

## Suggestions for researching Aboriginal education and schools

by Dr Allison Cadzow for the Board of Studies NSW, 2008

There is no single method for researching Aboriginal educational history, but here are some ideas for starting.

### 1. Discussion

Talk with people who attended the school and find out what they know about the school. This could lead to oral histories, interviews with relevant people and perhaps photographs and other images.

For example, in the case of the [Gulargambone case study](#), discussion with a colleague whose family was involved with the Aboriginal school prompted my interest. She wanted to find out more about their involvement. The discussion alerted me to names and issues, which might be significant in the archival material.

### 2. Background reading

Jim Fletcher has completed extensively researched histories of Aboriginal education in NSW, called *Clean, Clad and Courteous: a History of Aboriginal Education in NSW* and an accompanying volume, *Documents in the History of Aboriginal Education in NSW*.

You can check the index of these histories to see if particular papers, documents and other references relevant to your school/organisation are mentioned. This work will also give some context on education history so you can 'place' your case study within a broader framework, and compare it with other schools.

Heather Goodall's *Invasion to Embassy* provides context on Indigenous politics, education and history in NSW. The index, map of segregation disputes (p199) and list of school files with material on segregation disputes (in the bibliography) are also very helpful.

Nigel Parbury's *Survival: a History of Aboriginal Life in NSW*, first published 1986, now in a 2005 revised edition, is an accessible account of education in NSW from 1788 into the 1990s.

Various articles in *Teaching Aboriginal Studies: a Resource of the Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies Project*, edited by Rhonda Craven are helpful too.

For more recent history of an Aboriginal organisation central to changes from the 1960s, see Shirley Berg and the Aboriginal Education Council (NSW): *Forty Years of Change 1963–2003: Aboriginal Education in NSW*.

Numerous autobiographies and biographies by Indigenous authors which discuss their experiences and activism in the area of Aboriginal education such as Evelyn Crawford's *Over My Tracks* (1993) Charles Moran's *Talk Softly, Listen Well: Profile of Bundjalung Elder*, or Minnie Quinlan's interview about Nulla Creek Reserve/Bellbrook are insightful and helpful too.

The works above and key changes and events in institutional Aboriginal education in NSW are mentioned in the [timeline](#).

Some other articles and case studies are listed in the [reference list](#) for the timeline.

### 3. School, university and local library catalogues and indexes

Check if there is already a history of your school or organisation which could provide some key dates and leads, biographies of Aboriginal people who attended schools in the area, or references to other histories.

You can search these listings by using keywords. For example, for the [Gulargambone case study](#) the keywords used were 'Gulargambone', 'Gulargambone Aboriginal history', 'education history', the school names, and family names associated with the schools.

### 4. State Library of NSW catalogue

The State Library and Mitchell collections hold many materials relating to NSW history. It contains references to books, images, films, original papers, maps and other materials.

Some of these resources might be available at your local library, or via interlibrary loan or copy schemes, but some images and manuscripts are not held anywhere else. There may be a cost involved in accessing copies, but searching the catalogue is free.

<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/using/search/>

The State Library has recently developed a guide for researchers investigating Indigenous Australian history

[http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/research\\_guides/indigenous/index.html](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/research_guides/indigenous/index.html)

Their website also contains the **InfoKoori Database**– which has references to articles about Indigenous people from *The Koori Mail*, missionary publications, some regional newspapers and the magazine *Dawn*. Some entries contain the full text of the article.

### 5. AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) catalogue

AIATSIS, which is located in Canberra, has extensive collections of materials about and for research on Indigenous Australians. Their catalogue contains references to articles, books, images, films manuscripts, sound recordings and other resources.

The AIATSIS catalogue is especially useful because it also contains references to manuscripts and materials held elsewhere, and you can search by language groups too. Some of their sound recordings and other materials are not available anywhere else.

<http://mura.aiatsis.gov.au/>

Ask AIATSIS about their ROMTIC (Return of Materials to Indigenous Communities Program) which allows for families and communities to obtain for free some copies (up to 20 items) of materials which feature their Indigenous community/families.

[http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/audiovisual\\_archives/audiovisual\\_archives\\_collection\\_management\\_policy\\_manual/access\\_policy#ROMTIC](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/audiovisual_archives/audiovisual_archives_collection_management_policy_manual/access_policy#ROMTIC)

The AIATSIS website also has online exhibitions – such as the *Dawn* and *New Dawn* magazines (which mention individuals, schools, reserves and communities) and also *To Remove and Protect* which contains the reports of the Aborigines Protection Board, which sometimes mention specific schools.

[http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/online\\_exhibitions](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/online_exhibitions)

Both the SLNSW catalogue and AIATSIS catalogue are large collections and might contain references to resources which aren't held elsewhere, eg manuscripts, photos.

## 6. DATABASES AND INDEXES

You can also search databases such as **APAIS**, **AIATSIS** to see if journal articles are available on the topic.

## 7. IMAGES

*Picture Australia* on the **National Library** website contains many picture collections from all over NSW and might have relevant images

<http://www.pictureaustralia.org/>

Also check AIATSIS, SLNSW, local studies centres and State Records for images.

## 8. LOCAL AND REGIONAL HISTORY CENTRES AND MUSEUMS

Local history centres might have oral histories, photos and other sources of information, eg files or indexes of local newspaper clippings.

## 9. STATE RECORDS

State Records has a useful *Archives in Brief* guide for *Aboriginal Schools in NSW* to [http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/archives\\_in\\_brief\\_44\\_1473.asp](http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/archives_in_brief_44_1473.asp) that lists the schools that records are held for. It also has some helpful brief background information on the establishment of Aboriginal schools.

You might find there are files about your school – which as the **Nulla Creek** and **Gulargambone** case studies show, can contain rich material like petitions, letters and attendance lists.

While you are at this site, you can search to see if photos of your school are held in the **Department of Education photographic collection**. Several of these images are reproduced in the work of Jim Fletcher, and also in Jan Burnswood and Jim Fletcher's *Sydney and the Bush: a Pictorial History of Education in New South Wales*.

If your school wasn't a segregated school, sometimes information about disputes can be found in public school files from the area. A mixture of both were used in the Gulargambone case study (ie Gulargambone Aboriginal School and Gulargambone School).

See the *Archives in Brief* guide to schools

[http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/archives\\_in\\_brief\\_26\\_1937.asp](http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/archives_in_brief_26_1937.asp) for further ideas and searches.

Many of these records are held in Sydney, but you could ask State Records staff if copy services are available, or if copies are held at some of their access points around the state.

## 10. ORAL HISTORY

You can seek people who went to or taught at the school for their reflections on their educational experiences. This is information and analysis that is unique and valuable and that you can't necessarily obtain from written records.

These people might be able to point you to yearbooks, photos, notes and other people to talk with.

A good guide to getting ready for interviewing, especially if you haven't interviewed people much before, is Penny Taylor's *Telling It Like It Is: a Guide to Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History*.

Another guide with useful advice about interview process and history research is Diane Smith and Boronia Halstead's *Lookin for Your Mob: a Guide to Tracing Aboriginal Family Trees*.

During this research you can also be busy reading, thinking, planning, having more discussions and preparing information for circulation, eg through a radio program, web pages, an article, exhibition or talk (with the permission of the people you have spoken with).

### Reference list

Berg, Shirley, (2003) *Forty Years of Change 1963-2003: Aboriginal Education in NSW*, Sydney Aboriginal Education Council (NSW) Inc.

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