of Coranderrk would have looked much the same at this time, flourishing in its picturesque location along the banks of the Yarra.

The relationship between the two was healthy enough for Von Hügel to commission Walter to accompany him to the Pacific. In 1875 Von Hügel took passage on the 'John Wesley', the Wesleyan Mission barque, sailing to found a new mission

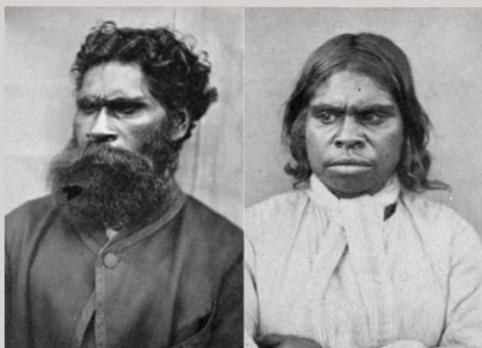
33 'Document – Blue box marked no 3', VH1/2/23, MAA.

34 'Document – Blue box marked no 3', VH1/2/23, MAA. Brown envelope 'Notes and letters Australia Batavia' Bundle: 'Baron's diary – Australia/ Batavia'

35 Irmline Veit-Brause: *Australia as an Object in Nineteenth Century World Affairs*, pp. 142-159; Sara Maroske: *Educational Exsiccatae*, pp. 37-47.

36 'Document – Blue box marked no 3', VH1/2/23, MAA. 'Notes and letters Australia Batavia' Bundle: 'Baron's diary – Australia/ Batavia', MAA.

Our Story



Ancestors and Past

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Fig. 4: 'Our Story', Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Organisation, 2023

in the Duke of York islands, and on the way visit Fiji, Rotuma and Samoa.³⁷ He took two assistants, Walter and the taxidermist Cockerell, but following a dispute with missionary Lorimer Fison, Von Hügel remained in Fiji, sending them on, "together with their equipment".³⁸ Walter collected in Duke of York Island, and in New Britain, subsequently passing on his botanical specimens to Von Mueller, who then sent them to colleagues such as British botanist Henry Trimen. It seems that Von Hügel tried to reclaim Walter's native collections, but the Baroness later annotated his diary to the effect that Walter had pretended he had not collected very much, "and refused to send him anything. It was only afterwards that Anatole heard fully how utterly false this was, and how much he had made by selling to others what belonged to Anatole. But he had made influential friends and he 'flourishes like a green bay tree' in consequence."³⁹ Sadly, this suggests the acrimonious end of their productive relationship, but also testifies to the enduring value of Walter's German scientific networks.

Today

Alongside such evidence for the contemporary value of Walter's photography as scientific data, we must also acknowledge the engagement of First Nations people with photography from its introduction, and their contemporary objectives in

37 'Document - Blue box marked no 3', VH1/2/23, MAA.

38 Jane Roth, Steven Hooper (eds.): *The Fiji Journals of Baron Von Hugel*, pp. xiii f.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 438.

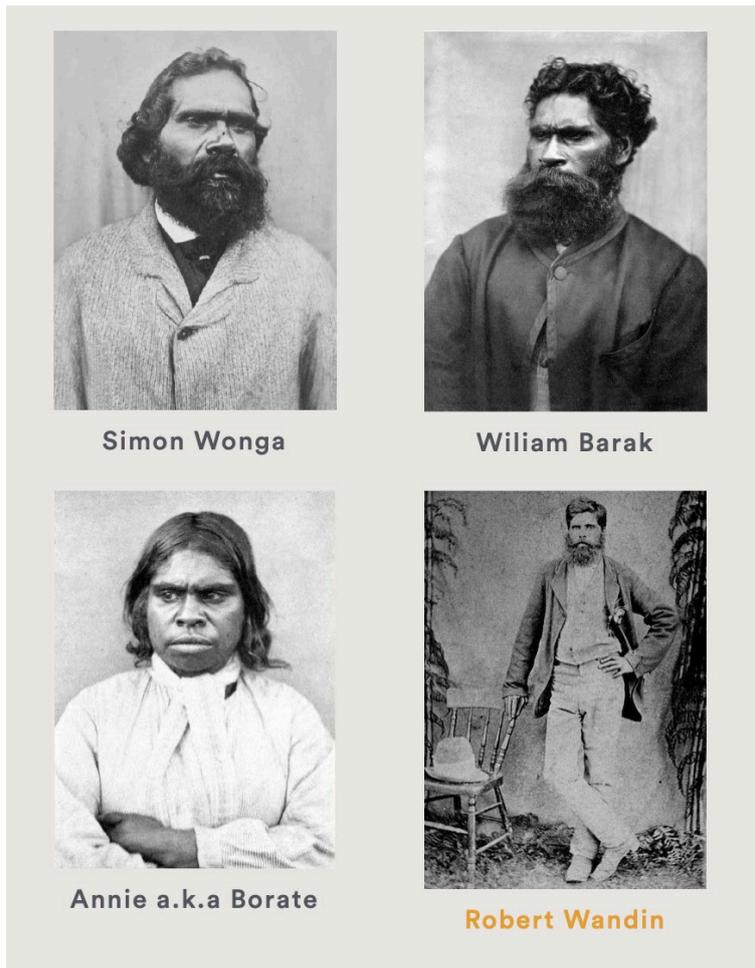


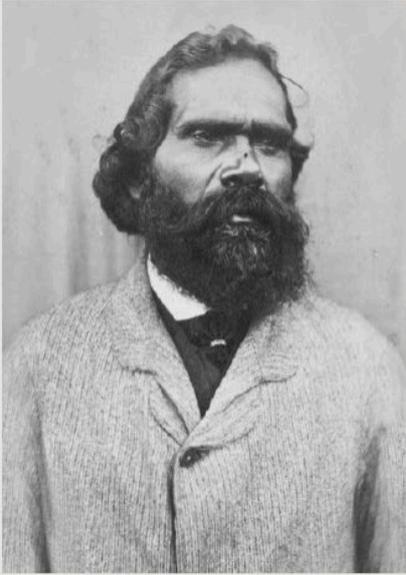
Fig. 5: Website Walter portraits

sitting for photography, acquiring photographs, and using them for purposes such as family portraiture. Historically, it was often noted that the Aboriginal residents collected and treasured portraits of their community – such as when in September 1876 the ‘Argus’ reported that “some of the chief objects of desire” were “photographic representations of their own and their children’s countenances”.⁴⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that today this series has become an important form of cultural heritage for the many descendants of the First Nations residents of Coranderrk, “belonging to about 10 or 12 different tribes”. The Wurundjeri, Taungerong, and other

Kulin or First Nations descendants have incorporated them into family histories and cultural narratives. As a doctoral student during the late 1990s, I was privileged to learn about these practices from senior Wurundjeri Elders Auntie Jessie Hunter, and Uncle Bill Nicholson, Senior, as well as Auntie Joy Murphy-Wandin, Vicky Nicholson, Murrundindi, Ian Hunter, Judy Monk, and many others. The generosity of Kulin Nations people continues to see these historic images shared with the broader community. The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Organisation, for example, hosts a website stating that, “We are the Traditional Custodians of Melbourne and surrounding lands.” It explains these links to ancestors on a page titled “Our Story”; regarding “Ancestors and Past” the website advises the viewer, “[t]o learn about some our Ancestors from recent history, click their name and find out more” (Fig. 4).⁴¹ Walter’s portraits of Simon Wonga, William Barak, and Annie Borate are shown, linking to further biographical and historical data that connect past and present (Fig. 5). Wonga’s portrait leads to further information, beginning “The son of Billibellary (c.1799-1846), Simon Wonga became Ngurungaeta (leader) of the Woi wurrung clans following

40 Board for the Protection of the Aborigines: Fifth Report, p. 4; The Argus Supplement, 1 September 1876, p. 7.

41 Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Organisation: Ancestors and Past,.



Simon Wonga

The son of Billibellary (c.1799-1846), Simon Wonga became Ngurungaeta (leader) of the Woi wurrung clans following the death of his father in 1846, at the age of 22. He was born near Arthur's Seat ("Wonga" being the Aboriginal place name for this area). In 1863, Wonga and his (maternal) cousin William Barak, who ultimately succeeded him as Ngurungaeta, led their remaining people across the Black's Spur Songline to the Upper Yarra and established Coranderrk Mission Station. Access to the land was granted, though importantly not as freehold.

The Melbourne suburb of Wonga Park and Wonga Road are named after him.

Fig. 6: Simon Wonga

the death of his father in 1846." (Fig. 6)⁴² The photographs have become a public family tree that demonstrates the Wurundjeri organisation's rights to speak for land and culture. Like many descendants of these historical photographic subjects, the photos remain a way to document family, re-connect familial links and ties broken by the Stolen Generations (assimilation policies) and the devastation of invasion and colonisation. This series is also well-known and much-loved by Wurundjeri, Taungerong, and other Kulin descendants, who have incorporated them into family histories and cultural narratives.

List of Illustrations

Map 1: Victoria, showing the Traditional Country of the Kulin. Jane Lydon.

Fig. 1: Walter, C. (1860). The Yarra Tribe starting for the Acheron. 1862. State Library of Victoria, photograph : albumen silver; 14.5 x 17.6 cm. Record id. 9917107203607636. www.find.slv.vic.gov.au/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=61SLV_INST:SLV&search_scope=slv_local&tab=searchProfile&context=L&docid=alma9917107203607636.

Fig. 2: Charles Walter, Fern trees in Dandenongs, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University, P.100232.

Fig. 3: View of Coranderrk settlement, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University, P.100246.

Fig. 4: 'Our Story', Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Organisation, 2023. www.wurundjeri.com.au.

Fig. 5: Website Walter portraits, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Organisation, www.wurundjeri.com.au/our-story/ancestors-past.

⁴² Ibid.

Fig. 6: Simon Wonga, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Organisation, www.wurundjeri.com.au/our-story/ancestors-past.

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