

1. Introduction

The only thing new in the world is the history you don't know.

Harry S Truman

In late 1927 an Aboriginal man wrote an inspiring letter to a young Aboriginal girl abused within the government-operated Aboriginal apprenticeship system. He offered support and encouragement, advising the girl she was but one of many Aboriginal girls suffering sexual abuse within the scheme. He asked for details of those responsible, and promised that he would see the perpetrator in court. Clearly shaken by the girl's experience, his anguish and anger is readily revealed in the text:

My heart is filled with regret and disgust. First because you were taken down by those who were supposed to be your help and guide through life. What a wicked conception, what a fallacy. Under the so-called pretence and administration of the Board, governmental control etc. I say deliberately. The whole damnable thing has got to stop and by God[s] help it shall, make no mistake. No doubt, they are trying to exterminate the Noble and Ancient Race of sunny Australia. Away with the damnable insulting methods. Give us a hand, stand by your own Native Aboriginal Officers and fight for liberty and freedom for yourself and your children.¹

The man who wrote that letter was Fred Maynard, and this is his story.

Maynard is one of the great forgotten Aboriginal patriots and an organiser of political activism. He was born, appropriately enough, on Independence Day, 4 July 1879, at Hinton, near Maitland in New South Wales. He was instrumental in forming the first unified and long-lasting politically motivated and organised Aboriginal movement, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA). He proved to be an exceptional man, an