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Land, Labour and Ambivalence: Lutheran Missionaries Managing Land Disputes at Cape Bedford Mission*

This article provides a close reading of a land dispute between Lutheran missionaries at Cape Bedford mission during the 1920s and 1930s in order to extrapolate understandings of missionary ambivalence, power, and privilege within colonial processes of dispossession. The main contention is that missionaries felt compelled to promote Aboriginal engagement in agricultural labour in order to ensure that they could visibly demonstrate the land’s productivity, and then maintain access to it. It also contributes to understandings about missionary power and privilege within the colonial context and how at times the authority of missionaries was undermined by bureaucracy. It points to the discrepancies between settler and humanitarian discourses around Indigenous land use in Queensland’s north during this period, and the relationships between missions and the state.

In the territories of Papua and New Guinea and Australia’s north, where the British and German Empires overlapped, missionaries were effectively “land brokers” for Indigenous peoples.1 In Queensland by the 1900s, missionaries usually held the title to at least part of the land that missions were on. They paid the government for the lease for Crown land so that Aboriginal people could use it. This reality complicates notions that the reserve system in Australia constituted a form of recognised Aboriginal land ownership in a colonial setting.2 To gain a greater understanding of land use and occupation at Cape Bedford, we can draw on these nineteenth-century studies from across

2. Elizabeth Elbourne argued that notions of land ownership on Cape Colony missions were so complex that they were often misunderstood, fuelling tensions between indigenous peoples and missionaries, and between the various clans who clustered on to mission stations. E. Elbourne, Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853 (London: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002), 295–96.

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the British Empire, identifying connections between colonial attitudes towards land, labour, and governance. Missionaries inhabited ambivalent positions at Cape Bedford, a Lutheran mission north of Cooktown on Queensland's Cape York Peninsular. At Cape Bedford, Aboriginal people worked on land and sea. The mission's superintendent, a German missionary who had trained with and represented the Neuendettelsau mission in Bavaria, George Schwarz, his director Otto Theile, and the Chairman of the Cape Bedford Mission Board, E. V. H. Gutekunst, believed that agricultural enterprise in particular would benefit Aboriginal people, partly because property rights were linked to discourses about labour. Though this may be dismissed as an effort to assimilate residents to what were perceived to be idealistic European lifestyles, there were signs that the missionaries believed that if Aboriginal people were able to make the land productive, in ways recognisable to the state and surrounding settlers, then the mission could better ensure their continued access to the land.

This was evident when, in 1934, a dispute erupted with the mission's neighbour, pastoralist Alex C. Wallace. Through this incident, we can assess ways in which missionaries brokered Aboriginal access to land in Queensland, and how the power missionaries held was sometimes illusory: at least limited, to certain aspects of life such as social organisation or the representation of religion. We can also trace continuities between nineteenth-century discourses around Aboriginal land dispossession and its entanglement with conceptualisations about Indigenous labour. Most importantly, however, this case study demonstrates the ways in which bureaucratic incompetence and inefficient state governance systems limited opportunities for Aboriginal economic advancement.

Cape Bedford mission was established in 1886 on the banks of the McIvor River, eighty kilometres north of Cooktown, on approximately fifty square miles. It is part of the Daarrba Warra clan's land and is a site of ceremonial importance. European explorers such as James Cook had met with Aboriginal people at the nearby Endeavour River in 1770, and Phillip Parker King's expedition sighted fires lit around the rim of the bay, as they sailed past in 1819. It was not until 1873, when William Hann found gold on the Palmer River, that foreign fossickers flooded in to the region and established a port at Cooktown. During this period there is evidence of Aboriginal camps being


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attacked at random and massacres being perpetrated by settlers and fossickers.8

In 1885 the Lutheran missionary Johannes Flierl, one of the frontmen for the Neuendettelsau Mission activities in the Pacific, took the lead role in planning the Cape Bedford mission. He was not only supported by the Neuendettelsau Mission in Germany, but was governed and supported in part by the Immanuel Synod in South Australia. He disembarked in Cooktown, passing through on his way to Finschaffen in the then newly claimed German colony of New Guinea (then Kaiser Wilhelmsland), where local peoples were already working on plantations.9 He inquired with the Queensland government about the potential for establishing a mission nearby.10 The local police magistrate had recommended a site for an Aboriginal reserve in 1881, and 50,000 acres had thus been marked out.11 Speculators had acquired the surrounding land, and by the mid-1880s the area was a “complete colonial dominion.”12 The land, along the McIvor River, was not necessarily easy to cultivate: an agricultural reporter for The Queenslander in 1887 had heard that it was undesirable, and was being voluntarily forfeited. Despite some successful tropical crops,13 uncertainty persisted about the ability to sustain pastoral or agricultural production. This contributed to the reluctance amongst mission societies to invest in the property.

Government policies of the time reflected the ideas of those in power who supposed agriculture was ideal industry for Aboriginal, as well as Pacific Islander workers. Finding that people at Cape Bedford were not always interested in his sermons, missionaries such as Flierl also often adhered to this view. He wrote: “if they could learn to clear the garden of weeds, they might come to appreciate the weeds in their hearts and minds and prepare a fine clean bed to receive the blessed Seed of God's Word into their hearts.”14

In 1897, nearly ten years after Flierl applied to establish the mission at Cape Bedford, the Queensland government introduced the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of Opium Act.15 The Act formalised a system of governance for Aboriginal peoples in the wake of Archibald Meston’s “Report on the Aborigines of Queensland.” Meston’s report was submitted to his commissioner,

8. N. Kirkman, “‘A snider is a splendid civilizer’: European Attitudes to Aborigines on the Palmer River Goldfield, 1873–1883,” in Race Relations in North Queensland, ed. H. Reynolds (Townsville: Department of History and Politics, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1993), 119, 135; McIvor, Cockatoo, 16.
12. Haviland and Haviland, “‘How much food will there be in heaven?’” 123.
14. Flierl to Rechner, 11 November 1886, ND (KM 1887, no. 2), cited in Haviland and Haviland, “‘How much food will there be in heaven?’” 132.
15. Haviland and Haviland, “‘How much food will there be in heaven?’” 126; M. S. Reigersberg, “‘We are Lutherans from Germany’: Music, Language, Social History and Change in Hopevale,” Aboriginal History 36 (2012): 102.

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Horace Tozer, then Home Secretary for the Queensland State government in 1896. In it, Meston articulated his hope that Aboriginal settlements would become agricultural hubs, recommending that missions be allocated 100 acres of land to commence agricultural programmes. He believed that engaging in Western modes of work — particularly agricultural forms of labour — would encourage Aboriginal people towards a more “civilised” lifestyle. To the missionaries so connected to German New Guinea, where plantations were already such a familiar part of the landscape, extending such arrangements into new colonies must have seemed a logical direction. There were also biblical connotations applied to land acquired by missionaries, with the Cape Bedford missionaries naming one tract of land “Elim,” “a place of rest for Torrad on their pilgrimage” to Canaan. Elim was, in the book of Exodus, an oasis within the desert, with twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. Flierl saw correlations between the place he was in and the one he read about, perhaps using the Bible to understand the process of dispossession, recognising the process as the same as that which had been thrust upon the Israelites of the Bible. He may also have recognised a desire to regroup, and a renewed energy to move to a new destination or homeland. The name Elim also referred to a place just outside of the Promised Land, not in it: it was not entirely clear where the missionaries believed the next stop would be, whether on the verge of relocation to another place, or on the verge of civilisation.

This article sits within an existing body of literature that explores the agricultural work of missions. Historians who have focused on questions of mission labour and land access have rarely ventured beyond the nineteenth century. Most point to the difficulties missionaries experienced, contending with pressure from the state and surrounding settlers. Jessie Mitchell, with Richard Broome and Felicity Jensz, demonstrated the importance missionaries placed on creating successful, self-supporting missions, while under considerable pressure to disband. Jensz has uncovered examples of

17. Johann Flierl to L. W. Griffiths, 26 December 1885, Colonial Office Cape Bedford A58851 correspondence, Queensland State Archives (hereafter QSA).
neighbouring settlers who objected to missionary land use and Aboriginal land “ownership” — Aboriginal ownership was understood through peoples’ association to the land, to an extent, but ownership had not translated into legislation or land deeds. This article extends on this work by examining similar examples from twentieth-century Queensland. In contrast to these previous histories, this article places missionaries within the settler colonial paradigm of silence and destruction of Indigenous peoples. From the 1880s onwards the Queensland colonial government which transitioned to statehood in 1901, gave expansive powers to missionaries, partly through their ability to acquire land on behalf of Aboriginal communities, and the expectation placed on them to implement government policies pertaining to Aboriginal peoples.

While the Queensland government’s Protection policy remained in place until the Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act of 1939 was introduced, the focus shifted amongst administrators and missionaries towards cultural assimilation from around the 1920s onwards. Russell McGregor’s comprehensive work showed that Adolphus P. Elkin and various government representatives advocated agricultural work as part of assimilation policy design. However, his work focused on policy discussions, and so does not explore the mission policies as they met state policies to promote Aboriginal engagement in agriculture with bids to obtain land. Taking a slightly different approach, Joanna Cruickshank and Patricia Grimshaw have illustrated policy shifts through writing the biography of Ann Bon, a humanitarian closely associated with the Victorian reserve of Corranderrk. Tracing her involvement in Aboriginal affairs through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offered an alternative way of understanding policy formulation and implementation in government and mission as well as between them. Similarly, policy shifts or particular elements of policy development and implementation can be explored by looking at missionaries’ responses in moments when tensions with the government as well as nearby settlers escalated around land. Doing this elucidates humanitarian ideas about Aboriginal land ownership, and the use of land within colonial contexts. Interrogating discussions around land opens up opportunities to explore the relationship between missionaries and the state, and thus their positioning within the settler colonial paradigm.

This article focuses on quite a narrow set of correspondence written by missionaries to the state in regards to land, and is thus a micro-history, but it


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relates to broader themes discussed in mission historiography. These letters reflect humanitarian concerns; however, because these letters were about the business of mission, they often lacked religious references. Interventions in the historiography compiled by missionaries, such as Rosalind Kidd’s landmark work *The Way We Civilise*, have pushed historians to consider Queensland missions within the broader systems of state control over Aboriginal peoples. More recently, in the edited collection *Indigenous Communities*, historians of mission have explored the multifarious discourses in which missionaries discussed Indigenous land ownership. Drawing on various historiographies of missions, and post-colonial indigenous histories, this article offers another fine-grain analysis of one particular land dispute to identify ways in which missionaries navigated their obligations to the state and to the Indigenous community while trying to manage pressure from neighbouring pastoralists.

Missionaries viewed agricultural enterprise at Cape Bedford as a means of introducing Christianity and “civilisation” — this was stated explicitly by Johann Flierl in 1885. For adults, missionaries maintained a policy of “no work, no food.” Missionary Pfalzer, working at Cape Bedford in 1887, claimed: “the only thing that would keep these wildly roaming hordes together at all is work; and if they are to work, they must be fed.” Aboriginal people from the approximately fifty tribal territories and distinct language groups, including Guugu Yimidhirr, Guugu Nyiguudji, Guugu Warra, and Guugu Yalandji, came to the mission, seeking security, and in some cases, access to their children who were staying in the mission dormitories. Labour became currency on the mission, a cornerstone to the reciprocal relationship between missionaries and residents. Both missionaries and residents had some power in this relationship. No work, no food. No food, no work. If there was no food, there would be no conversions, and no evangelisation. Missionaries needed

29. Johann Flierl to L. W. Griffths, 26 December 1885, Colonial Office Cape Bedford A58851 correspondence, QSA; historians have indicated that this occurred at other mission sites. See T. Shellam, “‘On my ground’: Indigenous Farmers at New Norcia 1860s–1900s,” in Laidlaw and Lester, *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism*, 65.
30. Haviland and Haviland, “‘How much food will there be in heaven?,’” 122.
31. Pfalzer to Inspector, 6 September 1887, in Haviland and Haviland, “‘How much food will there be in heaven?,’” 122.
33. Brock, “‘Two-Way Food,’” 27.
incentives, both for themselves and for local Aboriginal people. By 1890, somewhere between 46 and 63 people were camping on the mission at any given time. Numbers fluctuated, but there was a constant Aboriginal presence at the site.34

As the mission community grew larger, the missionaries became more strategic and organised. The Queensland government's policies pertaining to Aboriginal people provoked increased organisation, as did global trends in indigenous governance and mission strategy. Missionaries around the world sought to train indigenous peoples in various industries, viewing it as a means of preparing them for transition towards “civilisation.”35 Missionaries tried to ensure that indigenous Christians could display the markers of “modernity” typically associated with European land use.36 Historian Rod MacNeil has argued that the difference between “a civilised and uncivilised condition lay in the cultivation of land. Accordingly, in the absence of recognisable signs of farming — as defined and understood by settlers — it was possible to assume that Aboriginal people had never been in possession of Australian land, having ranged over it rather than resided upon it.”37

Land grants were awarded on the basis that land be demonstrably made economically productive in the colonies, and missions were not exempt from these legislated requirements.38 Missionaries at Cape Bedford were under constant pressure from the state to ensure that the allocated plots were under industry.39 Schwarz and a small band of missionaries seemed to be constantly organising and reorganising Aboriginal labour on the mission. Profits were not distributed as wages for the Aboriginal workers, but went directly towards paying the mission's costs.40

As a result of these policies and peoples' own enthusiasm for the work, Cape Bedford became a vibrant and modestly profitable agricultural and fishing settlement. By 1920, Aboriginal fishermen worked on the mission's fishing boat, the Pearl Queen, catching chalk fish for curing and sale for a reasonable price.41 Aboriginal mission resident Victor Cobus recalled that he and other

34. “Cape Bedford Mission Station,” The Brisbane Courier, 5 June 1890, 6.
35. This popular idea was discussed at the International Missionary Council conference in Edinburgh in 1910. See Report of Commission III: Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life, with supplement: presentation and discussion of the report in the Conference on 17th June 1910 together with the discussion on Christian literature (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), 267.
39. Similar to the situation experienced by earlier Moravian missionaries in Victoria. Jensz, “Ohne Neid,” 222; Broome, “There were vegetables every year Mr Green was here.” 43.6.
41. Schwarz to Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 17 December 1923, QSA Item ID 645415.

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young boys, aged around ten, would work on single-sail dinghies. Sometimes there were about twenty-four crew members on the ketch, staying out for one or two weeks at a time but coming home for religious events such as Pentecost, Easter, and Christmas. Then, “After the holiday we’d get our rations, chop firewood for the boiler, fill the tanks with water and go out again.” Crops were also maintained, and in 1925, 250 cattle were onsite, producing milk and meat. Cotton, sisal hemp, and coconuts were grown. Walter Jack remembered working on the farm, “grubbing trees, planting potatoes, pumpkin, cutting scrub, scrub you know. Falling scrub, plant pumpkin, watermelon, manuk.” In 1925, residents were growing enough to feed themselves and sell excess stock in the local market. That year, the mission received an additional £332 through the sale of Mauritius beans and beche-de-mer.

Part of the broader economy, Cape Bedford was in no way protected from the impacts of the Great Depression. The 1929 Wall Street Crash and several concurrent droughts depleted the mission's bank accounts. Theile observed: “[a]ll and every one of our undertakings met with disappointment.” Ella Bowen, growing up on the mission during the 1930s, described how “Dad was on the plough, ploughing the ground to plant peanuts, but no good crops, nothing, you couldn’t plant anything, only potatoes to feed the people there.” In 1933, the mission’s produce raised £171 — half of the earnings it had generated eight years before. Donations from congregations and Queensland state grants were sporadic. Plagues blighted the mission’s cattle and they were raided by neighbouring stockmen. The missionaries' relative inexperience with agricultural work did not help. Even £750 from the state government, along with £200 from the state treasury in 1933, was not enough to cover the mission's running costs, or to pay outstanding accounts to Cooktown merchants.

Schwarz believed that the best response to this financial crisis was to expand the crops, and thus sought to move the mission’s existing borders to the edge of the nearby Morgan River. Schwarz, Gutekunst, and Theile applied to the Protector of Aborigines, John W. Bleakley, for support as well as to the

42. V. Cobus, Milbi THagaalbigu Balgaayga, ed. B. Jen (Hopevale: Guugu Yimithirr Cultural Centre, 1994), 7–8.
43. Annual report to Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1925, QSA Item ID 716955, 5.
45. Annual report to Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1925, QSA Item ID 716955, 5.
46. O. Theile, 27 June 1935, QSA Item ID 645415.
47. E. Bowen interviewed by D. Somersall in the Bringing them Home oral history project, 26 October 2000 [sound recording]. Australian National Library, record ID 716377.
48. Theile, Hope Valley statement of account for the year 1933, QSA Item ID 336188.
49. Interview with Bob Flinders, 19 November 1986, in Ganter, The Pearl-Shellers of the Torres Strait, 54; Pohlner, Gangurru, 103; Theile, Hope Valley Statement of Account for the Year 1933, QSA Item ID 336188.
50. Poland, Loose Leaves, 73–74.
51. Schwarz, u.d. QSA Item ID 336188.
Department of Lands. The Secretary C. W. Holland informed Gutekunst in September 1934 that the Mission could access the land on the McIvor River on two conditions: firstly, the timber on the land could not be sold for profit by mission authorities. The second proviso was that if Europeans established successful crops along the McIvor River and they wanted to extend their land holdings, “any agricultural land occupied by the Aboriginal Authorities and not put to reasonable use may be excluded from the Reserve and settled by white selectors.” Government representatives would assess the mission’s productivity, and Home Secretary E. H. Hanlon was informed of this decision. The government’s message was clear: farm the land, or lose it.

The conditions placed on the mission’s land use by Hanlon and the Lands Department contributed to existing tensions between the mission and its neighbours. Sitting between the 20–25 miles of land along the Morgan River and the mission’s existing site lay a property used by grazier Alex C. Wallace, held by him through the public curator according to the Public Curator Acts of 1915. The missionaries, unwilling to allow this, attempted to advocate for the Aboriginal residents at Cape Bedford. Theile hoped the Aboriginal Department would be able to buy this tract of land from Wallace and link the two sections of the mission. Bleakley was supportive, but Mr Payne from the Lands Department was unwilling to concede more land. Theile met with Bleakley and Payne in Brisbane, and it seemed that the government representatives would not assist them in acquiring this tract of land from Wallace, believing that the mission’s residents would be able to farm the new 500 acre plot from the original mission site. Lorenzo Veracini’s argument, that the objective of settler colonialism was to silence and eradicate Indigenous peoples, adequately describes the attitudes of the mission’s neighbours and the government. Schwarz and Theile sought to ensure the reserve remained in place.

Aware that their progress with agriculture had to be clearly visible, Schwarz and Theile were concerned productivity would not be adequately recognised. Theile wrote to the Home Secretary six months after the Morgan River plot was allocated to them:

The Lutheran Mission … has through its existence tried to follow out the principle that the [Aboriginal people] under its care should not remain a burden on the country, but should be raised from their primitive state to become useful citizens. Such an aim can only be obtained by settling these nomadic people and training them to work.

52. C. W. Holland to Gutekunst, 5 September 1934, LCA.
53. C. W. Holland to Gutekunst, 5 September 1934, LCA.
54. Minister of Lands to Home Secretary E. M. Hanlon, 5 September 1934, QSA Item ID 336188.
56. Theile to Members of the Hope Valley Mission Board, 6 September 1934, LCA.
57. Theile to Schwarz, 6 September 1934, LCA.
58. Theile to Schwarz, 6 September 1934, LCA.
60. Theile to Home Secretary, 5 April 1935, QSA Item ID 645415.
His preoccupation was conveyed in the final sentence — the training and transition he presumed were required. Agriculture was seen as a means by which to dissociate Aboriginal people from a nomadic lifestyle. While not replicating the language of other Protestant missionaries of the time, Theile evoked some of the assimilationist and stadial racist concepts about the need for Aboriginal people to move from a “primitive” to a “civilised” state. He was therefore anxious to highlight the mission’s difficulties in ensuring the land’s productivity. He thanked Bleakley for the land grant in September 1934, but by January 1935 Theile was concerned about why the land still had not been officially gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve.

By 26 January 1935, Schwarz appeared confident that the land along the Morgan River at Mount Webb had already been gazetted to the Reserve. He was eager to get the new crops planted in the wake of a damning report by tropical medicine expert, Doctor Raphael Cilento, who after visiting the mission reported that Cape Bedford residents were underfed, possibly due to “the absence of suitable hunting grounds.” Schwarz, paradoxically, did not intend the new plot to be used exclusively for hunting. If the residents were to hunt on the reserve, the “game” would quickly diminish and there would be nothing left to eat. There was another explanation too: “it is our intention and always has been, to wean the younger generation from that hunting instinct, but we really had no right to do so simply, because we could not employ and provide with food all people uninterruptedly.”

Roy McIvor, who grew up at Cape Bedford, recalled his family spearing ganharr (crocodile) and to conduct nganyja (initiations) at McIvor River until Schwarz called a stop to it. While it is possible that Schwarz considered hunting and the initiations as emblematic of a “primitive” culture that had to be abandoned, it is more likely that he was influenced by the government's policies that had shifted to promote cultural and social change. Between downpours of monsoonal January rain, Schwarz travelled with his daughter along the coastline to help other missionaries and Aboriginal residents to mark out forty acres for the first crop on the new plot. Though the Aboriginal residents remained unnamed in the Schwarz’s account, it suggests that the community had some opportunities to discuss what was

63. Theile to Gutekunst, 10 January 1935, translated German to English, LCA.
64. Schwarz to Theile, 26 January 1935, LCA, 1.
66. Schwarz to Theile, 26 January 1935, LCA.
69. Schwarz to Theile, 2 February 1935, LCA.
happening, but these were limited and not clearly documented or communicated to the government.

Wallace, on the other hand, was excluded from Schwarz's deliberations at the fence line. Schwarz suspected their neighbour would be “rather bitter when he gets official notice” about their acquiring the Mount Webb land.70 Brother Keese, based at the Mount Webb outstation, had spoken to Wallace, and expressed concerns that “the blacks might frighten his cattle or set fire to his grass.”71 As it turned out, Wallace had already contested the mission's claim. He informed the Lutherans that his Occupational Licence for the Mount Webb land had been renewed, granted due to the nature of the gazette for the Aboriginal reserve.72 The land laws, and the class and racial hierarchies they entrenched, supported Wallace, who was more able to demonstrate his ability to make the land productive in a way understood by government officials.73 He was well connected, and with a relative working as editor for the local newspaper, the *North Queensland Register*, he was able to sway public opinion.74

Theile met with the head of the Lands Department settlement branch, Mr Ralston. They trawled through the Occupational Licences of the land in question. Three members of the Wallace family had held an Occupational Licence over the north-west part of the block recently allocated to the mission. They had forfeited it some years ago, but Alex Wallace had corresponded with the Department throughout 1933, and asked to renew the Occupational Licence without it being opened to the public. The renewed Licence was awarded towards the end of 1933, numbered 474. This arrangement had been overlooked by the Lands Department when they gazetted the extension to Cape Bedford's reserve.75

Theile assured Schwarz that the mission's claim was still valid and overrode Wallace's licence. The Lands Department was clearly at fault for not having kept adequate records. The Lands Department agreed to inform Wallace that his tenure had been terminated and that he would receive a refund of his rent that year.76 Theile informed the Home Secretary that if the government reneged the land deal, the only alternative would be to disband the Cape Bedford community and “throw the responsibility for the 300 inhabitants on the Reserve on the Government.” He argued: “it would be unbearable to be in charge of these people with no work from them, and see them laze about dependent on the charity of your Department for their food and clothing.”77

Wallace had been left almost entirely uninformed about the changes to his boundaries, despite his holding being reduced by 10 square miles, which

70. Schwarz to Theile, 2 February 1935, LCA, 2.
71. Schwarz to Theile, 2 February 1935, LCA, 2.
72. Schwarz to Theile, 11 February 1935, LCA.
73. Schwarz to Theile, 11 February 1935, LCA.
74. Schwarz to Theile, 11 February 1935, LCA.
75. Theile to Schwarz, 19 February 1935, LCA.
76. Schwarz to Theile, 11 February 1935, LCA.
77. Theile to Home Secretary Hanlon, 5 April 1935, LCA, 2.

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would impact his rent. He appealed to Home Secretary Hanlon: “when my existence is at stake, as it is now, I must take all the steps I can to preserve my home and my father's life work.” To the Department of Native Affairs, he declared that he had always been a good neighbour to the mission, supported their intentions and recognised the “valuable work they are doing for the state.” As Bain Attwood has described of settlers around Victoria in the nineteenth century and even in the Colonial Office in Britain, Europeans often asserted the importance of their own claims to land in a bid to justify their place in the process of dispossession. In this dialogue, Wallace created his own myth of entitlement, neglecting to mention his family's part in Aboriginal dispossession, and instead adopted the role of victim.

Wallace’s claim sat within a broader process of geographical engineering. As a councillor of the Shire of Cook, he had requested a road be built that “would mean closer settlement by the whites and not the blacks.” Again, settler colonial theory is useful here when trying to comprehend this endeavour to exclude Aboriginal peoples from access to resources, and efforts to limit their mobility. Closer settlement was a scheme adopted by the Queensland government to open up land to farmers, and reward ambitious agriculturalists. Wallace believed that closer settlement would maintain physical segregation between Europeans and the Aboriginal community. It would require “cattlemen” to give up their land: “but it will be to our own flesh and blood racially and will be no hardship as we can trust with the settlers as to supplies of cattle for building up dairy herds and the like which will be to our and the state's advantage. With the blacks in possession nobody benefits but the blacks.”

Wallace was therefore anxious to maintain racial boundaries around Cooktown, and entrench an exclusivist system that continued and benefited from Aboriginal dispossession. These same spatial arrangements existed throughout Queensland and other Australian states, separating white from Aboriginal communities. There had been a concerted effort made to preserve these geographic and demographic designs, no matter how imperfectly they were implemented.

78. Theile to Home Secretary Hanlon, 5 April 1935, LCA, 3.
79. Wallace to Home Secretary Hanlon, 3 April 1935, QSA Item ID 645415.
80. Wallace, 3 April 1935, QSA Item ID 336188.
82. Attwood with Doyle, Possession, 105–6.
86. Wallace, n.d. QSA Item ID 336188.
Theile reassured Wallace that he and other missionaries were not conspiring against him, sending Wallace copies of the letters he had sent to various state departments. He wanted to show that he had not known that the mission’s new gazette encroached on his own.88 Percy Pease, Minister for Lands, admitted that this had been the fault of their survey branch.89 One month later, Wallace offered part of his land to the mission for £1,500, though the Lands Department had valued it at only £400.90 The mission refused, instead lobbying the government for support. Schwarz told Bleakley that without the land extension, the mission would not be able to accommodate more Aboriginal people, and would the mission residents would be forced to live in small, fragmented communities, which was not ideal.91

By July, Schwarz had adopted a clear narrative to describe Wallace’s attitude and defend his own position in this dispute. He accused Wallace of running his cattle on their good land, and placing the needs of his stock over those of the Aboriginal residents. Rather than let the Aboriginal people have access to any good land, Schwarz believed that Wallace wanted to push them “back to their swamps and sandhills as otherwise the peaceful lives of these cattle might be disturbed.” Wallace was determined to get any land suitable for stock and crops. Schwarz wrote:

There was never before ONE acre of good land been included in the reserve — that is the reason why the Aboriginals have been left in undisturbed possession for so long. The moment a few acres of suitable land were given to the Aborigines there is the outcry “fancy any good soil being given to black” and that in spite of the fact known to everyone, that is really compensation because they were unable to resist their aggressors.92

Schwarz considered it an injustice that “for the sake of a few old cows” the Aboriginal people “must be hunted back to their swamps.”93 In August, he wrote a rather morose reflection to Theile, that the state's policies had changed little over the last fifty years, and the needs of cattle were always placed before the needs of the Aboriginal people. “Only the methods” had changed:

in the earlier days, when the means employed to get them out of the road of cattle and sheep were lead, arsenic and so forth. This gentleman in question evidently did not know or at least did not mention the fact, the same object is gained in a more “humane” (?) way, by shutting up the Aboriginals on reserves, comprised of land where stock could not exist and where unfortunately the Aboriginals do not fare much better than cattle would.94

The Land Department’s rules catered to the European settler rather than effectively protecting Aboriginal communities. Schwarz felt his own ability to advocate was constrained, and that the residents had little ability to contest

88. Theile to AC Wallace, 8 April 1935, LCA.
89. Pease to Theile, 11 April 1935, LCA.
90. Theile to Gutekunst, 24 May 1934, LCA.
91. Schwarz to Bleakley, 19 July 1935, LCA.
92. Schwarz to Bleakley, 19 July 1935, LCA, 2.
93. Schwarz to Bleakley, 19 July 1935, LCA, 2.
94. Schwarz to Theile, 8 August 1935, LCA.

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or change the position they were in: with no ability to “raise their voice and plead their cause.” Though he tried to speak on their behalf, Schwarz felt equally powerless against the state, and it was the state alone, he thought, that could help.95

Schwarz was convinced of the discriminatory element of Wallace’s claim and the government’s response to the situation. He suggested to Bleakley that Wallace had only desired that land because of the mission’s own interest in it, and that they had “no chance whatever of a FAIR deal in the matter.”96 Wallace had forced the mission residents off the little cultivation paddock they had established during the wet season, warning “that they must not show their faces outside of srub [sic] and swamp.”97 Schwarz fantasised about putting up an iron fence, “12 feet high all around,” to block out interference.98

It is likely that Wallace’s attitude was rooted in anxiety shared by other farmers that the mission would become their biggest economic competition. Theile recounted a meeting he had with the chairman of the Shire Council. Farmers around the district complained that the mission grew cotton, and used the Aboriginal residents as cheap labour. The mission had become an unwanted competitor in the local market. Though the Councillor dismissed this as “irresponsible talk,” Theile was wary.99 With its sand dunes and rocky outcrops, the mission could not offer serious rivalry to other producers, yet rumours of the mission’s economic potential persisted. The fact that the Mission was using cheap labour was not so readily addressed. With Aboriginal workers not earning any monetary remittance for their labour, and the ideas behind this centred on theoretical understandings of culture and race, the missionaries had instituted practice that seemed dubious and exploitative despite their efforts to legitimise the scheme.100

While the Mission awaited the final verdict over the land, Mr Keese, the missionary based at the Wayarego outstation, reported that Wallace was annoyed about Aboriginal residents crossing the boundaries. Keese recounted a meeting between Wallace and some of the Mission’s residents along the Morgan River. Wallace warned the Mission residents to stay away from his land, giving directions on where to go and where not to go. Keese was frustrated, feeling that it was not his job to stand guard on the veranda like the armed guards at king and king and see that they don’t cross the dotted line and instead of bearing the burden of self-reproach, put the blame where I think it belongs. I’m tired of the Board’s “wait-a-while” tactics and if nothing turns up from Theile this week will have to set about turnings things up for myself.101

95. Schwarz to Hanlon, 27 June 1935, QSA Item ID 336188.
96. Schwarz to Bleakley, u.d., QSA Item ID 336188.
97. Schwarz to Theile, 8 August 1935, LCA, 2.
98. Schwarz to Theile, 8 August 1935, LCA, 2.
100. Interview with Bob Flinders, 19 November 1986, in Ganter, Pearl Shellers of the Torres Strait, 54; Pohlner, Gangurru, 103.
101. Keese to Schwarz, from Wayarego, u.d., LCA.

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Schwarz stated that it was nearly impossible to keep Aboriginal residents within the mission's boundaries, particularly when the boundaries were only drawn on a map. He believed he would have to move people from the outstation Wayerago to a more central location on the mission in order to prevent trespass onto Wallace's land. Schwarz was dispirited, and wrote: “This removal incur[s] a lot of expenses and put the people again on unproductive land and ask them to do almost useless work, but what of it – the Minister for Land has redeemed his election promise and the Blacks can go hang.”

Both Schwarz and Keese were so disappointed with the government's proposal to return the land at Mount Webb to Wallace that they were ready to resign. This came to a head in September 1935, when Wallace met two or three of the Cape Bedford residents on what Schwarz still considered to be the mission's side of the fence line. Wallace had found some of his cattle dead and accused the Aboriginal men of killing them: “I know that he never for a moment thought that they had done so, but it will serve his purpose if he talks like that, to arouse sympathy with his stated sufferings by those dreadful Aboriginals.”

Schwarz felt trapped — the mission was surrounded by difficult terrain and disgruntled people. Leaving the mission's boundaries as they were would effectively “re-imprison” the residents “amongst their swamps and sandhills,” and he became a “Warden in the Aboriginal concentration camp.” But by the end of the month, Theile had abandoned hopes of securing the Mount Webb plot, as Wallace had never ceased paying rent on the property. Yet Schwarz persisted: “From the beginning it has been the aim of the mission to wean the Aboriginals from their nomadic habits and settle down in fixed homes.” He went on: “We reluctantly had to allow them to revert to certain extent to the old people's way of making a living, that is — allow them more time for hunting and in that way do something towards the keeping of their families.”

He commenced a programme of “centralisation,” moving people away from its boundaries and into the middle of the property. In 1936, the mission received £1,599 from the government, congregations, and sale of produce, but it cost £1,924 to operate, including upkeep, salaries for European staff, and agricultural implements. The mission board had drawn funds allocated to their work in New Guinea and redirected them to Cape Bedford and requested supplements from the Queensland government. Schwarz contributed his personal funds into the property. The 1935 deficit would not be repeated, but “centralisation” would be costly.

In the following years, tensions eased between Wallace and the mission's residents, but the mission overall was under constant threat. A few neighbours

102. Schwarz to Theile, 2 September 1935, LCA.
103. Schwarz to Theile, 2 September 1935, LCA.
104. Schwarz to Theile, 7 September 1935, LCA.
105. Schwarz to Theile, 14 September 1935, LCA, 2.
106. Theile to Schwarz, 25 September 1935, LCA.
107. Schwarz to Theile, 28 September 1935, LCA.
110. Schwarz to Theile, 2 March 1936, LCA.
however did show some support: for example, Mrs Fuller to sell her property to the mission in early 1936. Schwarz and one of the Aboriginal residents — again unnamed in Schwarz’s account — inspected the property together. It was 239 acres of freehold land, with two lagoons, and could be irrigated from Cameron’s Creek.111 To get from Fuller’s property to the existing lands allocated to the mission, “we only had to cross Cameron’s creek … the place we crossed is rather steep and the water being pretty deep too.”112 This block was only 22 miles from Cooktown, bringing the Mission closer to the township.113 The mission Board applied for the deeds to this property at Spring Hill in November 1936. Theile and Gutekunst, and members of the mission board, Reinhold Theodore Rohde, Ernst Paul Hermann Prenzler, and Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Schulz were made trustees.114 The mission secured this land to establish new crops and generate income. The “civilising project” seemed vaguely viable once more, but the financial position stagnated, with Theile reporting in 1940 that a failed harvest had set them behind, as well as withdrawal of special government grants.115 The Second World War, however, sharply disrupted mission life. The armed forces acquired the mission site after relocating its 258 residents to central Queensland reserves at Palm Island and Woorabinda, and arresting George Schwarz as an enemy alien.

These disputes over the boundaries at Cape Bedford Mission, particularly between 1934 and 1936, as well as the wartime evacuation briefly mentioned here and discussed in greater depth by myself and Jonathan Richards in other work,116 demonstrate the undermining of missionaries’ power when confronted by the desires of the colonial or state. The conflict over the Mount Webb property on the Morgan River offers insight into the role that missionaries took in trying to ensure that lands remained reserved for Aboriginal use under increasing pressure from settlers. Historians have argued that the government gave missionaries power in their role as superintendents, but while they might be seen as part of the overwhelming state apparatus designed to “protect” and “assimilate,” they were at times amongst the few Europeans advocating for Aboriginal rights to land. While their involvement with the enacting of damaging and violent social policies, including their active participation in the process of child removal, has had lasting and heart-breaking impacts, missionaries were also subject to the whims of the government and were considered to be in need of control and discipline. In the case of

111. Gutekunst to members of Hope Valley Mission Board UELCA, 25 June 1936, LCA.
112. Schwarz, u.d., LCA.
113. Gutekunst to members of Hope Valley Mission Board UELCA, 25 June 1936, LCA, 2; Schwarz to Gutekunst, 25 September 1936, LCA.
114. Groom and Lavers Solicitors to Gutekunst, 30 November 1936, LCA; Fuller’s Land Trustees, Groom and Lavers Solicitors to Gutekunst, 30 November 1936, LCA; Gutekunst to Groom and Lavers Solicitors, 9 December 1936, LCA.
115. Theile to Director of Native Affairs, 19 June 1940, Native Affairs Cape Bedford 43, QSA.
George Schwarz — he was for a short time considered an enemy of the state.117

The conceptualisations of European power as finite is, as other historians have argued, not easily applicable to all Europeans who were brought into the complex of colonial power. It is more accurate, perhaps, to talk about white privilege than it is to talk about white power to describe the experiences of individuals who were imbued with responsibility yet were trying at times to move against what they saw as an unjust system. It is also worth considering the complex interaction and positioning of people who represented overlapping imperial powers. Though German rule had ended in New Guinea by the 1930s, the strong relationship between the Australian state and the British Empire worked to marginalise missionaries who symbolised competing rulers.

Missionaries and settlers alike employed strategies and discourses that were bound in popular notions of race, and these limited the potential for Aboriginal autonomy over their own lives. Aboriginal people were depicted as “primitive”: missionaries Schwarz and Theile believed that Aboriginal people required preparation for the “modern age.” Meanwhile, Wallace deployed racialist tropes to demonstrate his entitlement to the land. The missionaries, who sought to ensure that Aboriginal mission residents maintained their place near Cooktown, did not do this in the same way. The disparity between the racial discourses adopted by Wallace and Schwarz reflect the discord between settler colonial and humanitarian discourses, and perhaps also hint at variations between British and German approaches to colonialism.118 There were different strains of thought, or different varieties of colonial culture, developed within the settler and humanitarian communities respectively.

The ambivalence of missionary power in the face of settler desires and an almost apathetic bureaucracy was demonstrated in the Lutherans’ dealings with the Lands Department over the title to the land at Mount Webb. Their positions were tenuous when vying for extensions to Aboriginal reserves. Undeniably, missionaries had greater legal standing in the process of negotiating land access than Aboriginal people at the Mission. The Protectionist Act and the policies of the Lutherans also inhibited Aboriginal people gaining Licence or Title to any of the Mission land. With all the earnings made from Mission produce going to the Mission proper and no wages paid to its Aboriginal workers, there was little to no possibility that Aboriginal workers might apply for land licences. If we are to consider the Land Department’s acts as simply an example of settler colonial hegemony enacted by the state, we would need to ignore the evidence that the errors made with land titles at Cape Bedford seem more the result of a bumbling bureaucracy rather than a sinister plot. Regardless, this does show that there were times when the government’s actions slowed or denied Aboriginal economic development by curbing access to sufficient resources.119

119. As Sarah Carter has argued of Canadian examples. Carter, Lost Harvests, 3.
Missionaries had their own agendas, which at times merged but at others diverged from those of the state. Their positions as mediators between the state and Aboriginal people placed them in ambivalent positions in what was at times an ambivalent system: they had power but it was limited by the whims of those around them, of the members of the colonial government, and by the Aboriginal people onsite. They resisted pastoralist's bids to continue colonial processes of dispossession. They tried to empower Aboriginal people — but this was done generally through assimilative projects and practices, with significant limitations and paradoxical elements, requiring for example the transformation of land into something recognisable to colonial observers as economically productive. Through industrial mission, they at once defied and abided by the *Protection Act* but ultimately continued to limit the autonomy of Queensland's Aboriginal peoples.