

SKY PILOT NEWS

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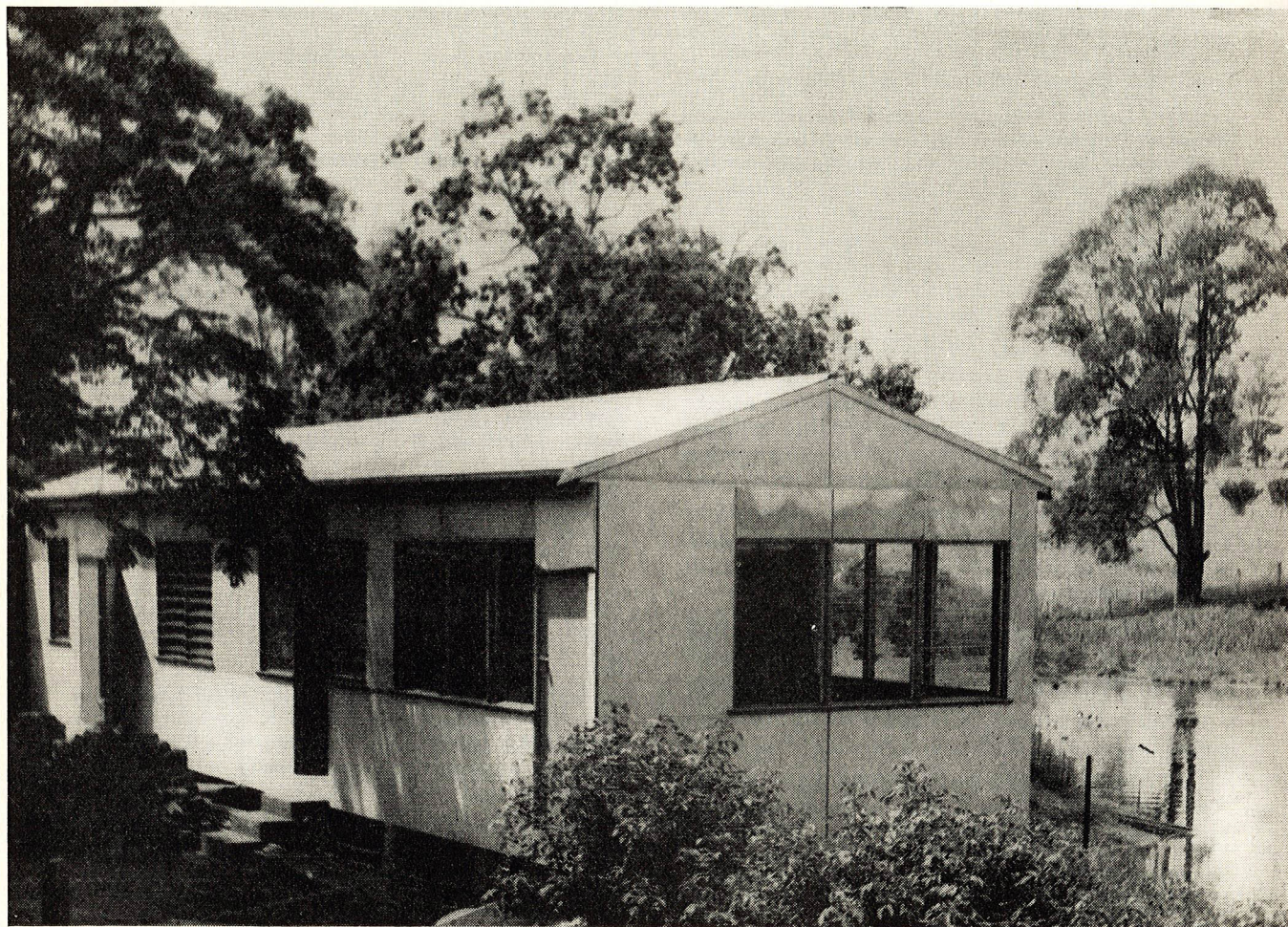
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"THE ANNEXE ALMOST COMPLETED."

Joe was a newcomer to Arnhem Land. He had the interest of the Aborigines at heart and, like many newcomers, he sought to introduce social and economic reforms without perfectly understading the background. He began with George, a stockman who had spent a lifetime with the Aborigines.

"George," he asked, "how much do you pay your stock boys each week?"

"Well," replied George, "if you mean *in cash*, I don't pay 'em anything; except, maybe, when we are near a town and they want a bit of pocket money."

"I thought so," said Joe. "You are exploiting the poor natives. It is a wonder your conscience doesn't stop you from sleeping at night."

"I sleep very well, thank you, Joe. We are 200 miles from the nearest store, and cash is no good to the natives. I give the stock boys food, clothing and tobacco, according to Government regulation; I also feed all their relatives, which is not according to regulation. Most of my stock boys were born in my camp; they have been with me all their lives, and they are quite happy. What's on your mind?"

"I'm going to start a stock station of my

own, but I'm going to start it on a proper and honourable footing. All my stock boys will be issued with food, clothing and tobacco, according to regulation, but I AM GOING TO PAY THEM WAGES, AS WELL."

"And what about the stock boys' relatives, Joe? You haven't mentioned feeding them."

"I won't neglect them, George. Any close relatives that depend on them will be fed, too."

"What do you mean by *close* relatives?"

"Oh, I don't know, George, I haven't worked it out yet. I wouldn't mind feeding the parents of a stock boy, and maybe his brothers and sisters and, of course, his wife and children, if he has any."

"That sounds good — for the Aborigines. And you are going to pay wages on top of all that?"

"Of course. It's the only honourable thing to do."

George chuckled. "I'm afraid you won't make that stock station of yours a profitable venture, Joe. You'll go broke in a few months, unless you have more money than sense."

"Honesty always pays," said Joe, in his self-righteous way. "I know the Aborigines sometimes have two wives, but each stock boy only has one set of parents."

"That's what you think," chuckled George. "But you'll learn in time. Each boy may have three or four fathers and just as many mothers."

"Don't be stupid, George. I wasn't born yesterday."

"Maybe not, Joe; but it was only yesterday you came to Arnhem Land, so to speak. But go ahead and learn the hard way."

Joe moved to the billabong, where he hoped to establish a new cattle station. He took four stock boys with him, also their wives and children. Only one of the boys had two wives; the others were younger men and had not yet acquired the multiplicity of wives that sometimes is the mixed blessing of older Aborigines. About half a dozen "close relatives" went with the stock boys. Joe explained, as well as he could, his proposed reform. When the stock boys understood that he was to pay wages as well as feed all the relatives of his working boys, they were delighted, and word soon went round the countryside. At the end of the first week there were 15 Aborigines in Joe's camp. By the second week there were 27. The following week brought the total to 32, and by the end of the month there were 57 Aborigines, all claiming close relationship to the four stock boys.

Joe's neighbours began to be alarmed as their mustering camps became depleted. Jim was furious about it, and talked it over with George. "Look here, George," he said, "things are getting serious. I haven't enough boys left in my camp to carry on with the mustering, they're all going to Joe's camp. Even the kitchen lubras have gone. Something will have to be done to stop this or we'll all be out of business."

George laughed. "Don't worry, Jim, let 'em go. We'll all be in the same boat. Most of my mob have gone, too; in fact, I encouraged 'em to go. No good trying to hold 'em when they was dissatisfied, thinking they was missing out on something good."

"You're mad," said Jim. "How can we carry on without labour? Joe must have a lot of money behind him. We couldn't afford to pay what he is giving the natives. He's trying to ruin us by enticing our boys away."

"I think you've got Joe wrong," George told him. "His intentions are good, but he doesn't understand the Aborigines. But he's learning fast! There are over 50 in his camp now, and more arriving every day. Unless he's a millionaire, he won't be able to keep it up. I'd give him another week or two at the most, then you'll find your boys drifting back again."

"I hope you're right," said Jim, only half convinced. "The wet season will be here before I get my bullocks ready for the road, unless I get my boys back pretty quick."

George and I were sitting by the camp fire a few days later, when Joe rode into the camp. Something seemed to be worrying him, and he only grunted in reply to George's welcome. He threw himself on the ground, and ignored the billy of tea that George pushed towards him.

"Well," said George, "and how's the reform going? I hear you've got a mighty lot of workers down your way now."

"Workers!" exclaimed Joe. "I've got four working boys and a kitchen lubra — the others are all relatives — or say they are. You can't help people who only want to impose on you. I've never met such an ungrateful lot of lying, deceiving natives before. They've just about ruined me, and I've decided to sell out and go South; I'm wasting my time here."

George laughed. "I could have told you that, Joe, but some men have to learn the hard way. But don't be too hard on the blacks. Maybe you'll find they really are all relatives of your stock boys."

"Don't be silly, George. Every stock boy claims to have about half a dozen fathers and mothers, twenty or more brothers and sisters,

and goodness only knows how many uncles and aunts — and they expected me to feed the lot!"

"That's what you promised 'em, Joe. You can't go back on your word."

"I only offered to feed REAL relatives — not imaginary ones. I soon found they were having me on. They must take me for a fool. The last straw was when Quart-pot brought a woman into the camp and asked me to feed her, as she was his FATHER."

"And what did you do?" George asked quietly.

"What did I do!" Joe spluttered. "I knocked him down and hunted the whole mob of impostors from the camp. Then my stock boys and the kitchen lubra cleared out, too. I can't run the place on my own, so I'll sell out. I suppose you've exploited the blacks so long that when they got a chance they thought they could exploit me."

"Hold on, Joe. You don't know what you are talking about. I never exploited the blacks, whether you believe it or not. What's more, the blacks were not trying to exploit you; they took you at your word, that's all. The trouble is that you don't understand the Aboriginal laws and relationships. If you did, you would understand that every one of those people was telling you the truth — even Quart-pot."

"Are you trying to tell me a woman could be his father?"

"Yes, I am. That woman is Old Mary, and Quart-pot has called her "Father" as long as I've known him. It's too complicated for me to explain, but it's true enough. You shouldn't have offered to feed all the relatives till you understood what you were taking on. No stock-man could feed all the relatives and pay wages and make a profit. Either you pay wages and make the stock boys feed the relatives — which is mighty difficult when there ain't no shops within 200 miles — or you do as we do and supply all that the stock boys need AND feed all his relatives. You can't do both."

* * *

ABORIGINAL KINSHIP: The Aboriginal family is a self-contained unit. The husband and wife (or wives) can make or obtain between them all that is required for daily life. Sometimes two or more families combine for this purpose; in this case the women form one party, and the men another, as they seek food.

To the Aboriginal, relationship is the basis of all his social behaviour. We white people have but little of this in our society, though custom and law regulates some of our behaviour

in regard to marriage, maintenance and bequests.

The Aborigines reckon their relationship throughout the whole of their community, even beyond the borders of any one tribe. This relationship governs their social behaviour.

The Aboriginal has to recognise every other person in the tribe as a relation. He does this, not by creating a lot of new kinship terms, nor by describing each relationship in detail, but by enlarging the family, for the purpose of social behaviour, to embrace the whole tribe. They do not speak of second or third cousins, great-uncles, great-great-grandfathers, etc.; they regard brothers as equivalent and sisters as equivalent, and apply terms according to this principle. Thus my mother's sister is classified with and called "Mother", and my father's brother is classified with and called "Father"; my grandfather's brother is "Grandfather".

As a consequence of this, as my father's brother is "Father", his son is my brother (not cousin, as with us). Likewise, my mother's sister's children are not cousins, but my brothers and sisters; my brother's children are not nephews and nieces, but my "sons" and "daughters".

However, the children of a brother and sister are distinguished in terminology; and different social behaviour is observed towards them. Thus my children and my brother's children (if I am a male) are "sons" and "daughters" to me, but the children of my sister are "nephews" and "nieces", i.e., my brother's children call me and regard me as "father", but my sister's children look on me as "uncle".

There are differences in kinship systems amongst the Aborigines, as there are differences in language, but they are all based on similar principles. It would be confusing to readers of this paper to attempt to explain these differences; what is important is to realise that the whole social behaviour of the Aborigines is based on relationship; therefore it is necessary for this relationship to embrace the whole tribe; in fact, all the people with whom the Aboriginal comes into regular contact.

What is very confusing to most white people is the fact that the Aborigines frequently use one term for persons of both sexes. When an Aboriginal man calls his son "father" and his nephew "uncle", it is not as absurd as it seems. The terms are used to imply the social behaviour to be observed between those in question. Sometimes the term "father" is used for father's sister. Father's sister is regarded as female father, and to apply to her the term "father" is to regard her children as brothers and sisters, and therefore taboo as far as marriage is concerned.

When Joe, in our story, undertook to feed all the relatives of his stock boys, he did not realise that this meant feeding the whole tribe. And Quart-pot was quite correct, according to Aboriginal law, in claiming his father's sister (Mary) as his "father".

RELATIONSHIP AT MARELLA: Almost all the Dark Children who came here claim relationship to each other. This is the basis of all Aboriginal behaviour. If a white child, brought up by foster-parents, later discovers that those he believed were real parents were actually no relation at all, it is often a severe shock. For that reason, foster-parents are sometimes called "Uncle" and "Aunt". This does not apply to the Aborigines. The children here call the Sky Pilot and his wife "Dad" and "Mum". The difference in colour is, of course, quite obvious to the growing child, and in any case those with Aboriginal background are used to having several "fathers" and "mothers", as father's brothers are "father", and mother's sisters are "mother".

By looking on the Sky Pilot as "father", all the children become brothers and sisters; this establishes a relationship governing social behaviour amongst those of sufficient age or Aboriginal background to understand. The family is the basis of Aboriginal life and behaviour. Our children are not isolated members of an institution, but are made to feel that they are members of a family; remembering always that in Aboriginal law each "family" is enlarged to embrace the whole tribe. This would not be possible or advisable, perhaps, if we were dealing with white children.

HOLIDAYS: All the Dark Children were able to have three weeks' holiday this year. We are grateful to those many friends who took our little ones into their homes and gave them such a wonderful time. The children came back looking very fit and happy and, strange to say, quite looking forward to going back to school.

SWIMMING: During the heat-wave the new dam was greatly in demand as a swimming pool. There are shallow parts for the little ones and plenty of room and depth for the strong swimmers. Most of the older children are learning to swim quite well, but no children are ever allowed near the water except when one or two adults are there to supervise to prevent accidents.

STREET STALL: In spite of the holidays,

the Street Stall conducted by the members of the Women's Auxiliary on 21st January was a great success, and brought in over £45. If other friends would care to organise a Street Stall or Afternoon Gathering in other districts, the Women's Auxiliary would be glad to co-operate in any way possible. If you would care to talk it over with the President of the Auxiliary, Mrs. Hampson, her address is 49 Mercury Street, Beverly Hills, 'phone LF 9757; or you could 'phone Mrs. Langford-Smith at the Mission Farm, YA 2427. Any woman with a gift for organising could find this an outlet for her gift, and at the same time it would be a great help to the Dark Children in our care.

YOUTH FELLOWSHIP: The Sky Pilot Youth Fellowship has put in a great deal of voluntary work at the Mission Farm. They have also raised almost £200 during the past year — £140 of it during the past six months. This money has been used to provide building material for the huts on the picnic ground, and for the purchase of tents, camping gear, etc. During the past year over 5,000 visitors have come to the Mission Farm, and the huts and the 2½ acres of picnic grounds have proved invaluable.

The Youth Fellowship has organised some very successful functions, including car drives, house parties, film nights and concerts (at the Mission Farm), etc. A great deal of the money they needed was collected from other young folk who are interested in the Dark Children and the Youth work.

As we require more huts to use for Sales of Work and Rallies, to be held here in future instead of at the Sydney Town Hall, the Youth Fellowship is active in seeking to raise the money for roofing iron, timber, etc. Booklets of receipts have been printed. Each receipt is for 2/-, and there are 20 in each book. We would be glad to hear of any friends who would be willing to help in the collection by taking a book of receipts to dispose of amongst their friends. We would also like to enrol more members between the age of 16 and 30 who would be interested in joining our house parties and other activities. Full particulars may be obtained from the Secretary, Sky Pilot Youth Fellowship, Box 29, Post Office, Castle Hill — 'phone YA 2427.

CORAL WARD: Coral settled down much better towards the end of the year, and this was a great relief to us. She has now gone to a position in the country, found for her by the Aborigines' Welfare Board. We would appreciate your continued prayers for her future.