

This publication acknowledges the Wiradjuri people who are the traditional custodians of this land and pays respect to the elders past and present.

Aboriginal people are advised that the publication contains images of people who have died.

# Wellington



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## COUNTRY, SPIRIT AND BELONGING THE WIRADJURI IN WELLINGTON VALLEY

### Introduction

Wellington, a small town in central Western NSW Australia, is located at the junction of the Bell and Macquarie rivers. The masthead of the town's only newspaper, *The Wellington Times*, reads 'Where the Two Rivers Meet'. It could well be 'Where Black and White Australia Meet', for Wellington's historical and ongoing significance lies in its race relations. With just over 8850 inhabitants (2011), one quarter of whom are Aboriginal, Wellington's Local Government Area (LGA) is the site of many significant developments in race relations in Australia.

Wiradjuri nation occupies many municipalities including the Wellington LGA and claims a total massive land area that is three-quarters the size of England: a staggering 97,100 sq. km.

Wellington Valley was colonised in 1817 and for the first 20 year period of its settlement represented the furthest outreach of the British colony.

This early settlement had Australia's first Anglican mission. The Wellington Valley Mission Papers represent one of the largest and most important sources of colonial frontier history in NSW. These records are highly significant for local Indigenous people as well as historians, as the genealogical records they contain prove the continuity of Indigenous presence that stretches from settlement to the present day (see pages 32, 33).

Mission records from those times also reveal Wellington Valley Mission 'procured' Wiradjuri children for re-education and separation from their families and cultural milieu. Thus the sad history of the stolen generations had its beginning six generations, or close to 200 years ago, in this valley (see pages 8).

The first stop and intervention of the 1965 Freedom Ride, led by Charles Perkins was in Wellington (see page 21).

In 1993 Australia's first Native Title claim was lodged by members of Wellington's Aboriginal community under the *Native Title Act* (1993) (see pages 32, 33).

Today Wellington appears to be a town struggling on many fronts. The Council's *Economic Development Plan* (2011-2015) outlines many of the challenges faced by the local economy and community, not least the predicted steady decline over the next few decades of Wellington's population (the only demographic predicted to grow is the Indigenous community). Wellington has never had an Indigenous council member, let alone mayor – an indication of the state of political and social reconciliation between Indigenous and non Indigenous communities.

'Introduction' is continued on the back page of this publication.



Joyce Williams (2011). Photographer: Mathieu Gallois.  
(The people represented in the photo frame are listed on page 15)

### Survival

Joyce Williams is the most senior Wiradjuri woman of the Wellington Valley. Along with Violet Carr and Betty Ferguson, she is an elder of the Gallangabang Aboriginal Corporation. Black snake, possum and echidna are Gallangabang's totems and are among many totems Wiradjuri people identify themselves with in the region.

Joyce, Violet and Betty have collectively lived more years than Australia has been a British colony and nation. Through their extended family trees, these three women represent the great majority of Wellington's traditional Aboriginal families. In this capacity and as elders, they are the Applicants of the Wellington Valley Native Title claim.

Joyce's extraordinary life story, the places where she has lived and worked, the fights for self-determination and equality she has participated in and led, closely mirror the wider story of race relations and Aboriginal survival in Wellington over the last century.

Joyce was born in a small makeshift tin hut on the banks of the Macquarie River in Mission Camp (now called Nanima) in 1926. She is one of the last living links to the Wiradjuri language in the Wellington area (she knows just a few dozen words). Her mother Margaret Riley (maiden name Margaret Cecilia May) worked on stations in the local area and sometimes

worked as a midwife. Joyce's father Herbert Riley (known to many Aboriginal people as Boney Riley) was a shearer before he volunteered to serve in WW1 when he was 19 years old. As an Aboriginal man, Private Riley was not recognised as an Australian citizen when he enlisted in the army, he could not drink beer in a bar in Wellington, nor was he a part of the federal government soldier settlement program when he returned to Australia (see page 30). Private Riley was wounded in battle at Hermies, a small rural town not much bigger than Wellington in northern France in 1916.

'Survival' is continued on page 2 of this publication.