



FannyCochrane Smith

Fanny was born in 1834 at Wybalenna. Her mother was *Tanganitura* of the Cape Portland people; her father was thought to be *Nicermeric* from Robbins Island. In 1847 she and her family went to live at Oyster Cove. In 1854 she married William Smith. The government gave Fanny twenty four pounds per year which would have been the cost of her keep at Oyster Cove. Fanny kept in close touch with her family at Oyster Cove. When she was given a 100 acres land grant, she selected it at Nicolls Rivulet to be near her people. The grant was some form of compensation to her as an Aboriginal person. Fanny practised and taught many of the old traditional skills of hunting, stringing shell necklaces and basket making. She and William raised a large family of 11 children and became a mainstay of the little community in the Channel region. She was loved and respected by black and white people alike.



Top
At the new Cape Barren Island church, 1893. Left to right - Phillip Thomas ?, John Smith or Henry Beaton, Jane Everett (nee Beaton), Nance Mansell (nee Thomas), John Maynard ?

Above
Barbara Arnott near the War Memorial on CBI, that honours the men who fought in the two World Wars.

Cape Barren Island

The Cape Barren Island community can be traced back to the early 19th century, when European sealers brought Aboriginal women to the remote island to become reluctant wives and workers. Mutton birding replaced sealing as the main economic activity in the 1850s and the community led a lifestyle based on a mix of both Aboriginal and European ways.

As early as 1866 the community was asking for communal ownership of land by virtue of their Aboriginality. Their claims were always rejected. Instead, in 1881, a reserve was established for the 80 people living on Cape Barren Island. The reserve system acted to control the island community's livelihood and movements.

The Cape Barren Island Reserve Act of 1912 acknowledged Aboriginal identity. Ironically, in 1951 in accordance with the assimilation policy, the Reserve Act was abolished and the people again became non-Aboriginal!

From the 1940s to the 1970s, unemployment and State Government policy of assimilation drove the people from Cape Barren and other islands in Bass Strait.

Today, Cape Barren is a small community consisting of people who have never left their island paradise, and the younger generation who have moved back there to find peace and tranquillity.



A tradition not forgotten

French explorers and colonial artists painted Tasmanian Aboriginal men and women wearing strings of tiny shells. Making shell necklaces is one of the few Tasmanian Aboriginal traditions that was not destroyed. It continues on Cape Barren today, providing a living link to Aboriginal ancestors.

Both Joan Brown (dec) and Dulcie Greeno have known about shell-stringing for as long as they can remember. Joan learned the art from her mother and grandmother. Dulcie was taught by her father and aunts. Their mothers were taught by their own mothers, for generations extending back far beyond living memory.

In response to the question:

‘Who taught you to string shells?’

‘You don't have to be taught when you live on Cape Barren Island’.