
Tribal Songs Recorded at Tenterfield

Tribal Aboriginal songs in various dialects sung by Mr Dick Donnelly have been tape-recorded by the Tenterfield District Historical Society.

Mr Donnelly described himself to the *Tenterfield Star* as the last of a wild tribe and the last Jocambal Aboriginal singer.

“The younger Aborigines do not show an interest in the songs,” Mr Donnelly said.

Mr Donnelly was born at “Millera” on the Rocky River about 65 years ago. When he was 14 his family moved to Lionsville. For the past 20 years he worked at a Woodenbong sawmill until his recent retirement.

Jocambal songs

At the recording session last year Mr Donnelly's first two songs were in the Jocambal dialect, and written before the coming of the white man. The first told of a crow that had disturbed the writer of the song; the second was about the writer's father and his spiritual place, located near Tenterfield.

Mr Donnelly's third song about a “two-up” player was written after settlement of the country by the white man.

The *Tenterfield Star* said that when a person was in disfavour with the early Aborigines it was common for a song to be written about the person, who was then “sung” by them.

One such person was a publican's wife who refused to give a drink to an Aborigine recognized as a tribal king near Lionsville. Another person “sung” was Mr Ogilvie, the original settler at Yulgilbar.

Mr Donnelly also sang about the first motor car seen by the composer at Grafton.

Platypus story

One song gave the story of the platypus, telling how it got its large mouth.

The platypus was once a man who had travelled down the Rocky River with a firestick—blowing on it to keep it burning. At the junction of the Rocky and Clarence Rivers, the man jumped into the River and turned into a platypus.

The large mouth came as a result of the prolonged blowing on the firestick.

The legend also says that as sparks fell from the firestick they turned to gold—thus explaining the gold along the river; and that a large nugget was found where the man had jumped.