

By Ps Barbara Miller

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William Cooper was an Aboriginal Australian Christian who lived from 1860-1941. He was a Yorta Yorta man born near Echuca in the Murray River area. He was one of the first Aboriginal people in Australia to accept Christianity following the lead of his brothers and sisters. Daniel and Janet Mathews set up Maloga Mission distressed at the treatment of Aboriginal people and William learned to read and write very quickly. Daniel also encouraged the Aborigines to follow his steps in actively working to improve the situation of Aboriginal people, sending petitions to government etc.

William Cooper's legacy persists today in the yearly celebration of NAIDOC or National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee which is celebrated in July. He is the father of NAIDOC. William spent many years working for the "uplift" as he called it of his people, writing letters to federal and state governments and newspapers, meeting Prime Minister Lyons and other MPs and petitioning the King of England.

However, the Australian government would not forward his petition to the King because Aborigines were not citizens of Australia, having lost that status at federation. Disillusioned, Cooper set up two things. One was the Day of Mourning for the 150th anniversary of European settlement in Sydney which he organised with NSW leaders such as Bill Ferguson, a Presbyterian Aboriginal and Jack Patten. They felt they could not celebrate the occasion.

The other was Aboriginal Sunday where Cooper persuaded the National Missionary Council to set aside the first Sunday before Australia Day to pray for and teach about the Aboriginal situation. The first was in 1940 and it gradually changed to a secular as well as a church event, became week-long and included Torres Strait Islanders.

Cooper set up one of the first Aboriginal organisations in Australia – the Aborigines Advancement League which did welfare work and helped the Cummeragunja Aborigines on strike because of the bad conditions they lived under. He set a platform for and mentored the next generation of leaders like his nephew, Sir Pastor Doug Nicholls who became the only Aboriginal governor of an Australian State – South Australia.

Cooper is fondly remembered by the Jewish community of Australia and has been honoured by Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Centre in Jerusalem because he led the only known private protest worldwide against Kristallnacht, the start of the Holocaust in 1938. He has an Academic Chair of Resistance to the Holocaust named after him. This was touching because he was not a citizen or counted in the census of his own country. He mentored some of the leaders who worked for the 1967 referendum to have Indigenous people counted as people not flora and fauna (plants and animals) in Australia's constitution.

In this book, you will be taken back to a significant time in Australian history, wherein a brilliant and dignified Aboriginal man WILLIAM COOPER bravely challenged the norms in his country.

Witness how he instilled change and fought for the human rights of several groups of people, who were victims of persecution. Inspiring and moving, this book will stir a sense of humanitarian awareness within the hearts, minds and spirits of its readers.

Captivating and filled with insights, this work is a literary beacon of light that dispels the darkness of racial and social discrimination.

Barbara is married to Norman, an Aboriginal Australian and has a son, Michael. They live in Cairns, north Queensland, Australia. She is a pastor, mediator, psychologist and teacher and has had a keen interest in working for Aboriginal advancement since 1970 when she got involved as a university student. She was instrumental in the movement of the Mapoon Aboriginal people back to their land in 1974 after they had been moved off by police to make way for a mining company and she recorded their stand.



Also she was very involved in the setting up of the North Queensland Land Council in 1978 to work for land rights and self-determination for Aboriginal people against the background of the discriminatory Queensland Aborigines Act. The Human Rights Commission asked her to write a report on this and she did a case study on Yarrabah.

In the early 1990's, working as the CEO of the Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council which represented Aboriginal local government in remote communities, she lobbied state and federal governments and wrote a number of reports including reports on Aboriginal deaths in custody and crime prevention on Aboriginal communities. Barbara and Norman take groups of Australians to Israel each year for Christian conferences and prayer tours and minister regularly in other nations.

William Cooper Gentle Warrior

Barbara Miller

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My book "William Cooper, Gentle Warrior: Standing Up for Australian Aborigines and Persecuted Jews" brings to life this man of good Christian character, humility, integrity, vision, perseverance and charm. He had a commitment to God and social justice and was inspired by stories of the Jewish people coming out of captivity into the Promised Land and inspired by Negro spirituals that Mathews sang. The book is also a history of Aboriginal- European contact from settlement till today. Copies available from <http://barbara-miller-books.com/>