

Indigenous family history beyond the National Archives

Many records that are useful for Indigenous family history are not held by the National Archives of Australia. This fact sheet describes some of the records that exist and the organisations you might approach in your research.

Colonial and state government records relating to Indigenous people

Except in the Northern Territory, the function of 'Aboriginal affairs' was administered by colonial and state governments before 1967. For this reason, state archives or the relevant state government department are the main sources for records relating to the administration of Aboriginal affairs before the late 1960s (see [Addresses of Australian archival institutions](#)).

For Victoria, Aboriginal affairs records from 1836 to 1859 are kept by the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). Those from 1860 to 1972 are mostly, but not entirely, located in the Melbourne Office of the National Archives (see *Fact sheet 113 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*).

Aboriginal affairs records may include correspondence files, board minute books, personal case files, ward registers, indexes, station reports, certificates of exemption, financial records and photographs, all of which may contain names of Indigenous people, reserves, homes and other related places. Other state government records, such as those relating to health, education, housing, government employment, lands, police and the courts can include relevant information.

Where else might information be found?

- registrars of births, deaths and marriages, see *Fact sheet 89 - Births, deaths and marriages*
- the [Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#)
- the [National Library of Australia](#), where you can search newspapers in [Trove](#)
- State libraries (see *Fact sheet 2 - Addresses of Australian archival institutions*)
- public libraries with genealogical and local history collections
- church archives which may include records relating to homes, missions and reserves
- university libraries and archives
- trade union records, business or company records, pastoral property records held at the [Noel Butlin Archives Centre](#)

Questions to help you to think about what kinds of records to look for

Think about how your family might have interacted with the government. Some useful questions might include:

- Did they live in or have an association with an Indigenous mission, reserve or home?
- If so, was it run by the government or another group (such as a church), or both?
- When and where did they go to school?
- Were they born in a state hospital?
- Are they likely to have received any pension or child endowment?
- Did they serve in the armed forces? (Defence force personnel files are kept by the National Archives).

Also think about:

- What you know about yourself and your family – names, nicknames, dates, places and any other details you remember from family stories.
- Checking electoral rolls – contrary to common belief, Indigenous people could enrol before 1967 although relatively few did. *Fact sheet 104 - Commonwealth electoral rolls held in Perth* details some of the National Archives' holdings of electoral records.
- Place names – some Indigenous missions and other places have had various names at different times and there are often several ways to spell them.
- Personal names – names that people are known by are not always the same as on their birth certificate. Could the name you know be short for another name or be a nickname? Also think about spelling variations for names, for example, McGuinness, McGuiness, McGinnis, McInnes.

Publications and websites

Further information about Indigenous resources can be found on the websites of state archives and state libraries. Some specific publications and websites include the following:

- A Guide to Records of Indigenous Australians in the Lutheran Archives, Adelaide, SA, Cultural Ministers Council, 1999
- Department of Community Services, NSW, *Connecting Kin – Guide to Records: A guide to help people separated from their families search for their records*
- Find & Connect: History & information about Australian orphanages, children's homes and other institutions.
- National Archives of Australia, Tracking Family: A guide to Aboriginal records relating to the Northern Territory, Canberra, 2015
- New South Wales State Records, State Archives Relating to Aboriginal People, Sydney, 1998 (see also other material on the website)
- Nunkuwarrin Yunti of South Australia Inc., Finding Your Own Way: A guide to records of children's homes in South Australia, Adelaide, 2005

- Public Record Office Victoria, Finding Your Story: A resource manual to the records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria, Melbourne, 2005 (see also other material on the website)
- Queensland State Archives, Brief Guides Number 50 Records Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Indigenous resources
- Records Task Force of Western Australia, Looking West: A guide to Aboriginal records in Western Australia, Perth, 2004
- South Australian State Records, Guide to Records Relating to Aboriginal People, 5 volumes
- Wharton, Geoff, Mission time: A guide to Queensland Presbyterian Church records relating to the Gulf missions at Aurukun, Mapoon, Mornington Island, Weipa and Thursday Island Mission Agency, 1891 to 1978, PCE Press, Brisbane, 2000
- Public Record Office Victoria, Finding Your Mob: Researching Aboriginal family history at the Victorian Archives Centre, Melbourne, 2014