



# AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL  
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

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## Background reading

There are two main types of background reading that will be useful to your research:

- **Family and personal histories** – family, community histories and life stories or biographies are histories of individuals, families, communities, missions, reserves or other places
- **Administrative histories** – histories of the legislation and administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

### Family and personal histories

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have written histories of their own lives, their families and of communities such as missions or reserves. These are mostly published books and should be available in public libraries.

AIATSIS has a comprehensive collection of writings by and about Indigenous people. Some of the collection is indexed by name in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index (ABI).

#### Search strategies

Start your search for books and other material for background reading by searching and browsing the ABI and Mura® catalogue.

- **Search the ABI for family names.** If there are too many search results, limit the results by place (see the left-hand side of the search results).
- **Browse the Family History section of Mura®.** There may be recent family histories relevant to your research. To do this, go into Mura and then choose Family History from the list on the left hand side of the Mura Collections Catalogue Home page
- **Search the ABI by place.** If the place is relatively large (Northern Territory) you will need to try to narrow to a smaller place (Alice Springs). If your family name doesn't appear in the search results, you may find the names of other people associated with that place.
- **Search Mura® for names or places.** The search results list will include family and community histories.

Note that the search results will also give you some information about the language and the names of people or groups associated with places or names. See Thinking about place.



## Other places to search for family histories:

- National Library catalogue
- State and Territory Library catalogues
- Catalogues of your local council library or local history collection. You may be surprised at what you might find.
- Google and Google books. In each of these you might include a family name, a place, the word 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal' and 'family history' in your search.

## Administrative histories

The term 'administrative history' refers to histories of the government departments responsible for Aboriginal people. It also refers to historical information about the legislation enacted by governments for the 'protection' and 'welfare' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Each state and territory developed, passed and enforced its own laws, so it is valuable to understand what happened in the states/territories that are important to your family.

### Why is it useful to read administrative histories?

You will find that some of the records that may be available about your family were created because of legislation. For example, under protection legislation in most parts of Australia individuals were permitted to apply for an 'exemption' from the Act (Act meaning the legislation controlling Aboriginal people at the time). An exemption or 'dog tag' as it was often referred to, meant that an Aboriginal person wasn't treated as Aboriginal for the purpose of the Act. For example, they were permitted to move around and work in similar ways to a non-Aboriginal person. If a family member was exempted, there should be a file held by among government records with the exemption application and other related paperwork.

It is also useful to know the names of the departments that were responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and Child Protection at different times in Australia's history because you then know who might have been creating records about your family members.

## Aboriginal Family History Research guides

Each state, territory and commonwealth archive holds government records related to Aboriginal protection and welfare. These archives have developed research guides to help people trying to find records about themselves or their families. Most guides include a short history of the protection/welfare regime and information about the kinds of records that were created. State and Territory Libraries also have research guides which can lead you to many different kinds of resources for Aboriginal Family History research and offer other ideas on approaches to family history. Below are some links to Research Guides in State/Territory Archives and Libraries.

## New South Wales

- Research guides related to Aboriginal people - State Records of NSW  
<https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/aboriginal-people/guides>
- Aboriginal Australians family history – State Library of NSW:  
<http://guides.sl.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal-australians>

## Northern Territory

- Researching your Aboriginal family history – Northern Territory Archives Service:  
<https://dta.nt.gov.au/arts-and-museums/northern-territory-archives-service/archives-information-leaflets>
- Tracking family: A guide to Aboriginal records relating to the Northern Territory – National Archives of Australia:  
<http://guides.naa.gov.au/tracking-family/>

## Queensland

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family history – State Library of Queensland: [www.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/family-history/atsi](http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/family-history/atsi)
- Queensland State Archives  
<https://www.qld.gov.au/dsiti/qsas>  
<https://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/arts/heritage/archives/collection>
- Queensland Government links for Aboriginal Family and Personal history  
<https://www.qld.gov.au/atsi/cultural-awareness-heritage-arts>

## South Australia

- Aboriginal family history – State Library of South Australia:  
[http://guides.slsa.sa.gov.au/Aboriginal\\_FH](http://guides.slsa.sa.gov.au/Aboriginal_FH)
- Aboriginal services – State Records of South Australia:  
<https://www.archives.sa.gov.au/content/aboriginal-services-guides>

## Tasmania

- Records on Tasmanian Aboriginal people – LINC Tasmania:  
<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/family-history/Pages/default.aspx>

## Victoria

- Aboriginal people and family history – State Library of Victoria:  
[guides.slv.vic.gov.au/aboriginalfamilyhistory](https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/aboriginalfamilyhistory)
- walata tyamateetj: A guide to government records about Aboriginal people in Victoria:  
<https://prov.vic.gov.au/walata-tyamateetj-research-guide>
- Finding your mob: Researching Aboriginal family history at the Victorian Archives Centre  
<https://prov.vic.gov.au/finding-your-mob>
- Finding your story: Resource manual to the records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria: <https://www.prov.vic.gov.au/koorie-services/finding-your-story>

## Western Australia

- Indigenous family history – State Library of Western Australia:  
<https://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/explore-discover/indigenous-wa/family-history/wa-indigenous-family-history-resources>
- State Records Office of Western Australia:  
[www.sro.wa.gov.au/archive-collection/collection/aboriginal-records/aboriginal-family-history](http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/archive-collection/collection/aboriginal-records/aboriginal-family-history)
- Looking west: A guide to Aboriginal records in Western Australia – Department for Child Protection:  
[www.dcp.wa.gov.au/SupportingIndividualsAndFamilies/Documents/LookingWest.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/SupportingIndividualsAndFamilies/Documents/LookingWest.pdf) (PDF 385kb)
- Signposts: A guide for children and young people in care in WA from 1920 – Department for Child Protection: [signposts.cpfs.wa.gov.au](http://signposts.cpfs.wa.gov.au)

See also: Aboriginal protection and welfare records

### **AIATSIS online exhibition: To remove and protect**

This online resource includes digital copies of legislation relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and some of the protector's reports submitted to state governments.

See: [aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/remove-and-protect](http://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/remove-and-protect)