



Suggestion 44

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2 pages

Australian Electoral Commission Victorian Federal Redistribution Submission

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I wish to convey my strong objection to the continuing use of the name McMillan as a federal electorate in Victoria. As you know, McMillan was named after the explorer, squatter, pastoralist and politician Angus McMillan. To those epithets should be added - mass murderer.

There is strong evidence of Angus McMillan either leading or sending others in his name to kill hundreds of Gunnaikurnai people in the 1840s. Over the course of the decade between 1840 and 1850, there were multiple incidents in which tens and sometimes hundreds of the Gunnaikurnai community were killed in retribution for supposed acts of violence perpetrated by the local Aboriginal people (see map following). Even when this did occur, such as in the case when his friend and first employer Lachlan Macalister was killed by an Aborigine, McMillan's response was so disproportionate it beggars belief. McMillan retaliated by organising an armed assault on the Gunnaikurnai, including the massacre of between 60 and 150 people at Warrigal Creek, according to historian Paul Bartrop. These massacres were carried out despite the risk of hanging to the perpetrators. As we know, very few non-Aboriginal people were ever arrested let alone convicted or hung for such atrocities. Mostly they were either ignored by or kept from authorities. Tellingly, a fellow Gippsland squatter, Henry Meyrick wrote the following in a letter home to his relatives in England in 1846:

"... The blacks are very quiet here now, poor wretches. No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparring perseverance as they are. Men, women and children are shot whenever they can be met with ...I have protested against it at every station I have been in Gippsland, in the strongest language, but these things are kept very secret as the penalty would certainly be hanging.

... For myself, if I caught a black actually killing my sheep, I would shoot him with as little remorse as I would a wild dog, but no consideration on earth would induce me to ride into a camp and fire on them indiscriminately, as is the custom whenever the smoke is seen. They [the Aborigines] will very shortly be extinct. It is impossible to say how many have been shot, but I am convinced that not less than 450 have been murdered altogether..."

('Gippsland Settlers and the Kurnai Dead' by Patrick Morgan)

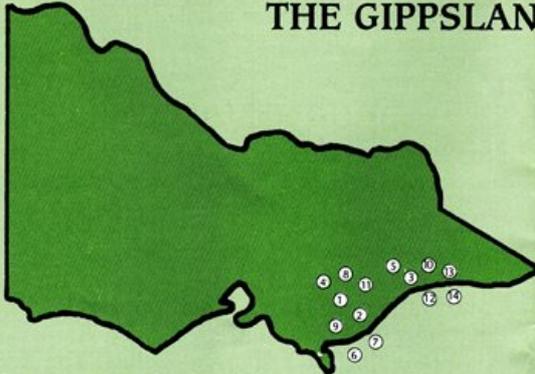
Cal Flyn, a Scottish descendant of McMillan, who has written a book 'Thicker Than Water' about her ancestor, discovered that when McMillan arrived in Gippsland there were some 2,000 Aborigines in the area. By 1857 only 96 remained. Her ancestor was directly involved in the near extermination of an entire community.

It is one thing to have monuments and plaques celebrating McMillan's life still prominent in the local area. But to have the Parliament of Australia officially sanction Angus McMillan's heinous crimes through continuing to have a federal electorate named after him is repugnant. Could we imagine Germany ever having a Hitler electorate? Thankfully, over the past 18 months, the sitting Liberal member, Russell Broadbent, as well as Labor and Greens candidates, have endorsed a change of electorate name. I would go further and suggest that the Gunnaikurnai communities of Gippsland have a direct involvement in the selection of an appropriate new name and I understand Gunnaikurnai organisations have formed a naming committee.

The continued use of McMillan’s name for the federal electorate has brought pain and humiliation to the Gunnaikurnai people and shame on us for long enough. As Cal Flynn said in a newspaper interview “it seems the wheels of progress turn slowly, but I’m glad to hear that the concern of Gippsland’s Aboriginal community are finally being heard. Changing a name cannot change the past, but it is a symbol perhaps that the wilful blindness shown towards the darker seams of colonial history is coming to an end.”

It has been almost 70 years since the Federal Division of McMillan was proclaimed to honour Angus McMillan. Twice in the past 15 years submissions to change the name have failed. It is now time to honour the First Australians to whom McMillan brought devastation, not on a single occasion to one individual, but on multiple occasions over a decade to hundreds of Gunnaikurnai men, women and children. This is not about taking a black armband view of history. It is about telling the truth. If we are truly to walk together as a nation and strive for reconciliation, surely righting this wrong is a simple yet powerful acknowledgement of who we are as Australians today and what we stand for. As a human being sharing the same blood as those who have suffered at the hands of this man both then and now, **This Must Be Done.**

THE GIPPSLAND MASSACRES



The Aboriginal people of East Gippsland fought against the European invasion of their land. However the technical superiority of the Europeans’ weapons gave them an absolute advantage.

This map shows the locations of known killings of Aborigines by Europeans in East Gippsland between 1840 and 1850.

The deaths of many hundred people are represented. Many more died beyond prying eyes.

1	1840, Oct.-Dec.	Unknown number killed by Angus McMillan’s men.
2	1840, December 21	Angus McMillan and his men took a ‘heavy toll’ of Aboriginal lives.
3	1841	30-35 shot by Angus McMillan’s men.
4	1841	Unknown number shot by Angus McMillan’s men.
5	1842	Unknown number killed.
6	1842	‘Hundreds’ killed.
7	1843, June	Between 60 and 180 shot by Angus McMillan and his men.
8	1844	Unknown number killed.
9	1846, November	14 killed.
10	1846, December	8 killed by Captain Dana and the Aboriginal Police.
11	1846-1847	50 or more shot by armed party hunting for a white woman supposedly held by Aborigines. No such woman was ever found.
12	1850	15-20 killed.
13	1850	16 poisoned.
14	1850	15-20 killed.

Source: KHT