
Australian Heritage Database

Places for Decision

Class : Indigenous

Identification

List: National Heritage List
Name of Place: Moree Baths and Swimming Pool
Other Names: Moree Spa Baths Complex, Moree Hot Mineral Baths, Moree Artesian Pool
Place ID: 106098
File No: 1/02/192/0006
Nomination Date: 02/02/2009
Principal Group: Aboriginal Occupation Site

Status

Legal Status: 02/02/2009 - Nominated place
Admin Status: 07/12/2012 - Assessment by AHC completed

Assessment

Recommendation:
Other Assessments: :

Location

Nearest Town: Moree
Distance from town (km):
Direction from town:
Area (ha): .5
Address: Anne St, Moree, NSW, 2400
LGA: Moree Plains Shire NSW

Location/Boundaries:

About .5ha, corner of Anne Street and Warialda Street, Moree, comprising all that part of Lot 100 DP1163663 to the north of MGA northing Zone 55 6736080mN.

Assessor's Summary of Significance:

In 1965 student protest actions at the Moree baths highlighted the racial discrimination and segregation experienced by Aboriginal people in Australian rural towns and the outback and forced the broader Australia community to look at the way it treated its Indigenous population. The protest was an important contributor to the climate of opinion which resulted in a yes vote in the 1967 referendum to change the Australian Constitution regarding the status of Aboriginal Australians. That change provided a legal basis for subsequent Commonwealth involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and an increased recognition at local, state, and national levels of the importance of Indigenous rights in

Australia.

The events that occurred at the Moree baths in 1965 also have a special association with the life and works of the Aboriginal activist Dr Charles Nelson Perrurle Perkins AO. Moree was the place where the public first saw him confront people with awkward truths about the treatment of Aborigines. This combined with other events that occurred in the wider Freedom ride, brought Charles Perkins to public prominence as a leading Aboriginal activist and established him as an iconic figure for both young and older Aborigines alike. In addition it clearly demonstrated his commitment to achieving equity for Aboriginal people in Australia, which became a lifelong cause.

Draft Values:

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Rating</i>
A Events, Processes	The Moree baths has outstanding national heritage value under criterion (a) as the place where student protests in 1965 highlighted the legalised segregation and racism experienced by Aboriginal people in outback Australia. It brought the racial discrimination and segregation experienced by the Aboriginal population in Australian country and rural towns to the attention and consciousness of the white Australian population. It forced Australia to look at the way it treated its Indigenous population and showed that racial segregation continued in many towns. The protest was an important contributor to the climate of opinion which produced a yes vote in the 1967 referendum to change the Australian Constitution. From that change came a legal basis for subsequent Commonwealth involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and an increased recognition at local, state, and national levels of the importance of Indigenous rights in Australia.	AT
H Significant people	The Moree baths has outstanding heritage value to the nation under criterion (h) as the place that has a special association with the life and works of the Aboriginal activist Dr Charles Nelson Perrurle Perkins AO. The events at the Moree baths in 1965 brought him into public prominence as a leading Aboriginal activist and it was here that his tactic of confronting people with awkward truths about their treatment of Aborigines first emerged in a public context. This pattern was repeated throughout his life even when it resulted in costs to him personally. The events that occurred in Moree, and the wider Freedom ride, established Charles Perkins as an iconic figure for both young and older Aborigines alike. In addition it clearly demonstrated his commitment to achieving equity for Aboriginal people in Australia, something that became a lifelong cause.	AT

Historic Themes:

Nominator's Summary of Significance:

Until the early 1970s, segregation of town amenities, or to be precise, the disallowance of

Aboriginal people from commercial and social gathering places, was practised officially through the NSW Shire by laws, and equally importantly, unofficially by employees like bartenders and cafe-owners. Aborigines anywhere in rural Australia, for example, would rarely enter a café because they knew that they would probably be served last, if at all: Even if no by-law actually forbade entry, it was known that there would be only grief for any Aborigine trying to enter, or sitting down and ordering a meal.

The desegregation of town amenities in NSW and other states was undertaken during the 1960s. The Freedom Ride in NSW, led by the Eastern Arrernte man Charles Perkins, was the best known of these crucial campaigns attempting to desegregate amenities like picture shows, hairdressing salons and swimming pools, by means of peaceful protest.

The Moree Baths picket was the best known and most photographed event of the 1965 Freedom Ride, and proved to be successful as the ban against Aboriginal children in the pool after three pm was lifted some months after the picket. Charles himself is remembered affectionately and with respect in Moree (which is more than can be said by the white towns folk, perhaps, of Walgett). I believe that a memorial of the event, such as a plaque within the pool enclosure, would be welcomed by the Shire as well as by the town's Indigenous people: So a nomination, possibly recognised by a plaque in the pool, would commemorate the outstanding event or the 1960s desegregation movement and in particular, the key moment in the 1965 Freedom Ride.

Description:

The Moree Hot Artesian Pool Complex (Moree baths) is owned and managed by the Moree Plains Shire Council. The Baths are located on Lot 20 bounded by Anne St, Gosport St and Warialda St Moree, NSW, 2400. The original hot pool opened in 1895 when the first bore that tapped into the Great Artesian Basin was completed. The bore delivered mineral waters, heated naturally to about 41 degrees Celsius. A small basin was originally excavated and gravelled. This was later upgraded with a small wooden lined basin for bathing. The original bore ceased to flow in 1957, and the hot mineral waters are now pumped to the baths. Currently the large municipal complex comprises three tiled pools.

Analysis:

Criterion (a): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's cultural history;

Many Australians were shocked by the media coverage of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa and the violence against civil rights protestors in the southern parts of the United States. On 6 May 1964, University of Sydney students protested outside the United States consulate in support of the Civil Rights Bill, which the United States Congress was then debating. When police began arresting protestors, fellow students tried to free them. The initial scuffle turned into what was described by one newspaper as an all-in brawl with the inevitable media publicity (Curthoys 2002: 6-7). The American press responded by suggesting that the demonstrators were hypocritical because they focused on fashionable American civil rights issues but did not consider the treatment of Australia's Indigenous minority. The students responded to these criticisms by establishing the Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA) which drew members from the full spectrum of university clubs (Ford 1965: 4; Spigelman 1965: 116-117; Curthoys 2002: 8-10).

Inspired by the Freedom Rides in America, the SAFA decided to use a bus to visit rural

towns in New South Wales and southern Queensland to highlight the plight of Aborigines in rural Australia to the wider Australian public through the media, and to undertake a social survey. The Freedom Ride bus set off from the University of Sydney on the evening of 12 February 1965 with 29 students on board.

The Freedom Riders found little to protest about until they reached Walgett. The RSL Club refused to admit Aboriginal people, including ex-servicemen, as members. The students picketed the RSL, which provoked heated discussion and anger in the local white community. After the demonstration, the Anglican minister and three churchwardens gave the students two hours to vacate the church hall in which they were staying. A truck attempted to run the bus off the road, succeeding on the third attempt. Fortunately, no one was injured and the students returned to town and reported the incident to the police (Read 1988: 47-48; Curthoys 2002: 100-105). Bruce Maxwell, a cadet reporter, for the Sydney Morning Herald, was present, and reported the survey, the protests, and most importantly of all the truck running the bus off the road. In showing the extent of local anger at the students' protests, the truck driver's actions created new media interest in the Freedom Ride (Curthoys 2002: 110-111; Clark 2008: 171).

The next stop on the Freedom Riders' itinerary was Moree, where a council ordinance prohibited Aborigines from using a range of council facilities including the swimming pool. This 1955 ordinance read as follows (Spigelman 1965:49):

Patronage of baths and Memorial Hall: - That no person being a full blooded or half cast aboriginal of Australia, or being a person apparently having admixture of Aboriginal blood, shall use, occupy or be present in or upon, or be allowed or be permitted or invited to use, occupy or be present upon, the premises of the council known as Memorial Hall or in or upon any of the buildings or places ancillary there to, including the supper room, Kitchen, Servery, Toilets and Passages AND THAT no such person as aforesaid shall use, occupy or be present in or be allowed or permitted to use or occupy or be present in or upon the premises of the council known as the Moree Baths or in or upon any of the buildings or places therewith.

The council justified the ordinance by claiming that Aboriginal people would affect the hygiene of the pool facilities. While the council had agreed in 1961 that Aboriginal students at Moree High School could swim under school supervision in the Municipal Baths every Wednesday afternoon during the swimming season, they were excluded as soon as school was over (Spigelman 1965:49). A local alderman, Bob Brown, had tried to introduce motions to rescind the ordinance but to no effect (Read 1988: 49; Clark 2008:172). This was the first place where the students had encountered a by-law that provided an official basis for discrimination. They therefore decided to picket the council to highlight the official discrimination against Aboriginal use of the Moree baths. The next day Bob Brown and the Freedom Riders tried to take Aboriginal children into the pool. The argument between the pool manager and the students about admitting the Aboriginal school children ended when the mayor agreed that the children should be allowed in. A meeting of students and locals that evening passed a motion that the by-law segregating the pool should be removed. The mayor said he would take this motion to the council (Curthoys 2002: 136-142).

The Freedom Riders left Moree jubilant that the colour ban had been lifted (Messenger 2002: 2). However, the next day another group of Aboriginal children, who were taken to the pool by Bob Brown, were refused entry. The mayor arrived at the pool after an emergency council meeting and ordered the by-law segregating the baths to be enforced. Once the students were

aware that the Moree pool was still segregated, they returned to the town despite having been told they would not be welcome (Curthoys 2002: 149; Clark 2008:173). The Freedom Riders again collected a number of Aboriginal children from the mission and attempted to gain admittance into the swimming pool. They attempted to enter the pool with the children for three hours. By this time, a large crowd of angry locals had gathered outside the pool. Some locals threw eggs and tomatoes. They knocked some students down and at least one was punched. Fights broke out and police arrested several crowd members (Curthoys 2002: 155-158). The media reported the attacks on the students as 'little different from the American South' (Messenger, 2002:3).

A breakthrough came when the mayor of Moree, Bill Lloyd, came down to the baths and informed the students and the crowd that he was prepared to sign a motion to rescind the 1955 by-law. Two aldermen from the council also signed the motion. This was a win for the Freedom Riders.

The events at the Moree swimming pool in 1965 received widespread coverage in newspapers and on radio and television. The fact that segregation of the pool was officially sanctioned and the poor treatment of the Aboriginal school children and of the university students, brought the plight of Aboriginal people living in outback New South Wales to the attention of the broader public. While there were other confrontations during the Freedom Ride, notably at Kempsey and Bowraville (Curthoys 2002: Ch. 7; Clark 2008:178), it is Moree and the admittance of children to the pool that has come to symbolise the Freedom Ride. A sustained public debate over Aboriginal policy broke out after the Freedom Ride returned to Sydney (Curthoys 2002:9). The publicity and debate stimulated by the Freedom Ride that persuaded many Australians to vote for constitutional change in the 1967 referendum (Cameron 2000:12).

The events which took place at the Moree Baths in February 1965 are therefore a defining moment in Australian history (Clark 2008:11). They brought the racial discrimination and segregation experienced by the Aboriginal population in Australian country and rural towns to the attention and consciousness of the white Australian population. It forced Australia to look at the way it treated its Indigenous population and brought the Commonwealth government's assimilation policy into question. It was an important contributor to the yes vote in the 1967 referendum, which provided the legal basis for the subsequent Commonwealth involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs that has resulted in increased recognition of the importance of Indigenous rights in Australia.

Criterion (h): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's cultural history;

The Moree baths have a special association with the life and works of the Aboriginal activist Dr Charles Nelson Perrurle Perkins AO. These events brought him into public prominence as an Aboriginal activist. It was at Moree baths that his tactic of forcing people to confront the awkward truth about their treatment of Aborigines first emerged in a public context. The events at Moree also clearly demonstrate his commitment to achieve equity for all Aboriginal people in Australia, something that was to become a lifelong cause.

Charles Perkins was born at the Bungalow, Telegraph Station, in Alice Springs, the son of an Eastern Arrernte woman and a Kalkadoon father (Hughes: 1998: 1). Aware that there weren't proper schools for Aborigines in Alice Springs, Charles's mother took up the offer of

schooling for him at St Francis Anglican home for boys of mixed Aboriginal and other descent in Semaphore South, Adelaide (Briscoe 2000:253). Discipline was harsh at St Francis's and racial taunts were a daily burden for Charles. For example, in his late teens Charles's offers to dance at the Port Adelaide Town Hall dance were rejected by every single woman present. He summoned up the courage to walk across the room and asked each individually only to be told, 'We don't dance with blacks'. The experience, he said scarred his mind and undermined his confidence and self-respect (Obituary-The Times 19 October 2000).

In the early 1950s Charles began playing soccer at St Francis. His outstanding skills as a soccer player led him to England in 1957 to trial for Everton. Eventually he was offered a position but declined due to his poor treatment at the club, instead accepting a position with amateur team Bishop Auckland. Feeling homesick, he returned to Australia where he was appointed captain-coach of Adelaide Croatia. In 1961 he met and married Eileen Munchenburg, moving to Sydney where he took on the position of captain-coach for the Pan-Hellenic and where he studied for his matriculation (Briscoe 2000:254). After Charles married Eileen, he used his passion and skills as a soccer player to help finance his way through University. Charles entered the University of Sydney in 1963 and it was here that he first focused on campaigning against racism and for the rights of Aboriginal people.

In 1964, Charles Perkins became President of the Student Action for Aborigines. This group visited towns and Aboriginal communities in Northern New South Wales and Southern Queensland to identify and protest against racial segregation and discrimination. Perkins' pivotal role in this Freedom Ride was recognised by his fellow students and despite occasional disagreements over tactics, the group remained remarkably cohesive (Curthoys 2000: 256).

During the Freedom Ride, Charles Perkins confronted the people living in outback New South Wales and the broader Australian community with issues that they would have preferred to ignore. This was most obvious in the events at the Moree baths where he challenged the entrenched racism of the council and the local townspeople. Perkins took the children from the mission to the pool for the successful attempt to gain entry to baths during the students' first visit to Moree. He also confronted the pool manager on the second visit to Moree, refusing to go away until the Aboriginal school children were admitted.

The pattern of directly confronting people with uncomfortable truths was a characteristic of the rest of his public life as both an Aboriginal activist and a Commonwealth public servant. To many people, Charles Perkins was an angry radical activist with an instinct for making challenging statements which grabbed headlines (Henty-Roberts 2000: 13; Spigelman 2005: 1). While Perkins (1975: 109) saw the offer of a job in the Commonwealth public service as an attempt to buy him off, he continued to speak his mind. At times this led to conflicts with government ministers but he was never afraid to challenge them even if it was at some personal cost (Briscoe 2000: 254). He witnessed some notable achievements during his time in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs where he became the first Aboriginal person to become a Departmental head. This included the 1973 revision of the Migration Act (allowing Aboriginal people to get passports without a special permit), and the 1975 Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act (Cameron 2001).

During the Freedom Ride, Charles Perkins fascinated the press. At that time, he was a rarity: an articulate and determined Aboriginal leader who clearly communicated his message of

freedom, dignity and human rights to all Australians (Curthoys 2002: 11; Spigelman 2005: 1). He also articulated the importance of changing the socio-economic status of Aboriginal people and the need to rebuild Aboriginal nations (Behrendt 2007:101). As Chief Justice Spigelman noted, 'He was a moral force for all Australians, making [Australia] a better and fairer place to live (Spigelman 2001: 12)'. It was at the Moree baths that Charles Perkins first started to change the way other Australians thought about Aboriginal people and the way that Aboriginal people perceived themselves by making people confront the uncomfortable truth (Gunson 2000: 258). In addition it cemented Charles Perkins' reputation as an iconic figure for the advancement of his people and as an inspiration for young and older Aborigines alike.

A state funeral was held in Sydney in honour of Charles Perkins on 25 October 2000. Dr Refshauge (then Deputy Premier of New South Wales) moved a condolence motion in the NSW Legislative Assembly acknowledging his extraordinary work to bring about a better future for Aboriginal people and compared him as being to Australia what Nelson Mandela was to South Africa and what Martin Luther King was to America (Parliament of NSW Government, Hansard 2000: 9494).

History:

In early 1965 a group of students from the University of Sydney led by Aboriginal student activist Charles Perkins embarked upon a bus trip through outback NSW and Qld to highlight racial inequalities in Australia at the time. The trip was based on the 'Freedom Rides' that occurred as part of the civil rights movement in the United States in the early 1960's. The bus travelled to number of towns where racial discrimination had been identified with the aim of highlighting the inequalities and raising the profile of this issue amongst the broader Australian community. A number of towns were visited including Walgett and Kempsey but in Moree, where a ban on Aboriginal use of the local pool was in force, the trip gained a national profile in the media and raised the profile of Charles Perkins as an iconic figure for the Indigenous community.

The events at the Moree Swimming Baths in February 1965 constitute a defining moment in the history of race relations in Australia. The activities of the Student Action for Aborigines group at Moree drew the attention of the public to the informal and institutional racial segregation practised at that time in outback towns in New South Wales. The events at Moree also highlighted the failures at both state and federal levels; while both spoke rhetoric of inclusion into the wider Australian society, Aboriginal people in country towns were still being excluded from sharing basic facilities. The publicity that the events at the Moree baths attracted contributed to shaping a climate of opinion resulting in a resounding Yes vote in the 1967 referendum, leading to a change in the Australian Constitution to allow the Commonwealth to make laws specifically for Aboriginal people. The constitutional amendment provided the legal basis for subsequent Commonwealth involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, and also led to increased recognition of the importance of Indigenous rights in Australia.

The Freedom Ride and the events at Moree have their origins in a heightened concern about racial discrimination in Australia after the Second World War. In 1945 the international community, in its attempts to provide peace and security in a world traumatised by the social and economic disruption of total war, agreed to recognise the political aspirations of, and to promote self-government in, colonised countries (United Nations 1945: Article 73). As a signatory to the United Nations Charter, and under pressure from independence movements in many of its colonies, Britain began to divest itself of its colonies immediately after the

war: India gained independence in 1947, quickly followed by Ceylon and Burma in 1949 and Malaya, Sudan and Ghana in the 1950s. While these countries were proud of their independence from Britain, many of them elected to remain within the Commonwealth. The 'Commonwealth club' provided a forum where the heads of government of the newly independent states met on equal terms with the heads of older self-governing Dominions like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa.

In 1960 the British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan responded to the Sharpeville massacre by delivering his 'Winds of Change' speech to the South African Parliament. The speech recognised the inevitable growth of African national consciousness, which could no longer be ignored. MacMillan's speech was not welcomed in South Africa, with its apartheid laws that entrenched racial segregation, economic exploitation, and discrimination. In response, South Africa declared itself a republic in 1961, a move that threatened to divide the Commonwealth. The Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and Harold MacMillan tried to develop a form of words that would keep the Commonwealth intact. However, the final statement released at the end of the 1961 meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers expressed concern at the effect that South Africa's racial policies could have on relations between Commonwealth countries that were members of a multi-racial association of people (Martin 2000: 201).

Menzies always championed the Commonwealth and it is not surprising that he worked with MacMillan to try to keep it intact. Privately, however, he questioned whether the newly independent nations could ever equal the old Commonwealth countries where British descendants and values prevailed (National Archives of Australia). He declined to become involved in overt criticism of apartheid, arguing that it was an internal matter for South Africa in which Australia should not interfere. Despite the government's silence, an anti-apartheid movement began to form which included the National Union of Australian University Students (Curthoys 2002: 2; Clark 2008: 5).

South Africa was not the only country where there were laws institutionalising segregation and racial discrimination. In the early 1960s, protests by the civil rights movement against racial segregation laws in the United States of America led to brutal response by police in southern states. The police response and subsequent mass jailing received widespread coverage in Australia. In response to the mass protests and arrests in Birmingham, Alabama, the American President, John Kennedy, introduced a Civil Rights Bill to Congress in 1963. His successor, Lyndon Johnson, sought to push the bill through Congress in the early months of 1964. Sydney University students decided to protest outside the United States consulate on 6 May 1964 in support of the Bill, and against the senators from southern states who were attempting through filibuster to prevent its passage. When police began arresting protestors, fellow students tried to free them. The initial scuffle turned into what one newspaper described as "an all-in brawl", leading to extensive media publicity (Curthoys 2002: 6-7). International and some local reports of the demonstration included suggestions that demonstrators were hypocritical because they focused on fashionable American civil rights issues but did not consider the treatment of Australia's Indigenous minority, which was also racially discriminatory. In 1965, assimilation rather than segregation had been Commonwealth government policy for at least a decade, but the Commonwealth's powers were limited to persuasion since Aboriginal policy was firmly a State matter at this time. In his statement after the 1961 Native Welfare Conference, the Hon Paul Hasluck, the Commonwealth Minister for Territories, described this policy as one that would enable Aboriginal people to:

"... live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians."

Discriminatory legislation was removed at Commonwealth and state level in the early 1960s. The last two states to grant Aboriginal people voting rights were Western Australia in 1962, and Queensland in 1962 (for Commonwealth elections) and 1965 (for State elections). In New South Wales, Aboriginal policy was managed by the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB), which sought either to keep people on its managed stations or to exert control over the rest through a network of district welfare officers (Goodall 1996: 265). Typically, Aboriginal people lived on the fringes of towns, either in unhealthy shanty settlements or in highly regulated stations. They continued to suffer the effects of racial discrimination at a local level, socially, economically, and culturally.

There was, however, a growing movement for Aboriginal rights in the late 1950s and early 1960s, represented most clearly by the organisations brought together by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines (in 1964 Torres Strait Islanders were added so that the acronym became FCAATSI). Students had not been a significant part of this movement, but after the criticisms of their actions outside the US Embassy in May 1964, and influenced by the arrival the year before of Charles Perkins and Gary Williams as the first two Aboriginal students at the University of Sydney, they began to organise a very successful student-organised demonstration and concert. This took place on National Aborigines Day in Hyde Park in Sydney and was followed by the formation in July 1964 of a more permanent organisation, Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA). This organisation drew people from many of the political, religious and recreational clubs in the University and it had an Aboriginal student, Charles Perkins, as Chairman (Ford 1965: 4; Spigelman 1965: 116-117; Curthoys 2002: 8-10).

The proposed Freedom Ride with its focus on racial discrimination and segregation resonated with Charles Perkins' life. He was born at the Bungalow in Alice Springs. His Eastern Arrernte mother, recognising there were limited educational opportunities took up an offer for him to go to school at the St Francis House, an Anglican home for boys of mixed Aboriginal and other descent in Semaphore South, Adelaide (Briscoe 2000: 253). It was here that he first encountered discrimination against Aboriginal people. A story from his late teens demonstrates the callous treatment meted out to Aboriginals. He went to a dance at the Port Adelaide Town Hall where he summoned up the courage to walk across the room and individually asked each girl for a dance only to be told, 'We don't dance with blacks'. The experience, he said, scarred his mind and undermined his confidence and self respect (The Times 19 October 2000).

In the early 1950s Charles began playing soccer at St Francis House. His outstanding skills as a soccer player led him to England in 1957 where he trialled for Everton. Although he was offered a position he rejected this due to his treatment at the club and ended up playing as an amateur for the Bishop Auckland club. In 1958, he returned to Australia to marry Eileen Munchenburg and take up matriculation studies (Briscoe 2000:254). He continued to play soccer, taking on the position of captain coach for Adelaide Croatia before moving to Sydney where he also accepted the role of captain coach of the Sydney Pan Hellenic team, using it to help finance his way through University. In 1963, he entered the University of Sydney where he became increasingly involved in campaigns against racial discrimination and segregation against Aborigines, 'recognising too their rights as a people.'

One of the suggested activities for the SAFA group, which was inspired by the Freedom Rides in America, was a bus tour of Aboriginal settlements. Unlike the American Freedom Rides, which aimed to challenge segregation on interstate buses and at interstate bus terminals in the south, SAFA planned their bus tour to highlight the plight of Aborigines in rural Australia on a range of issues. Their aim was to undertake a social survey into the extent of racial discrimination in country towns, and then to draw discrimination to the attention of the wider Australian public through the press, radio and television. They wanted to point out

the discriminatory barriers and inadequacies in health and housing as well as supporting Aboriginal people in challenging the *status quo*. The group decided to adopt Martin Luther King's approach of non-violent resistance when dealing with opponents. Preparations for the trip included a number of fundraisers including folk concerts, dances and sales of Christmas cards. SAFA also received donations from the Student Union, and each student participant contributed ten pounds. They heard talks and produced a reading list about the barriers facing Aboriginal people in outback New South Wales to help them prepare themselves for the trip (*Talkabout* 1964 No.1 and No.2). The group also had several people as sources of information on discrimination and segregation in the towns in northern New South Wales. One was Jack Horner of the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship. He provided information on issues in a number of towns in outback New South Wales including Walgett, Moree and Kempsey. He also advised the SAFA about recent reports and conferences dealing with Aboriginal health and education (Letter from J. Horner to J. Spigelman 19 January 1965). Charles Perkins, the President of the group was another source of information for the bus trip. During the summer, he worked for the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs where his interaction with job seekers, evicted families and those requiring access to social services enabled him to gain an understanding of the issues faced by Aboriginal people in New South Wales. He gained further insight into racial prejudice and segregation in some of the towns when he was invited to join a light plane tour through New South Wales with a journalist, Craig Williams, and the Reverend Ted Noffs, who had agreed to help the students design their survey (Curthoys 2002: 50).

With all the preparations completed, the Freedom Ride bus left Sydney on 13 February 1965. Its first stop was Wellington where the students conducted surveys and investigations, highlighting social injustices and uncovering evidence of racial discrimination. However, without local Aboriginal contacts and with insufficient firm information to justify a demonstration they moved onto to the next town, Gulargambone. While the conditions under which Aboriginal people lived there were quite shocking, there was not a clear case of racial discrimination on which to demonstrate. The next stop was Walgett, and here the Freedom-riders took action. Walgett had both an existing group of Aboriginal activists and some clear cases of racial discrimination. It proved to be the first real showdown for the Freedom Riders. They spent their first day conducting interviews to obtain information about segregation and racial discrimination and found that the cinema, the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) club, the town's two hotels and a frock shop were all segregated (Read 1988:47). The manager of the Oasis Hotel stated that he did not allow Aboriginal people into the public bar because his white patrons did not want them admitted. He said he would lose his white customers and business if he allowed Aboriginals to drink there. Of more concern was the fact that Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal ex-service men, who applied to join the Walgett RSL Club, were denied membership.

The Freedom Riders picketed the Walgett RSL club from noon until sunset holding placards stating '*Walgett: Australian's disgrace*', '*Bar the Colour Bar*', '*Good enough for Tobruk – why not Walgett RSL?*' (Read 1988: 48; Curthoys 2002: 98). The picket provoked much heated discussion and the white community in Walgett expressed its anger towards the Freedom Riders. The minister of Anglican Church Hall in Walgett, where the students were staying, had warned them that morning that they would not be allowed to stay if they demonstrated against the RSL. After the demonstration, the minister and three churchwardens gave the students two hours to vacate the hall (Read 1988: 48).

A line of cars and a truck followed the bus when it left Walgett. It was night time and the students could not see their followers. The truck attempted to run the bus off the road twice; on the third attempt, it clipped the bus forcing it off the road and over an embankment. While nobody was injured during this incident, the students were further alarmed when the convoy

of cars stopped, but were relieved to find that the cars belonged to members of the Aboriginal community who had tried to provide an escort to protect the bus from hostile white residents. The bus returned to Walgett where the driver reported the incident to the police. When the police had finished taking all the statements, the Freedom Riders left Walgett, which remained a bitterly divided town (Read 1988:49).

Walgett was the first big test for the students. While their protest did little to change the attitudes of the townsfolk, they encouraged the Aboriginal community to push for change. Aboriginal people who participated in pickets were bitter at the ongoing discrimination they experienced in their town and they continued to protest and agitate for desegregation in the establishments that still upheld a colour ban after the protestors left (Clark 2008:171). Seven months after the visit of the Freedom Ride, some students returned to Walgett to assist in an Aboriginal demonstration to desegregate the local cinema.

Initially, there was little media interest in the events in Walgett (Clark 2008:171). However, a report by Bruce Maxwell, a cadet reporter for the *Herald*, brought the SAFA Freedom Ride into the national spotlight. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Mirror* newspapers as well as TV and radio now began to report on the next stage of the Freedom Ride in Moree (Curthoys 2002:7).

The pattern of racial discrimination and segregation in Moree was similar to that found in Walgett with some firms refusing to employ Aboriginals, and most hotels refusing to serve them. The students' attention, however, focused on the swimming pool where a council by-law prevented Aboriginal people's entry. This was an example of discrimination enforceable under local ordinance so it was seen to be similar to officially sanctioned apartheid in South Africa and segregation in the United States. In addition, a local councillor, alderman Bob Brown, had repeatedly tried to get the council to allow Aborigines to use the baths, but to no avail - he could not even get a seconder for his motion (Clark 2008:172).

Initially, the Freedom Riders held a picket at the Moree council chambers to protest against the exclusion of Aboriginal people (except for school children during school hours) from the Moree baths. The next day Bob Brown and the Freedom Riders tried to take Aboriginal children into the pool. The pool manager argued heatedly with the student leaders. The impasse ended when the mayor agreed to allow the children in. That evening, the students held a public meeting to explain why they were in Moree and to present their survey results. Initially the largely white audience reacted angrily and some left, but after discussion the atmosphere changed. The meeting concluded by passing a motion that the by-law segregating the pool should be removed, which the mayor said he would take to the council (Curthoys 2002: 136-142).

The Freedom Riders left Moree the next day, jubilant that the colour ban had been lifted (Messenger 2002: 2). While the students travelled to Boggabilla and then to Warwick in southern Queensland, Bob Brown tried to take another group of Aboriginal children to the pool but the pool manager refused them entry and decided to close the pool. Following an emergency council meeting, the mayor arrived and ordered the manager to re-open the pool and enforce the by-law providing for segregation of the baths. The following day Bob Brown called the Freedom Riders to let them know what had happened. Charles Perkins had flown to Sydney to be interviewed for a television programme. The students phoned the Methodist Minister in Moree who confirmed Bob Brown's story and told them that they would not be welcome in Moree. The students decided to turn the bus around and return to Moree (Clark 2008:173).

The Freedom Riders stopped at Inverell that night and picked up Charles Perkins in the morning. Charles felt that the opportunity to achieve a 'break through' was at stake and saw Moree as the place to do this (Read 1988: 51). On returning to Moree, the Freedom Riders again collected a number of Aboriginal children from the mission to gain admittance into the

swimming pool. They attempted to enter the pool with the children for three hours. By this time, a large crowd of locals had gathered outside the pool. It was hostile and tempers were inflamed. Some locals threw eggs and tomatoes. They knocked some students down and at least one was punched. Fights broke out and police arrested several crowd members (Curthoys 2002: 155-158). The media reported the attacks on the students as “little different from the American South” (Messenger, 2002:3).

A breakthrough came when the mayor of Moree, Bill Lloyd, came down to the baths and informed the students and the crowd that he was prepared to sign a motion to rescind the 1955 by-law. After some negotiation, the Freedom Riders accepted these assurances and agreed to leave. They boarded the bus under a hail of eggs and tomatoes and the police provided a protective escort as the bus left town (Curthoys 2002).

The Freedom Riders continued their journey, visiting the coastal towns in northern New South Wales to undertake their surveys and highlight instances of racial discrimination. While the students demonstrated against particular instances of discrimination and segregation in towns like Kempsey and Bowraville, the local reactions were more muted than those in Moree (Spigelman 1965: 49; Curthoys 2002; Ch. 7).

The reports and photos in the major newspapers of the events at Moree shocked many white Australians, making them aware of the plight of Aboriginal people (Cameron 2000: 12; Clark 2008: 178). By drawing attention to both informal and officially sanctioned segregation and racial discrimination, the Freedom Ride helped to show that governmental rhetoric, that Aboriginal people should share in the benefits and opportunities of Australians generally, was not being applied in practice.

The Freedom Riders highlighted the fact that, contrary to government policy, segregation and discrimination were endemic in many of the rural towns of New South Wales. The council ordinance prohibiting Aboriginal people from using the Moree baths demonstrated that discrimination was officially sanctioned in some cases. Whether the Commonwealth Government was unable or unwilling to tackle such contradictory policies is unclear. Section 51 of the constitution, prohibited the Government from passing laws specifically for Aboriginal Australians. There was also a lack of will to use the external affairs powers to address racial discrimination.

By highlighting endemic racism in Australia, the Freedom Ride contributed to the passage of the 1967 referendum, which altered the constitution to allow the Commonwealth to make laws for Aboriginal people. It also contributed to the passage in 1975 of legislation prohibiting racial discrimination and encouraged some Aboriginal people to become active in challenging the status quo of segregation and discrimination. The Freedom Ride has been described as one of those transitional moments in Australian history when one era fades and another takes its place (Clark 2008: 11).

Condition:

The building is still in use and is in good condition. Since 1965 the exterior has been modified and there have been minor refurbishments to the interior of the baths and swimming pool. These modifications have not affected its heritage value relating to the 1965 Freedom Ride.

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End of Report
