



AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

Family History Unit

Freecall: 1800 352 553

Fax: 02 6261 4287

Email: familyhistory@aiatsis.gov.au

Sources – other records and collections

Biographical indexes and dictionaries

An index is a detailed alphabetical guide to names, places or topics, with a reference to where the information can be found. Indexes don't contain actual information, though they might include a summary.

A **biographical index** is a list of people's names and the location (e.g. page numbers and library catalogue numbers) of the information about them.

There are a number of useful biographical indexes of Aboriginal people:

- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index](#) – AIATSIS
- [INFOKOORI Australian Indigenous Index](#) – State Library of New South Wales
- [Bringing Them Home Index](#) – National Archives of Australia
- [Indigenous indexes](#) – Queensland State Archives
- [Index to the Chief Protector of Aborigines files 1898–1908](#) – State Records Office of WA

Biographical dictionaries are alphabetically indexed lists of people containing information about their lives.

For example, the *Dictionaries of Western Australians* was a major project that includes four volumes about Aboriginal people. Names were taken from the records of the Colonial Secretary's Office, private journals, newspapers and published journals. For example, the names and details of Aboriginal people imprisoned on Rottnest Island are listed.

You can find other biographical dictionaries through a search in [Trove](#).

Census records

Aboriginal Australians have been counted in some censuses of the Australian population, but have been deliberately excluded from others. Section 127 of the *Constitution Act 1900* stated that 'Aboriginal natives shall not be counted', but exclusion also occurred in earlier censuses.

Government definitions of Aboriginality have also varied over time, meaning an Aboriginal person of mixed ancestry might have been counted in one census and excluded from another census.



Some census records therefore include information about Aboriginal people. In New South Wales, for example, the 1891 and 1901 Census collectors books list the names of householders and the number of Aboriginal people living in each household.

The State Library of Victoria has a guide on [early Australian census records](#), including a section on [censuses of Aboriginal Australians](#).

Local history collections in public libraries and local museums

Many local public libraries in suburbs and towns collect books, photographs, maps, letters and newspapers about their local area – a local history collection. Many towns also have small local museums. These collections can be useful to Aboriginal researchers because they might have records of local properties listing Aboriginal stock workers, local newspapers, family diaries and photographs.

Two websites that maintain lists of family history and historical societies are:

- CoraWeb – Genealogy, Family History and Historical Societies:
www.coraweb.com.au/categories/family-history-and-historical-societies
- Cape Banks Family History Society – Australian Family History & Historical Societies:
www.capebanks.org.au/australian-family-history-societies/

You can use **Australian Libraries Gateway – Find a Library** (www.nla.gov.au/apps/libraries) to locate libraries with family history and local history collections. Under location select your state and under library type select 'Local/Family history'. You can also browse using the map.

Land council records

Your local land council or other Aboriginal organisation (such as cultural and arts groups, training institutes, medical and legal services) might have their own resource collections. They might hold books, pamphlets and newsletters about local events and people, as well as tribal and contact history. Some Aboriginal communities have organised their own family history groups and work together recording oral histories and writing community histories.

Union, company and employment records

The Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University collects business and labour records from Australian companies, trade unions, industry bodies and professional organisations. Its collection includes records of trade unions and pastoral properties. See [Records about Aboriginal people](#) (PDF 119 KB) for more information.

