

# The Cabbage Tree Island Story

**The story on Cabbage Tree Island is the first of a series on the history of stations and homes under the care of the Aborigines Welfare Board.**

Cabbage Tree Island is not an old tribal ground. The early aboriginal settlers were put there about 1885 by a mounted policeman of that time.

The first aboriginals to settle on the island were Yuke, Jack Roach and Jack "Poppa" Cook.

Very little is known about Yuke and Roach, even whether they died or later left the island.

Poppa Cook stayed on, and his family was really the foundation of the islanders.

Poppa was 18-19 years old when he and his wife went to the island. They had two children, one walking and one on the hip. A third was born on a hill where his wife had gone to escape a flood at the time. Many more children came later.

The next settlers to make their homes on the island were the Bolts (or Sparks), Kapeens and Roberts.

This group was made up of people from as far south as Kempsey and from the Tweed and Tenterfield. They usually took their names from white settlers for whom they worked.

For many years, sugar cane was grown on the island, and attempts are now being made to revive this crop. Poppa Cook grew the first crop of sugar cane.

The first homes to be built were made of cabbage tree palms split into slabs.

Four wells were dug in those early days to supply drinking water, and three are still in use.

Scarcity of game, apart from birds and fish, probably caused the islanders to become good gardeners.

Cedar cutting that was widespread on the north coast in the early days also was the first work for the Cabbage Tree men.

Poppa Cook was a bullock driver where Lismore is now situated but where then there was only one homestead.

When sugar cane growing developed, the Cabbage Tree men started cane cutting, and to this day there is a gang which is called the "Black Gang", with an aboriginal ganger.

Nothing is known of the tribal names of the early settlers on the island, though often the writer heard Poppa Cook speak in his own dialect.

Now on Cabbage Tree Island, there is only one cabbage tree left.

The death of Poppa Cook at the known age of 104 years broke the greatest link with the past.

Men from the island joined the Army in the first World War, and in the last war, one man who was a prisoner-of-war in Germany escaped three times.

He made it at the third attempt, and got through safely to England.

**Jervis Bay children at the Royal Show learned vividly the need for care with fire when they inspected the exhibit of the N.S.W. Bush Fire Committee. This popular exhibit showed the destruction wrought by fire on a neglected property, and side by side with it, the children saw how a well-cared-for property can resist the onrush of fire.**

