

Finding Your Mob

Researching Aboriginal family history at the
Victorian Archives Centre



The Koorie Reference Service was established within the Koorie Records Unit to offer culturally sensitive support and guidance to Aboriginal researchers, members of the Stolen Generations and their families who are looking for records relating to their past.

The Koorie Reference Service assists Aboriginal people to access the resources and Victorian archival collections held at Public Record Office Victoria and the National Archives of Australia.

The Victorian Archives Centre at North Melbourne features a large Reading Room to view original records and use resources to access the archival collection.

Important note about the Aboriginal records

The archival collections contain historical and government records that reflect social and individual attitudes of the time. They were created in the context of government policies and legislation that had a major impact on many Aboriginal families and communities in Victoria. They contain words, descriptions and information which may be considered insensitive or inappropriate today. They may contain images of people now deceased. This may cause sadness or distress, particularly for relatives and family members.

The records do not include information about all Aboriginal people who have lived in Victoria over time, and do not provide confirmation of Aboriginality.

Researching Aboriginal records

What records can I find about Aboriginal people in Victoria?

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The Aboriginal records held in the Victorian Archives Centre are in the collections of Public Record Office Victoria and the National Archives of Australia. They were created by government agencies and officials responsible for managing Aboriginal affairs in Victoria from the 1830s to the 1970s. This includes the Chief Protector of Aborigines, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, and the Aborigines Welfare Board.

These records contain a wide range of information about Aboriginal peoples and places and include:

- annual reports
- letters
- employment records
- minutes of meetings
- maps and plans
- education records
- medical and police reports
- registers about the issuing of provisions (such as clothing and rations)
- photographs
- notes on languages and cultural practices
- records of the movement of Aboriginal people across Victoria

Letters and petitions to government also show the resilience and determination of Aboriginal people as they dealt with difficult and often repressive administrations.

Aboriginal missions and reserves were also managed by government and there are records about the communities at Coranderrk, Framlingham, Lake Condah, Ebenezer (Lake Hindmarsh), Lake Tyers and Ramahyuck.

Using Aboriginal name indexes

Accessing the indexes and original records

Both Public Record Office Victoria and the National Archives have created name indexes of records of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, to improve access for Aboriginal people to records about themselves, their family and country.

If you or your family members are mentioned in Aboriginal affairs records then the **Koorie Index of Names** (KIN index for Public Record Office Victoria) and the **Bringing Them Home name index** (BTH index for the National Archives) may help you locate these records. KIN is an ongoing indexing project and not all records relating to Aboriginal people have been indexed as yet. Also, not all Aboriginal people who have lived in Victoria are mentioned in the records.

The indexes themselves don't contain personal information about people, but they can direct you to original records containing information about your ancestors. From these original records, you may be able to discover personal information such as where they were living, what life was like at the time and family and community networks.

To search Public Record Office Victoria's KIN index, visit the Victorian Archives Centre and discuss your research with one of our friendly staff members who will show you how to access the database.

Requests for searches of the National Archives' BTH index can also be made to a National Archives reference officer at the Victorian Archives Centre.

If you can't make it to the Victorian Archives Centre, you can contact our Koorie Reference Service to request searches of the indexes on your behalf, relating to family history research.

Visit prov.vic.gov.au/koorie-services to complete an online enquiry form.

Our staff can also help you to access copies of any records listed in the indexes that relate to your research.

Koorie Reference Service

A dedicated **Koorie Reference Officer** can provide assistance and support for Aboriginal researchers, including members and descendants of the Stolen Generations, wishing to do family history research. The Koorie Reference Officer can guide you through the archives, helping you to discover your story. We can carry out searches using the Aboriginal name indexes and help you to find and access records.

Where appropriate, we can check indexes of births, deaths and marriages, inquests, and will and probate records.

The Koorie Reference Officer can provide you with index search results, copies of original records found relating to your family, and advice on programs and organisations that may be able to assist you further in your research.

Need assistance?

Contact our Koorie Reference Service using the online enquiry form located at prov.vic.gov.au/koorie-services



Pupils at Lake Tyers School.
Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 14562/P4, Unit 6

Online tools for Aboriginal family history research

There is a wealth of research guides and resources available online that will help you to discover more about family history in the collection.

Public Record Office Victoria research guides

Explore Public Record Office Victoria's research topics and categories to discover the extraordinary range of records that are available. By using the information you have on family members, you may be able to find out more from the indexes of births, deaths and marriages, wills and probate records, and inquests. Digging a little deeper, you may be able to find names of people in legal and court proceedings, rate records, education records, and more.

prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection

National Archives of Australia research guides

You can also find records held in the National Archives collection relating to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal affairs across Australia. The National Archives also has service records that include personnel dossiers and case files from the Boer War, World War I and World War II.

www.naa.gov.au/collection

Koorie Services at Public Record Office Victoria

The Koorie Services section of the Public Record Office Victoria website has a number of resources to assist researchers to access Aboriginal records in the collection:

- Aboriginal Victorians family history: a step by step guide on how to use archives to find details about Aboriginal family history
- Aboriginal Victorians (1830s – 1970s): a guide to locating records about Victorian Aboriginal people
- Koorie Stories from the Archives: stories about Victorian Aboriginal families and communities utilising archival records.

prov.vic.gov.au/koorie-services

Free publications

walata tyamateetj: a guide to government records about Aboriginal people in Victoria

Public Record Office Victoria and National Archives of Australia, 2014.

This guide helps researchers to find and access the wealth of material about Aboriginal Victorians that can be found within the Public Record Office Victoria and National Archives collections. It has been designed to assist Aboriginal people find records about their family and country, regardless of which collection the records are held in.

You can pick up a free copy today at the Victorian Archives Centre, Ballarat Archives Centre and any of the organisations listed on page 10. Alternatively you can download an e-book copy online at

prov.vic.gov.au/walata-tyamateetj

Footprints: the journey of Lucy and Percy Pepper

National Archives of Australia and Public Record Office Victoria, 2012.

Footprints reveals the extraordinary story of the fight for family, war and survival when laws and government policies defined who was 'Aboriginal' and who was not in early twentieth century Victoria.

Told through correspondence between Percy and Lucy Pepper and government officials, the book shows how archival records can help Aboriginal people connect with their histories, trace the experiences of ancestors and learn about the times and places in which they lived.

Download your free e-book copy at prov.vic.gov.au/footprints-publication

CONTACT US

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National Archives of Australia
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Keep in touch: subscribe to the Koorie Records Unit newsletter

This booklet was published in August 2017 and is available online at
www.prov.vic.gov.au/finding-your-mob



**Public Record
Office Victoria**



Your story, our history