

## 'Footprints' Exhibition in April

'Footprints: the journey of Lucy and Percy Pepper' a travelling exhibition produced by the Public Records Office Victoria, will be on display at the Lakes Entrance History Centre from Saturday, 7 April until Tuesday, 1 May.

This special exhibition is a fascinating search through public and family records that trace the lives of one aboriginal family and provides an insight into their daily struggles in the early part of the twentieth century.

Featuring information panels and a short film, their story is presented largely through transcripts of personal letters written by Percy and Lucy themselves in their own handwriting, as well as official letters written by public servants and other government documents.

Government officials kept track of the family's every move and action, including telling them where they could live and work. Defined as 'half-castes' (to use the terminology of the time) the Peppers were not eligible to reside with their extended family on an Aboriginal reserve. They were expected to live and work in the mainstream community, although they were still subject to the same discrimination and prejudices faced by 'full-blood' Aboriginal people.

The letters and other documents also give us an insight into Lucy Pepper's long battle with tuberculosis, a disease that was very common in the early twentieth century, particularly among the poor and underprivileged.

Lucy's efforts to secure proper treatment and better living conditions are recorded, right up to her final months, many of which were spent tending her dying father at Lake Tyers Aboriginal mission station.

Lucy Pepper had to apply to the government for permission to visit her mother and father at Lake Tyers. When her father was dying, Lucy was granted permission to stay at Lake Tyers with her family and help her mother look after him.

After her father's death in 1923, Lucy was allowed to stay because of the worsening condition of her tuberculosis, but the rest of her family was not permitted to remain on the station and were asked to leave.

Like many other Aboriginal men of his generation, Percy Pepper volunteered for service during World War 1. His service record, which has been reproduced in colour in Footprints, tells us many details about his enlistment, training, active service and subsequent discharge.

Percy Pepper returned from the war to find that he and other Aboriginal servicemen still did not have the rights enjoyed by the majority of Australians.

There are many family photographs, which provide further insights into the Peppers' lives. For example, a photograph taken around 1920 of Percy and his son Phillip seated on a racing bike reveals their mutual interest in cycling.

Percy ran a bicycle agency at a store in Tynong, not far from the Koo-Wee-Rup soldier settlement block that the family farmed during the early 1920s.

Percy also had a slight physical disability, but still worked to support his children - not easy with his wife in such poor health and his presence at home being required.

Many of his efforts to make a living were vetoed by narrow-thinking public servants far away in Melbourne, but the family maintained its optimism and identity - and survived.

This sad and fascinating story has been produced from records held by the PROV and the National Archives.

Many of the photographs featured in the exhibition were obtained from Percy and Lucy's descendants.

Our Society is pleased to have the opportunity to make this story known and hope many local people will call in and see the exhibition while it is in Lakes Entrance.



Above: Percy Pepper (right), in his army uniform, with a fellow returned soldier (wearing a souvenired German uniform), early 1920's. This photograph was taken at the Pepper home at Koo-Wee-Rup. Family members can be seen in the background.

(Image courtesy of: The Watkins family)