

## Jessie Sinclair Litchfield

### Writer, poet and journalist (1883–1956)

Jessie Sinclair Litchfield (nee Phillips) was born in Sydney in 1883. She married Valentine Litchfield, an engineer, and moved to the Northern Territory in 1908, working in mining camps and later residing in Darwin. She lived her entire adult life in the Territory except for the years of World War II when all civilians were compulsorily evacuated from Darwin. Litchfield spent the years 1942–45 in Sydney.

Jessie Litchfield was an Australian writer, poet and journalist. She published five books, most of which drew on her experiences in the Territory and her knowledge of Aboriginal life. She worked as a journalist for many years, either in editorial positions on Darwin newspapers or as the Northern Territory press representative for major Australian or overseas newspapers. She took an active interest in politics, standing, unsuccessfully, as an independent for the House of Representatives seat of the Northern Territory at the 1951 Federal election. She had earlier been unsuccessful in an attempt to win a seat on the Darwin City Council in 1927. At no time was she an official of the Commonwealth government, nor was she ever elected or appointed to any Commonwealth body or institution.

She is regarded as the 'grand old lady of the Territory', founder of the Litchfield family in the Northern Territory and the grandmother of Marshall Perron, the Chief Minister of the Territory from 1988 to 1995. Litchfield National Park, established in 1946, was named after the Litchfield family. In 1953 Jessie Litchfield was awarded the coronation medal for her services to the Northern Territory. She died during a visit to Melbourne in 1956. After cremation her ashes were scattered over Darwin.

### Records relating to Jessie Litchfield

The records held by the National Archives about Jessie Litchfield generally relate to her approaches to government about the quality of services and facilities available to residents of the Northern Territory. She wrote many letters, often several pages long, to successive ministers, departmental heads and other senior government officials regarding the development needs of the Territory. Material relating to her nomination in 1953 for the coronation medal is also held.

A selection of material about Jessie Litchfield, held by the National Archives in Canberra, Sydney and Darwin, is listed below.

## Records relating to Jessie Litchfield held by the National Archives

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Mrs JS Litchfield assistance for settlement</u>	1908–28	A1, 1927/7242
<u>JS Litchfield – offer to bind newspapers – Darwin</u>	1926	A1, 1926/9641
<u>Mrs JS Litchfield complaint re NT administration</u>	1927–38	A1, 1938/23077
<u>Complete list of recipients of Coronation Medal, 1953, from Commonwealth Government</u>	1952–53	A463, 1957/3125
<u>Coronation Medal – award of. Territories miscellaneous</u>	1952–53	A518, SA112/1
<u>Coronation medal – Distribution to Commonwealth Territories (excluding ACT)</u>	1953	A462, 821/1/161

## Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Darwin radio station 5DR and Mrs Litchfield</u>	1947–48	SP286/7, box 3

## Darwin

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Mrs JS Litchfield suggestions re future development of Darwin</u>	1950–55	F1, 1954/388

## Other collections relating to Jessie Litchfield

Many of Jessie Litchfield's papers, including the manuscripts of her novels, and copies of her verse, have been deposited with the following institutions.

### National Library of Australia

Parkes Place, CANBERRA ACT 2600

Tel: (02) 6262 1111, Fax: (02) 6257 1703

### La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria

328 Swanston Street, MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Tel: (03) 9669 9824, Fax: (03) 9669 9907

### Northern Territory Archives Service

25 Cavenagh Street, DARWIN NT 0800

(GPO Box 874, DARWIN NT 0801)

Tel: (08) 8924 7677, Fax: (08) 8924 7660

Email: [nt\\_archives@nt.gov.au](mailto:nt_archives@nt.gov.au)

### Library, Charles Darwin University

Casuarina campus

Ellengowan Drive, CASUARINA NT 0810

(CDU Library PO Box 41246, CASUARINA NT 0811)

Tel: (08) 8946 7022