

News Release

November, 2008

Bethany and Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative unveil plaque to acknowledge traditional owners of land.

On Wednesday, 18 November 2008, Bethany Community Support formally acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which Bethany stands with the unveiling of a plaque to mark the occasion with representatives from the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative.

The ceremony began with a traditional 'smoking ceremony' and dance by members of Wathaurong.

Below is a transcript of the speech by Bethany's Chair Dr Sarah Leach.

'It is my pleasure to welcome you all here today. Our warmest welcome is in acknowledging the elders, traditional owners and custodians of the land that are here today. I particular want to make feel welcome those amongst us who have a personal connection with Bethany Community Support.

Bethany is proud to have been a part of the Geelong community since 1868; this year celebrating 140 years of adapting to the changing needs, beliefs and values of those that live here. In reflecting on this I thought it important to take the opportunity to highlight what Indigenous peoples in this area have experience over the past 140 years. As shared experiences such as this one are an opportunity to expand our knowledge and that over time, after many more opportunities for cumulative knowledge building, may we come to a level of mutual understanding that will allow us to work in true partnership with local Indigenous peoples.

Some of the significant events historically in the Wathaurong region were: the first recorded massacres occurred in 1835, by 1839 most of the land was settled and utilised for the grazing of sheep and cattle, 1840 saw Aboriginals banned from the streets of Geelong. In 1841, 150 peoples of the Barrabool clan were recorded as being "found" in 1861 a one acre block was set aside at Mt Duneed as a "reserve" for the remaining Barrabool peoples; and 24 years later in 1885 – Willem Bahnip died of tuberculosis; he was declared, by the settlers, as the last known survivor of the Barrabool clan and it was assumed also the last of the Wathaurong.

At this time in history Bethany had been already been servicing the Geelong Community for 17 years. The 1900's were a tumultuous time with wars and depressions and Bethany provided services to women and children as either respite, a maternity ward and/ or adoption agency. Although adoption had long been practiced unofficially in Australia legal adoption was introduced and arranged until 1977. It is impossible to know how many Indigenous women and babies have passed through Bethany throughout its history and to what degree their memories would insight pleasure, sorrow or irreverence.

For all media enquiries contact Julie Stefanoff at Bethany Community Support on 5245 2818, 0417 411 400 or email jstefanoff@bethany.org.au



News Release

In relation to this I, personally, and as a representative of the Board of Management at Bethany Community Support can say “we are collectively delighted to be here at this time in history, during a time of a National Apology for past practices, reconciliation and healing. Through sharing history we may develop a cumulative understanding and renewed trust and mutual respect. Today is a great example of the process that is happening across the country in regional and urban centers, which is the opportunity to warmly welcome the contemporary Indigenous community to include mainstream agencies and community members in special and ancient ceremonies to build knowledge and understanding. This ceremony, I am told , calls on the ancestral creator spirit to cleanses the old spirits and these grounds. This is an ancient tradition and we accept the symbolism of replenishing.

Thank you to the Wathaurong community, David Tournier Snr and dancers for sharing this ceremony with us and for allowing the staff and management of Bethany Community Support to participate.