

# The Late Mr. Lyle Roberts

## *An Appreciation by Mildred Norledge*

One of the most interesting personalities that I have ever interviewed was the late Mr. Lyle Roberts.

He was the last living member of the Aboriginal people here who passed through the sacred rules of the Initiation Ceremony. With his passing away to the spirit world of his people, there is a great loss, for he was a kindly man and gentle.

The loss is not only a personal one—to his people and to those who seek to record Aboriginal Folklore. For when these older people pass on there passes with them their beautiful folklore, and it is indeed beautiful and rich; and there also passes their sacred mystic rules. So the literary world of the anthropologist is poorer by their loss.

The more one comes in contact with these people the more one realizes how right was their code of honour, and how much they stressed that in order for a man to become a "clever man", such a man must be *good*—a fact which repudiates the statements not infrequently made and told by the settlers, in the past, that they weren't good, but charlatans.

So many things that Mr. Roberts told us, during that last interview, were most interesting and little did we dream it would be the last occasion we would interview him. We lost all track of the time. In fact, time didn't seem to exist. I think we were so engrossed that we must have entered a dream world with Mr. Roberts when he was speaking about his people. He told us a legend, the legend of a tree which many possums, the black possums, loved. This tree was the totem of a young man. And as Mr. Roberts related the legend we saw not only the tree, we saw, too, the young man who was a nephew to an older man in this tribe, going to the tree talking to the possums. We saw also the uncle stealthily stealing out of the camp one night and pulling up the tree and carrying it away—possums as well, and then finally the nephew going after the uncle and catching up with him. This legend as told by Mr. Roberts lived, so real was it at the time of telling.

The late Mr. Roberts was 82 years of age. His son, Pastor Roberts, is well known on the Richmond and I think his grandson is also a Pastor, whose appointment is to a church in Sydney.

It was on Saturday night, 14th March, that we, Mr. Hall, Secretary of the Richmond River Historical Society, Mr. J. Morgan, of Box Ridge Aboriginal Reserve, Coraki, and myself, were gathered together in the room at the Richmond River Historical Society's headquarters and museum in Lismore.

Mr. Wetherspoon photographed Mr. Roberts on that particular occasion (Saturday) and it was intended, and will be so, that the portrait of Mr. Roberts will hang in the museum.

The possum legend will be recorded in the museum files, along with other material he has given to me. And in this his memory will be perpetuated.

With Mr. Roberts' passing there is the sad loss, the loss of an interesting, kind, friendly citizen.

### SCHOLARSHIP FOR ABORIGINAL GIRL

A 14-year-old aboriginal girl, who gained her intermediate certificate at Lismore High School last year, has won a scholarship issued by the Australian Board of Missions.

She is June Roberts, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey Roberts, of Cubawee. June, who will do a business training course, has left for Sydney.



Bananas by the bunch. Who wouldn't like to be there? This young aboriginal woman from Northern Queensland looks rather pleased, too.