Indigenous history and heritage

Early European settlement in the area now known as the Gold Coast displaced many Aboriginal people from their traditional country. Among the Aboriginal people that remained on the Gold Coast, several became well known to the European community and are recorded in historical documents.

It is sometimes difficult to determine the specific region that was the traditional country of people featured in many of the early historical documents, due to the movement of individuals and family. Extensive research has enabled some very detailed accounts of the lives of a few Aboriginal people that lived in the Gold Coast region over 100 years ago.

Throughout the late 1880s and early 1900s, traditional Aboriginal people of the region had to adapt to many changes. Their freedom was at the mercy of government officials who would have preferred that no Aboriginal people lived near European settlement. Employment was a crucial factor that enabled many Aboriginal people to survive in their traditional lands. Often it was only those who could prove themselves to be of some value as labour for European industries that were allowed to stay.

Several Aboriginal families found employment, sent their children to schools, became Christians and established houses. Yet they still lived with the fear of having their children taken from them and placed under the control of government officials. Aboriginal people had to adapt to the changes that were happening around them to keep their families together and to survive in their traditional lands.

Aboriginal people played an important role in the establishment of rural industries such as the timber and pastoral industries, some became established as fishermen and in the oyster industry and others worked in the domestic service and the tourism industry. Many Aboriginal people have contributed to the development of the Gold Coast by working in the sand-mining, dredging, earthmoving, building and many other industries.

A recent census stated that over 3600 Aboriginal people live on the Gold Coast. Many of these are descendants of traditional Aboriginal people of the region, while others have moved to the Gold Coast from other regions throughout Australia. Ongoing work is being carried out by the local Aboriginal community to document their history and culture and share it with others.

Historical writing acknowledgement: Michael Aird

Indigenous History and Heritage image: Aboriginal peoples in the Hinterlands of the Gold Coast region, Queensland, circa 1891 [picture] / William Stark, photographer. L-Rt: Polly holding Molly Boyd, Jimmy Boyd, Kipper Tommy and Coomera Bob. Location may possibly be near the Albert River or Nerang River. Image courtesy of the City of Gold Coast Local Studies with kind permission of State Library of Queensland.

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