

Charlie Hill, 'King of Burekup'

(Article taken from the South Western Times dated in October 1966.)

CHARLIE, 'KING' OF THE NATIVES, IS DEAD

THE "King" of Burekup Aboriginal community died on Friday.

A great leader and a man we will never forget" is the tribute paid by all who knew him both black and white.

Charlie Hill was his name. Probably the best known Aboriginal in the South-West certainly the most respected.

A slight built man with a big heart.

His ready wit, big smile, and wiry face topped with a crown of white hair who charmed one and all.

At Burekup the natives knew his word was law.

On Monday afternoon about 300 people gathered at Bunbury cemetery to pay their final respects to Mr. Hill.

Towns

They came from as far distant as Coolgardie, Albany, Kellerberrin and Narrogin.

There were some whites at the ceremony too but most were of Mr. Hill's race.

Mr. Hill left 14 children, seven boys and seven girls. Ages range from 17 to 42.

His wife Rachel still lives at Burekup.

He also left 61 grandchildren and nine great grand children.

Mr. Hill was born at Bridgetown in 1900, and christened Charles Robert Hill.

He received elementary schooling at Bridgetown and Midland.

His early life was spent in the wheatbelt, mainly at Pingelly.

There he worked for 14 years on the farm at L.R. Watts a feat considered remarkable by farmers used to wandering Aborigines.

Mr. Hill also proudly boasted a house and block of land he bought at Pingelly.

He was never known to drink or smoke.

About 1956 he moved his big family to a campsite near Burekup.

Storekeeper John McKinnon remembers: "Charlies camp was always clean-very unusual for a native".

He was 'King Billy' to the 50 who lived at the camp.

He was a hard worker and organised work for his family and others at the camp.

"Whites regarded him highly, and the natives all looked up to him".

Contrast

What Mr. Hill lacked in schooling he more than made up for in intelligence and shrewdness.

He did not apply for citizenship and so gain drinking rights he knew that other natives might force him to buy their liquor.

When anybody wanted labour from the camp they went to Mr. Hill.

He allocated the work, collected their pay and bought their food and groceries.

If anything went wrong at the camp he was always there to mediate.

When troublemakers drifted into the camp the "King" told them to go. If they did not he called the police.

Mrs McKinnon recalls: "There were never any drunken brawls while Charlie was around.

He had a most charming personality that won everybody to his side.

Children idolised him. He never left the store without buying sweets for them."

Praise

Burekup Progress Association president John Hutchinson said: "Charlie was unlike any native I have known".

"You could ask him to put up 20 chains of fencing and he would do it without any trouble".

"Nothing was ever missing and he returned what he borrowed".

"No matter how much you refused Charlie for something whether money or work for his family he would come back just as happy a few hours later and tell you a story as to why you should do as he asked".

"He could spin yarn after yarn and you would never hear the same one twice".

"They got so good you could not pick a fault in them".

"You knew if the story was false, he knew you knew - but you gave him the money any way".

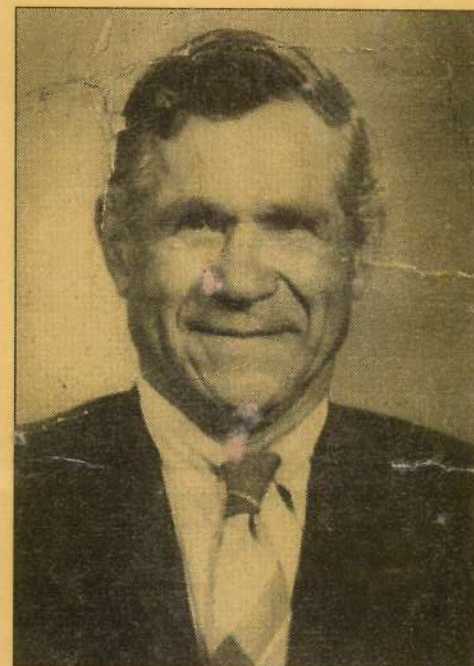
Nobody could dislike him. The natives have lost a great leader in Charlie. They have nobody to replace him".

Mr. Hill had great respect for the law.

His son Derick (24) said of his father: "He always told us to do things correctly. If we did not he would come and tell us what was right".

"He also led us with his good example".

"The wonderful things he did for everybody that made him so well liked".



"He would never see people left down and out. He would always help".

Updated Information

Mr Hill's wife Rachel later died in 1964. Mr Hill is survived by 5 daughters and 2 sons. His eldest daughter Mrs Alice Bennell resides in Bunbury, Dulcie Wallam, Doreen and Pauline Hill at Brunswick, Derek Hill, Dennis Hill and Mrs Diedre Thorne live in Perth.

Siblings past on are Maitland Hill, Violet Bennell, Jane Collard, Horace, Peter, Gerald and Lawrence Hill.