Archives and Native Title Research – strategies to meet the demand for information

Paper presented by Ms Kathy Franklin at ATSILIRN Conference, Nov 2006

Please be aware: This presentation contains images of and records about Indigenous peoples who are now deceased.
Community and Personal Histories provides assistance to access records created by the following State Government agencies which were responsible for the administration of the ‘Aboriginal Protection’ acts in Queensland:

- Colonial Secretary’s Office, 1859-1898
- Southern Protector of Aboriginals, 1898-1904
- Northern Protector of Aboriginals, 1898-1904
- Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office, 1904-1939
- Director of Native Affairs Office, 1939-1966
- Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs, 1966-1975
- Department of Aboriginal and Islanders’ Advancement, 1975-1984
- Department of Community Services, 1984-1987
- Department of Community Services and Ethnic Affairs, 1987-1989
- Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, 1989-1995
Community and Personal Histories - clients and services

- The majority of requests come from Indigenous peoples seeking to trace their family history
- Many clients are referred to CPH by Link-Up, Stolen Generation Counsellors and Land Councils
- CPH also assists –
  - Indigenous students
  - Indigenous Communities undertaking local history research
  - Academics

- Access to restricted records is provided via an administrative release process which is like FOI without all the red tape
- Clients are also assisted to access records on open access and records created by other government and non-government agencies including religious organisations

Identification Cards were kept on all Indigenous peoples controlled under the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897 and subsequent protection acts.
Community and Personal Histories receives between 700 and 1000 requests per year.

An average request takes between 1-2 weeks to complete – this involves locating and copying all relevant records held in the Department, Queensland State Archives and other agencies.

All restricted records have to be checked for personal information about other individuals which the client does not have permission to access – this information is ‘masked’ in the photocopy which is issued to the client.

Complex requests may take 1-2 months to complete.

The number of records sent to a client usually depends on how long their family were controlled under the ‘Act’.

The number of files sent to clients can be anything from 1 five page document to more than 30 documents which can sometimes equate to more than 2000 pages.
Requests from Native Title Claimants

- In Queensland, the State Government requires native title claim groups to submit a connection report before the State will consider proceeding towards a consent determination.
- Connection reports must contain evidence and arguments which support the claim group’s application.
- Consultant Anthropologists seek assistance from CPH to gather archival evidence that will assist in the preparation of the connection report.
- Changes to the Commonwealth Native Title Act in 1998 resulted in an increased demand for archival records from native title applicants and Land Councils. This demand has only increased over time.
- Requests from Native Title applicants and/or Representative Bodies now account for around 25-35% of the requests lodged with CPH – about 200 requests per year.
- CPH has the equivalent of about 7 staff working on requests – 2.5 staff are dedicated to native title requests exclusively.
Representative Bodies and access to records

- Consultant Anthropologists working for Representative Bodies must gain permission from individuals and families before they can gain access to restricted records.
- Claimants receive copies of relevant records and an analysis of the information contained in the records – this is usually a summary of genealogical information.
- The analysis or summary of information can be up to 20 pages in length and is extensively footnoted.
- Representative Bodies receive a copy of the analysis but must seek additional permission from the claimants if they wish to access copies of the restricted records.
- Claimants are encouraged to read the records they have received before they make a decision to hand the records to the Anthropologist as many of the files contain personal sensitive information not relevant to the claim. Some claimants choose to withdraw their permission for the Anthropologists to see their records after they have received them.
- Most Anthropologists have been satisfied with a summary of the information located, however, this has changed over the last 18 months with more Anthropologists seeking copies of the records to use in the compilation of connection reports.
Native Title Request - issues

- Native title requests usually have to be completed within very short time frames – most Anthropologists ask for requests be completed within a couple of months (or sometimes within a week)
- For most claims the research can be complex and time consuming and virtually impossible to complete quickly
- Anthropologists and historians are rarely ever given enough time to examine archival collections thoroughly, thus creating pressure on CPH to do much of the archival ‘leg work’ for them
- Genealogical information is the information most frequently required - it is needed at the beginning of the claim process to establish which families will be party to a claim. Many claimants become very anxious about receiving their documentation prior to authorisation meetings
- Many claimants seek assistance directly from CPH before they decide to contact their Rep Body
Information needs of Claimants and Anthropologists

- Genealogical information – including birth, death and marriage certificates
- Assistance locating descendants of traditional owners not known to the Rep Body
- Records including photographs showing continuous connection to country
- Documentary evidence of continuing practice of law and custom
- Land tenure history
- Records relating to actions that impacted on traditional owners e.g. native police, removal policies, pastoral and mining activity
- Evidence showing how traditional owners responded to removal, farming, mining etc.
- Access to non-government records e.g. church records, private manuscript material and newspapers

Aboriginal people at Whitula, South-west Qld, c 1903. (photographed by Harold Meston)
Improving access to records – better communication

- CPH has developed over the last 10 years a close working relationship with consultant anthropologists and claimants
- Rep bodies are reminded that CPH needs plenty of time to complete requests; they are also encouraged to keep in touch and advise of upcoming authorisation meetings and direction hearings which may require research to be completed urgently
- Very urgent requests are usually dealt with by sending the summary first and the records are sent later
- Where possible CPH staff are given all requests for a particular claim group so that they build their knowledge on the history of the claim area and the traditional owners for that claim
- Anthropologists are encouraged to be specific about where the gaps are in their research so that CPH staff can concentrate on those areas in need of more research
- CPH helps Anthropologists not familiar with Queensland records access key primary and secondary sources
- CPH provides quick and free access to transcripts of Queensland births, deaths and marriage certificates
- Anthropologist are supplied with electronic copies of the indexes to the Colonial and Home Secretary’s Correspondence series
Improving access to records - Indexing, Indexing, Indexing

- Over the last 14 years, CPH with the assistance of volunteers has indexed thousands of government and non-government records.
- These indexes are the key to locating records quickly and to connecting evidence contained in one record to another.
- Over the last five years, indexes to the Queensland Colonial Secretary’s correspondence and Home Secretary’s series relating to Indigenous peoples have been completed; these indexes will be available on-line in 2007.
- Nearly 4000 transcripts of birth, death and marriage certificates have been obtained from the Registry of BDMs.
- Registry office staff include all annotations written on certificates which sometimes includes references to a person being of Indigenous descent. These annotations are not included on certificates issued to the general public.
<table>
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<th>Gvn Nm</th>
<th>Evt</th>
<th>Sps Snm/Father</th>
<th>Sps Gvn/Mother</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Mn</th>
<th>Yr</th>
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<td>Very Mary Me</td>
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Connecting the evidence

- In 1896 Meston noted in his report on Durundur that “the widespread Wacca and Cabbee dialects, and the Gooray dialect of Durundur, are spoken by the few men and women who are brushing and ringbarking their old domain”. Among them is … one woman (Warrany) a widow, she has a boy and girl Wangindie and Jandoo, at Deebing Creek where they are known as Robertson and Julia. (Report on the Aboriginal Reserve at Durundur from Archibald Meston. COL/140, 96/15515)

- It is likely that these two children were Julia and Robin/Robert McKensie who were recorded on the Deebing Creek school admission register. Julia went on to marry Frank Simpson. She died at Maryborough in 1917.

- A Robert McKenzie was discharged from Deebing Creek in 1905 aged about 17. Robert was also on the 1903 Deebing Creek list his language name was given as Wongerdy and he was from Woodford. Robert married Edith Hinch at Barambah in 1916. He stated on his marriage certificate that he was born at Kilcoy and his parents were George McKenzie and Annie. Robert died in the flu epidemic at Barambah in 1919.
Indexing Tools

- Once records are indexed the indexes then need to be made searchable.
- CPH has always relied on full-text retrieval software and is now using the latest version of ISYS.
- ISYS is capable of creating indexes held in a wide variety of formats and is simple and easy to use. It has the capability to search within a search and all searches can be collected together in Word or Notepad.
- ISYS allows sophisticated boolean searching and has a ‘sound wheel’ to assist the user to identify other alternate spelling’s of names and places.
- ISYS is also being used to index the last 6 years of request summary letters (around 3500 requests) to assist staff quickly locate research previously undertaken by CPH.
Lily /10/ teresa - ISYS Query

58740 Exemption... H:\OPS\Comm...\A bundles Exemption... 3 A bundles

64785.txt H:\OPS\Comm...\A bundles Removals ... 2 A bundles
Death1.txt H:\OPS\CommPers...\BDMs BDM - Dea... 2 BDMs
58646.txt H:\OPS\Comm...\A bundles A/58646 - ... 2 A bundles
Tindale Index.txt H:\OPS\CommPe...\Tindale TINDALE I... 2 Open Access
vol105 H:\OPS\CommPe...\Mackett QAN Volu... 2 Mackett
Yarrabah Baptist... H:\OPS\...\Church Records Yarrabah ... 2 Church Records

Yarrabah Baptisms 1891 - 1927
H:\OPS\CommPers\Heritage\Heritage ISYS\Closed Access\Church Records\Yarrabah Baptism register.bap

Baptised 3.4.1926
Christian Name Constance Eleanor (Teresa), adult
Father
Mother
Abode
Notes Grace's sister
Daughter of Lily (Emma Meta) above
Died September 1937
Sponsors Lucy, ...., Joe Fourniile

Alleged Date of Birth About 1917
Baptised 3.4.1926
Christian Name Maisie Maud (Maud), adult
Father
Mother
Abode
Notes Died 3.4.1926
Sponsors ..., ..., Maywee
Within 10 WORDS of...
Yarrabah

AND which ALSO contain...

OR which contain...

BUT do NOT contain...

Within a PARAGRAPH of...

In the same PARAGRAPH as...

Followed anywhere by...

IN the paragraph LABELLED...

molly /10/ Yarrabah
necessities of life so as to prevent them from roaming about and inducing 
them to settle down on those reserves laid out by the government. "It is 
certainly not only the aim of the mission to civilize the aborigines but 
also to teach them the word of god and to make them acquainted with the 
rules put down by the same".

COL/139  89/7756
Letter number 89/1789
Microfilm Z1604, Microfilm frame number 61.
Telegram from AH Zillman, the Police Magistrate in Herberton: "WB Kelly of 
Herberton reports trooper Hanson has gathered large mob of blacks from the 
scrub in starving condition asks govt supply them with some food please 
instruct me report in full by mail".

COL/139  89/7756
No letter number. This letter is a copy of the letter on microfilm frames 
66-68  Microfilm Z1604, Microfilm frame numbers 62-63.
Letter from WB Kelly on behalf of the settlers of the Upper Barron Valley 
to AH Zillman, the Police Magistrate in Herberton. Kelly advises that the 
Aborigines in the Atherton district are starving. He states that some of 
the Aborigines have been persuaded to come into town and are supplied with 
some rations from his store but they need government assistance to supply 
them with further rations. Constable Hanson "is confident that he is able 
to get all the blacks in if there was a little food given them by the 
government. After a short time the selectors would employ them they would 
be in a short time in a position to earn sufficient for themselves".

COL/139  89/2147
Letter number 89/2147
Microfilm Z1604, Microfilm frame numbers 64-65.
Report from AH Zillman, the Police Magistrate in Herberton to the Colonial 
Secretary. Reports on a trip to Atherton to supply the Aborigines with 
rations. Advises that Mr Kelly has supplied some rations and suggests 
that the Aborigines should be supplied further rations to induce them to 
come in. This course of action will "be a good policy" to stop "their
Digitisation

- In the last 10 years over 200,000 records consisting mainly of personal files and financial records of Indigenous peoples who were ‘under the act’ have been digitised and indexed.
- An Oracle Document Management System was built in-house to access these digitised records.
- Digitisation has greatly enhance the staff’s ability to quickly retrieve files and has ensured that the originals are no longer handled and continuously photocopied.
- Queensland State Archives is now assisting CPH by digitising many of the most heavily used records such as the Chief Protector of Aboriginals Inwards Correspondence registers (1907-1923).
- The original registers are extremely large and difficult to handle and could not be photocopied. Digitisation has allowed the registers to be indexed and clients can now have copies of the original entries.
Confirming report that Mrs. Joe White, née is living as wife with H. Williams, n.p. Prince Davcy's brain plate was found at Barambah on 4/4/1918.

Report on aboriginal matters at Cooktown during May.

Philip Jones has taken out the cutter "May" with a crew of five for beche-de-mer.

Necessary ladders over to-morrow. Arrange with Capt. Wobb, postpone appointment till 19/6/18.

Return of abors. in Alpha Diet for quarter ending 30/6/18.

Maggie, mother of Jack McAllister, is an abor.
The Native title process has resulted in many Indigenous people seeking out and learning how to research their family and community history using archival sources.

Making this history more easily accessible to the Community must continue to be the primary focus of organisations holding records relating to Indigenous peoples.

Looking at photographs from the Uniting Church Collection held at the John Oxley Library – Napranum, 1994