

Northern Territory Archives Service

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), some preparation will ensure that your research time is as productive as possible.

Organise your information

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 researching, include these details with your notes. Include details about their activities including work, schooling, institutions attended, and organisations they were involved with.

Keep your own records

As you are doing your research 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 have used so that you can find the information again if you need to.

Before visiting the Northern Territory Archives

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 (BTH) Name Index*** for records relating to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. NAA staff in the Darwin can undertake a search using this BTH index on your behalf. The NAA can be contacted on (08) 8999 6890, or see their website for further details at www.naa.gov.au, including to browse the range of Fact Sheets, search their online database *Recordsearch* and to read a copy of ***Tracking Family*** which is a guide to organisations holding records relevant to Aboriginal people, families and communities 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 NTAS

Generally, 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 department that controls the records. Reference staff can provide you with further advice and help with 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.

Searching for information at NTAS

The two main tools used for finding records at NTAS are *Archives Navigator* and the general **List of Holdings**. Visit the NTAS website to use Archives Navigator, <https://dtsc.nt.gov.au/arts-and-museums/northern-territory-archives-service>. It is important to read the introduction which explains what you can do with Archives Navigator and with the List of Holdings. Do not hesitate to ask Reference Staff for further help with your search.

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 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 Reading Room usually the original archives will be made available to you. For these it is important to follow the guidelines on handling records outlined in the Reading Room rules. In some circumstances where archives are very fragile or damaged, you will be provided with a reference copy to view.

Make an appointment

Staff who work with the records and know the archives in NTAS 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 staff to set aside time to show you how to search for archives and to access them. NTAS Reading Rooms in Darwin and Alice Springs are open Tuesday to Friday from 9.00am-4.30pm. 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 the last will of a deceased person in the Supreme Court. 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, 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. These files are also in restricted access.

Police records

The first appointed policeman arrived in the Northern Territory in 1870. From this time 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. NTAS 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 archives, donated by individuals or organisations, whose records document the history of the Northern Territory. These include collections donated by individuals and their families who have worked or lived with Aboriginal people. Please see the list of holdings for details.

NTAS is actively developing its Community Archives collections. Please see the information leaflet on **Donating Archives** if you are interested in donating your photographs or records to the NTAS.

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. You are able to search the contents and summaries of oral histories through the online search tool: <http://oralhistory.nt.gov.au>.

The oral history records are available in an audio format which you can listen to in the Reading Room, or as a written transcript which you can read.

Check the NTAS **Oral History Unit** leaflet for more information. You can nominate yourself or people you know to be interviewed, using the Oral History interview nomination form attached to that 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 some of the Mission archive collections. Please speak to the Reference Staff for more information.

Anglican Church missions

NTAS collections include records of the Church Missionary Society 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 made up from a union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. Records of the Uniting Church include the following Missions/locations: Croker Island/ Minjilang (Methodist), Elcho Island/ Galiwinku (Methodist), Lake Evella/ Gapuwiyak, Ernabella SA (Presbyterian), Goulburn Island/ Warruwi (Methodist), Kimberleys WA, Milingimbi (Methodist), Nhulunbuy and Yirrkala (Methodist).

Enjoy your research!

Contacts

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