

Researching your Aboriginal Family History at the Northern Territory Archives Service

Before you begin your family history research using the resources of the Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS) you need to prepare to ensure that your visit is as productive as possible.

Organise your information

You need to gather and organise the information you already have about the people you are searching for, noting especially where they were located in the Northern Territory, and when they were there.

If you know the Aboriginal Name, Language Group, or Country, of the people you are looking for information about, include these details on your list. Include details of anything you know about their activities.

Keep your own records

As you are researching your family history it is important to keep details of where you find your information. When you get photocopies from Archives, or you search in publications, ensure to keep details of the resources that you used so that you can find the information again if you need to.

Before visiting the Northern Territory Archives Service

It is important to note that with the creation of the Northern Territory Government, the Commonwealth retained the function of administering Aboriginal Affairs. Therefore the records of Government relating to the administration of Northern Territory Indigenous People remained with the Commonwealth. These records are now held at the **National Archives of Australia (NAA)**.

The NAA maintains a database called the **Bringing Them Home Name Index** for records relating to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. You can contact the NAA Darwin Office and request a search of this index to identify records relevant to your family. The NAA Darwin contact details for the Darwin office of the NAA are available on their website at www.naa.gov.au, or phone them directly on (08) 8985 0300 and speak with their reference staff. You should also visit their website to browse the range of Fact Sheets, and to see a copy of **Tracking Family** which is a guide to organisations holding records relevant to Aboriginal families in the Northern Territory.

What you will find at the Northern Territory Archives Service

The NTAS collects records of Northern Territory Government departments which were created since the granting of Self Government to the Northern Territory in 1978, and also records created before 1978 from departments whose function and activity became the responsibility of the Northern Territory Government from this time.

The NTAS also collects archives donated by organisations and individuals which are relevant to the history of the Northern Territory. This includes records of the Church Missionary Society and Uniting Church and Oral History Interviews of many individuals.

Access to archives at Northern Territory Archives Service

Generally, Northern Territory Government archives are available for public access once they reach 30 years of age. Some further restrictions may apply. For government records that are less than 30 years old, you will need to seek permission from the government department that controls the records. Reference staff can provide you with further advice about this.

Access to community collections, including mission archives, is according to the agreement made between the depositor of the archives and the NTAS reference staff will provide advice on this.

Northern Territory Archives Service List of Holdings

The NTAS has a listing of all the archival series in its collections. This is our List of Holdings. Use this list to identify archives series which may be of use to your research, and then ask Reference Staff for series lists to search for particular items within the series. The List of Holdings is available on our website at the following address: <http://www.nt.gov.au/ntas/collection/holdings>

It is important to note that records of Births Deaths and Marriages, although part of the NTAS collections, are only available through the Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages located at Nicholls Place, Darwin City. Charges usually apply for obtaining certificates.

You will notice on the List of Holdings that the archives come in a range of formats including files, photographs, maps and plans, registers and volumes, scrapbooks and albums, amongst others. These archives are unique and irreplaceable, and it is important that they are preserved for generations to come. When you request records to look at in the search room we will usually make the original archives available to you. For these we will provide you with gloves, to protect the archives when you handle them, or in some circumstances where archives are very fragile or damaged, we will provide you with a reference copy in the search room.

Make an appointment

Staff who work with the records and know the archives in our collections can provide you with advice and guidance for your research. It is important to contact the NTAS before you visit to make an appointment, allowing us to set aside time when we can show you how to search for archives. Our search rooms in Darwin and Alice Springs are open week days from 9.00am-12noon, then 1.00pm-4.00pm. You can phone or e-mail to make your appointment.

Useful records to check for your Family History at NTAS

Records relating to deaths in the Northern Territory

There are many series of records, apart from those controlled by the Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages, which relate to the deaths of individuals in the Northern Territory, including Aboriginal people.

- **Probate records**

Probate is the process of proving and registering in the Supreme Court, the last will of a deceased person. Probate files can be a great source of information for family history. The NTAS and the Genealogical Society of the Northern Territory hold indexes (compiled by Len Cossons) of probate records for the Northern Territory. Probate records which are over 30 years old are available for access at the NTAS. For information about Probate records that are not yet 30 years old, you need to contact the Supreme Court Registry in Darwin.

- **Coroner's records**

The NTAS holds many series of Coroners records relating to deaths in the Northern Territory. In most cases there are series listings which enable searches by name. If you have the name and date of death of an individual, you may be able to find a relevant file.

Police records

The first appointed policeman arrived in the Northern Territory in 1870. From this time the NT Police, in the course of their duties, were creating records documenting their activities. The records of police include their dealings with Aboriginal people of the NT.

The NTAS holds series of Police Journals, maintained in police stations across the Northern Territory. We also hold police correspondence files, which include records of employment of trackers, reports of crime, of community activity, and reports of deaths.

Lands records

Lands records include correspondence files relating to pastoral leases, the issue of grazing licences, and other leases and licences in the NT. These records can provide information about the development of stations and properties, which may be useful when researching the area where family may have lived or worked.

Community archives

The NTAS collects personal archives, donated by individuals or organisations, whose records document the history of the Northern Territory. These include collections donated by people and their families who have worked or lived with Aboriginal people. Please see our List of Holdings for details.

The NTAS is actively developing our Community Archives collections. Please see the information leaflet on **Donating Archives** for more information, if you are interested in donating your photographs or records to the Northern Territory Archives Service.

Oral history collection

Oral histories provide a rich source of information about the past. The NTAS holds approximately 2500 interviews with people whose stories tell that of the Northern Territory also. Reference staff at NTAS will show you how to locate oral histories of interest, searching the tables of contents and summaries of oral histories. The oral histories are available in an audio format which you can listen to in the search room, or as written transcripts which you may read also in the search room.

Check the NTAS **Oral History Unit** leaflet for more information. You can nominate yourself or people you know to be interviewed, recording your or their story for the NTAS oral history collection. To do this you can use the **Oral History Interview nomination form** attaché to the Oral History Leaflet.

Mission records

The NTAS Community Archives includes records of some church organisations that ran missions in the Northern Territory. Permission is required to access the Mission archives. Please speak to the reference staff for more information.

- **Church Missionary Society Missions**

The NTAS collections include records of the Church Missionary Society, part of the Anglican Church who ran missions and homes in the Northern Territory at several locations including Groote Eylandt, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), Ngukurr (Roper River), Numbulwar (Rose River).

- **Uniting Church Missions**

The NTAS collections include records of the Uniting Church, formed in 1977 from a union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. Archives of the Uniting Church include the following missions: Croker Island/ Minjilang (Methodist), Elcho Island/ Galiwinku (Methodist), Lake Evella/ Gapuwiyak, Ernabella SA (Presbyterian), Goulburn Island/ Waruwi (Methodist), Kimberleys WA, Milingimbi (Methodist), Nhulunbuy and Yirrkala (Methodist).

Enjoy your research!

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