

Legacy still continues

by
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Hundreds gathered at Shepparton's Queen's Gardens for the unveiling of the William Cooper memorial statue yesterday, including school students from across the region, community organisations and councillors.

Master of ceremonies Leonie Drummond and Julie Ferguson, a great-granddaughter and great-great-granddaughter respectively of Mr Cooper, opened the ceremony.

The women spoke of the importance of the day and how proud they were to be related to a man who advocated equality and human rights for all.



Mr Cooper's grandson Uncle Alf 'Boydie' Turner and great-granddaughter Nola Kelly performed the Welcome to Country.

Mr Turner talked of time with his grandfather "living on the banks of the Murray River" and the legacy he strove to maintain.

A smoking ceremony accompanied by some traditional music and dancing displayed local Aboriginal culture.

Graham Briggs played the didgeridoo and wood blocks, while descendants Wylleon Baker, Ngtaeo Tass and Jirra Briggs invited those closest in the crowd to take part in the smoking ceremony.

Talyssa Baker treated the crowd to a special rendition of You Are My Sunshine, sung in Yorta Yorta language.

City of Greater Shepparton Mayor Kim O’Keeffe spoke of the “power of individuals committed to making a difference”.

Kaiela Institute executive chair Paul Briggs spoke of the importance of the day in Aboriginal history.



The impressive bronze statue honours the life and contribution of William Cooper.

“It’s a day of mixed emotions as we’re not only celebrating a great event and a great man, but we’re also remembering the past and our journey,” Mr Briggs said.

Sculptor Pamela McKillop also spoke, before descendants of William Cooper unveiled the statue from under the Aboriginal flag.



School students from across the region gathered at yesterday's unveiling of the William Cooper statue.

Gandel Philanthropy chief executive Verdan Drakulic talked of Mr Cooper’s bravery.

“Mr Cooper’s act of bravery and care for fellow human beings regardless of who they are is the story that must be remembered and must be told,” Mr Drakulic said.

Gandel Philanthropy donated \$30000 towards the sculpture.