

---

*Worldwide knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present*

“The first and most important aspect to consider is that generally Indigenous people are unaware of what records have been created about them, their families and communities, and the reasons behind their creation. Without this knowledge it is difficult to find a starting point in their search for their history. Therefore, Indigenous people must be informed about the records, the services available and their rights of access as this is one of the biggest barriers to Aboriginal people gaining control over their historical documents and thus their history. People who live in remote areas are often more disadvantaged by their geographical location.” (Katon, Kim 2002)

This brief guide will concentrate on those records and sources that specifically relate to Indigenous people. It is important to mention that the web pages of the Family History Unit at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) are a starting point with comprehensive links to fact sheets, guides to Indigenous records and contact addresses.

## BACKGROUND

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is Australia’s premier institution for research into Indigenous issues. It plays a vital role in helping to reunite Indigenous people who have been separated from their families and communities. Specialised support for Link-Up staff and clients by the AIATSIS Family History Unit.

Beginning in the late 1970’s, the Unit originated as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index (ABI) of names. Its aim was to provide a brief biographical entry of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples referred to, or depicted in published material held in the Institute’s collections. Today, its primary functions are to undertake family history research on behalf of clients, and importantly, to show people how to get started with their own research.

The AIATSIS catalogue, MURA®, is used to find reference material for clients such as a mission, station or reserve, language, autobiographies or genealogies. Information is also accessed through the ABI, Births, Deaths and Marriage indexes, archive indexes and Tindale indexes. Although the Unit does not compile family trees, staff can offer support and guidance in this area of research.

## RECORDS SPECIFIC TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

**Protectors’ Records and Reports:** In each State and Territory, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples came under the control of the Protector of Aborigines or similarly named bodies. Protectors’ reports and files are now held in each State or Territory Archives. People can access their own family files once clearance has been given. Contact your State or Territory Archives for details. Not all people will find a Protector’s report on their family.

**Tindale Genealogies:** Tindale was an anthropologist working for the South Australian Museum . He recorded Indigenous genealogies around Australia .Tindale genealogies have been given to the major libraries in each state. Contact your State Library for details.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index and INFOKOORI:** AIATSIS has the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index (ABI) referring to people mentioned in published books, magazines and journals that are held in the Library. Mission and government journals such as Dawn and Evangel have been used to build the index. The ABI is a part of Mura®, the AIATSIS catalogue. INFOKOORI, the Indigenous index of the State Library of NSW, also indexes many similar and other magazines / newspapers.

**Court and Police Records:** Court and police records can be of assistance. They may be the only way to verify the names of individual Indigenous people. Especially for the early periods of white settlement, police officers had the roles of local magistrates, and in some cases, were Protectors of Aborigines, distributing rations and effecting government policy.

**Electoral Records:** Electoral rolls, although only containing information on name, address and occupation (omitted after 1983), can be more useful than telephone directories. After all, many people are not on the phone or are not listed in the telephone directory. Indigenous people have had the right to be on electoral rolls generally since the 1960's. Do note that the 1967 referendum didn't give Aboriginal people the right to vote. They already had it. Very few Aboriginal people knew their rights so very few voted, but some eventually did.

**Land and Pastoral Station Records:** Aboriginal stockworkers and domestic staff worked for generations on pastoral stations, particularly in northern Australia . Many of these workers left the stations after the 1968 wages case. Some station owners or managers kept records such as diaries, wage books, registers of births etc.

Many of these records are held at the Noel Butlin Archives, mainly for farms and cattle properties in New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory. The Noel Butlin Archives also holds the records of many trade unions and companies that would cover people working in related industries. If you know of someone who has worked on an existing station, you could try writing to the station to find out if any records were retained. Unfortunately, some stations haven't kept records and many stations no longer exist or have been sold on.

There were various "pastoral directories" published that list pastoral properties, their names and owners etc. These may be useful to identify properties no longer in existence. There are various pastoral directories such as the *Australian Pastoral Directory* which are held in the State Libraries or in the Noel Butlin Archives. They will also have map collections relating to pastoral stations. If you want to search for information about pastoral properties you should contact the relevant state government agencies. They have pastoral maps, records of land surveys and details of who bought and sold properties.

**Mission Records:** Of the many Aboriginal missions that were established, most have disappeared, but some are still in existence. There is a good, but by no means complete, listing in the book *Lookin for your mob : a guide to tracing Aboriginal family trees* by Diane Smith and Boronia Halstead, Canberra : Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990. This listing has been further developed on the Family History Unit web site.

Starting dates for missions can vary as to what event is taken as the starting point (e.g. the arrival of a priest or the granting of land). Churches often maintained some form of presence after the official closure

date given. It must also be noted that some churches were active on government settlements, though they didn't always have an administrative role.

Many churches hold their records centrally in their major administrative offices. Sadly, many church records are missing or lost. To find out contact information for a church archive, you can use the Directory of Archives in Australia by either browsing their list or searching by keyword. Mission records are another valuable source to search for people. They could include various personal records of life on the Missions. Most are preserved in Church and Mission Society Archives though some have been given to libraries and archives.

You can search for archives/records of churches and missions that are held in RAAM (Register of Australian Archives and Manuscripts). In RAAM you can search under the name of the mission or the name of the church.

## **FAMILY HISTORY UNIT FACT SHEETS**

These fact sheets are valuable information sources for Indigenous family history and are available at: [http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family\\_history\\_tracing/fact\\_sheets](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family_history_tracing/fact_sheets).

## **RESEARCH GUIDES**

These guides are only available in print format and will need to be obtained from a library. See below for other research guides that are available on the Internet.

Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission (1999) *A piece of the story – national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families*. Curtin , A.C.T.: Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission, 1999.

Fraser, Ros. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Commonwealth records: A Guide to Records in the Australian Archives*. AGPS, Canberra, 1993

*My heart is breaking : a joint guide to records about Aboriginal people in the Public Record Office of Victoria and the Australian Archives*. Canberra: Australian Government. Publishing Service , c.1993.

## **ONLINE RESEARCH GUIDES**

### **Australia in General**

*Records of National Cultural Significance - Records relating to Indigenous Australians* (<http://www.archivenet.gov.au/Resources/records.pdf>) -this lists all the organisations holdings records of value to Indigenous people. It also lists many printed guides, most of which will be held by the AIATSIS Library.

### *Where to find Records on Indigenous Australians*

([http://www.naa.gov.au/The\\_Collection/indigenous\\_records.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/The_Collection/indigenous_records.html))- by the National Archives of Australia

### **New South Wales**

#### *A Guide to New South Wales State Archives relating to Aboriginal People*

(<http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/publications/aboriginalguide/aboriginalguidetoc.htm>)- by State Records NSW

### **Northern Territory**

#### *Guide to Records Holdings Relating to Aboriginal People*

(<http://www.nt.gov.au/dcis/nta/collection/aboriginal.html>) by the Northern Territory Archives

### **Queensland**

#### *Queensland Indigenous Family History: How to Get Started*

([http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/serv/ind/footprints/family\\_history\\_resources/start](http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/serv/ind/footprints/family_history_resources/start)) by the State Library of Queensland

#### *Resources Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*

(<http://www.archives.qld.gov.au/research/atsi.asp> ) by the Queensland State Archives

### **South Australia**

*Finding Your Own Way* ([http://www.salinkup.com.au/content.php?page\\_id=4](http://www.salinkup.com.au/content.php?page_id=4) ) SA Link-Up guide to SA Indigenous records

*Aboriginal Family History* ([http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?area\\_id=15&nav\\_id=630](http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?area_id=15&nav_id=630) ) by the State Library of South Australia

*Aboriginal Services* (<http://www.archives.sa.gov.au/aboriginal/index.html> ) by the State Records of South Australia

### **Tasmania**

*Records Relating to Tasmanian Aboriginal People* (<http://www.archives.tas.gov.au/guides/list/bg018> ) by the Archives Office of Tasmania

## Victoria

*Finding Your Story: A Resource Manual to the Records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria*  
(<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/findingyourstory/>)

*Aboriginal Records at PROV*  
(<http://www.access.prov.vic.gov.au/public/PROVguides/PROVguide067/PROVguide067.jsp> )  
and by the Public Record Office of Victoria

*Researching Family History at PROV*  
(<http://www.access.prov.vic.gov.au/public/PROVguides/PROVguide051/PROVguide051.jsp>) by  
the Public Record Office of Victoria

## Western Australia

*Looking West: A Guide to Aboriginal Records in Western Australia*  
(<http://www.lookingwest.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au/> ) by the Records Taskforce of  
Western Australia

*Aboriginal Records* (<http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/collection/aboriginalrecords.asp>) by the the State Records  
Office of Western Australia

*'Katitjin: a guide to Indigenous records in the Battye Library'*  
(<http://www.lis.wa.gov.au/pdf/katitjinsep03.pdf> ) by the Library Service of Western Australia

## Major Internet Sites

### Link-Up

Link-Up services are organisations funded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) to assist with the process of family tracing and reunion for members of the Stolen Generations. See [http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family\\_history\\_tracing/link\\_up\\_services](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family_history_tracing/link_up_services) for contact information.

### Individual States

NSW Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs - <http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/familyhistory/>

Northern Territory Archives Service - *Guide to Records Holdings Relating to Aboriginal People*  
(<http://www.nt.gov.au/dcis/nta/collection/aboriginal.html>)

State Library of Queensland - *Queensland Indigenous Family History: How to Get Started*  
([http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/serv/ind/footprints/family\\_history\\_resources/start](http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/serv/ind/footprints/family_history_resources/start))

South Australia Museum - Indigenous Information Centre  
(<http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/page/default.asp?site=1&id=436>)

Archives Office of Tasmania - Records Relating to Tasmanian Aboriginal  
People(<http://www.archives.tas.gov.au/guides/list/bg018> )

Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce (<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/vkrt/default.asp>)

Western Australia. Dept. of Indigenous Affairs, Aboriginal Family History Program  
(<http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Heritage/FamilyHistory/>)

### **Further Reading**

Smith, D., & Halstead, B, (1992) *Lookin for your mob – A guide to tracing Aboriginal family trees.*  
Canberra : Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990.

This work, whilst very useful, contains out of date contact information. For up to date  
information, use the AIATSIS Family History Unit web site.

Taylor, P. (1992) *Telling it like it is – A guide to making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history.*  
Canberra : Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1992.

Katon, Kim 2002, *Understanding the Barriers – Indigenous people and records,*  
[http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family\\_history\\_tracing/family\\_history\\_links/understading\\_the\\_barriers.](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family_history_tracing/family_history_links/understading_the_barriers)