

Gobbagumbalin and Pomingalarna

Many years ago, two local groups of Wiradjuri people occupied either side of the Murrumbidgee River in the vicinity of Wagga Wagga, the river forming the boundary between the two territories. The groups were generally friendly towards each other.

Each had its own tribal laws which they adhered to with undeviating strictness, breaches being punished with great severity.

A day came when one of the young men, Gobbagumbalin, the son of one of the elders, saw Pomingalarna, a gadgi migay (beautiful young girl) of the neighbouring group, and, falling in love with her, desired to make her his wife. However, the girl had been promised to a warrior of her own group.

The two met secretly and for a while these meetings passed unobserved but in time they were discovered.

A council of the old men warned the youth that he must see no more of the girl and any continuance of their meetings would be looked upon as a grave breach of tribal law and punishable.

Such passion existed between the young couple that they decided to elope, although they knew that such an action would make them outsiders forever.

They decided that Gobbagumbalin should cross the river at a spot where the girl would await him, then the two would recross the stream together and hasten to the depths of the ranges.

One dark night the young warrior swam across the river and found the woman waiting for him. Hand in hand, they entered the water and swam silently toward the farther shore. However, as they reached the centre of the muddy stream, a storm of spears directed from both sides of the river fell hissing in the water about them.

Both man and girl, mortally wounded, sank beneath the waters, tightly clasping each other's arms.

Such was the tragic death of the lovers, and today the frogs still mourn their fate. Those on one side of the Murrumbidgee cry "Gobbagumbalin" while those on the opposite side take up the cry of "Pomingalarna".

If tempted to doubt the truth of the story, the Wiradjuri people said you only had to listen to the mourning chant of the frogs.

It may be heard any hot night in summer.

Source

A condensation of a traditional story of the Wiradjuri people near Wagga Wagga as recorded by Keith McKeon in "The Land of Byamee" Angus & Robertson, 1938 and approved for reproduction by the Wiradjuri Council of Elders, June, 1997.



This poster presents a traditional story of the Wiradjuri people which is depicted in the painting and in the accompanying words. The painting was completed by Aboriginal student artist Greg Kennedy with assistance from his teacher Kathy Morton.

It is a story of love, of the strength of Aboriginal Law and the respect for it shown by the elders and their people. It also shows a knowledge of the natural environment.

Although meeting a tragic death, we are reminded that the deep love held by Gobbagumbalin and Pomingarlarna for each other lives on through the frogs as they call each other across the river.

The pair of frogs shown above are the Peron's Tree Frog and the Painted Burrowing Frog both of which still live and call in summer along the river in the vicinity of Wagga Wagga.

The memory of the couple also lives on in the place names of the Gobbagumbalin farm, homestead and lagoon and Pomingalarna Park, farm and hill.

The lower part of the painting shows the new Gobba Bridge (derived from "Gobbagumbalin") crossing the Murrumbidgee River. In this year (1997) of heightened reconciliation activity, the many different coloured hands symbolically link the many Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal cultural groups in Australia. Just as the frogs call and long to be united so there is a call to bridge the gaps in Australian Society.

Just as this traditional story has counterparts in many cultures (Running Bear and Little White Dove, Romeo and Juliet), so our diverse cultures are full of common unifying themes.

This poster was produced for the occasion of the opening of the Gobba Bridge in July, 1997, the first flood-free bridge over the Murrumbidgee at Wagga Wagga.

Co-operation and contributions from many people made this possible including: permission from the Wiradjuri Council of Elders the Wiradjuri Regional and Wagga Wagga Local Aboriginal Land Councils to use the condensed version of the story and to depict it in a painting; permission of the artist Greg Kennedy and his teacher Kathy Morton from Shepherds Park School, NSW Department of School Education, to reproduce the painting and the assistance of the school staff; support from Reconciliation Wagga Wagga; organisational support from the Wagga Wagga City Council; production support from Advision; sponsorship from Wagga Wagga Local Aboriginal Land Council and Rotary International; and research by Charles Sturt University and Greening Australia.

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