

OBITUARY

Suzanne (Sue) Newman, 17 October 1950 – 22 October 2012

Sue Newman, former archivist and Aboriginal Liaison at State Records New South Wales (SRNSW), passed away on 22 October 2012, following a long battle with cancer. Sue's death was a huge loss for SRNSW and for Indigenous people and communities throughout New South Wales (NSW).

Sue was a Dungatti woman – a descendant of the Roy family from the New England area of NSW (Walcha). Sue called Killcare home on the Central Coast and was an active member of the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Sue came to archives later in her life, contributing to State Records' services for Aboriginal communities in various capacities from 2003 until her passing in 2012. For Sue, the journey into archives was a deeply personal one – one that she devoted herself to passionately. Sue had experienced what it was like to enter the archives in order to do her own Aboriginal family history research and wanted to make sure that she supported others who did the same.

Sue originally started work with State Records as a volunteer in 2003. As a volunteer, Sue worked with a collection of over 1000 photographs, created by the former Aborigines Welfare Board between 1910 and 1966. These images are an important photographic record of the work of the Board in NSW and have significance for Aboriginal people in NSW. Sue was responsible for recording all the contextual information known about the images, in order to assist the community in discovering images relating to their families and communities. The database created links between the digitised images of the Board and other resources, such as the *DAWN* magazines, and images that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Sue was patient and thorough in her work, and she developed an extensive knowledge of this collection of photographs and their importance to communities across NSW.

In 2005, Sue was appointed Project Officer – Aboriginal Liaison and joined the team who were developing *In Living Memory: An Exhibition of Surviving Photographs from the Records of the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board, from 1919 to 1966 (ILM)*. Sue's volunteer work made a huge contribution to building a database to understand more about the images that would be showcased in the exhibition. Sue was a vital part of the *ILM* team, and she contributed to the consultation and negotiations with communities to determine access and display of the photographs. Sue had a number of family photographs in the collection, so she was aware of the importance of them for the wider Aboriginal community.

The *ILM* exhibition was launched in September 2006 at the Sydney Records Centre, The Rocks. Due to its popularity, the exhibition continued to be displayed until the close of the Centre in June 2012. A subsequent *ILM* NSW tour was developed to take the images out to communities. This version of the exhibition was launched at the Shoalhaven City Arts Centre in Nowra to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of

the nearby Bomaderry Children's Home. After 18 venues and two-and-a-half years, the official tour came to the end of its journey in October 2010. Sue contributed heavily to the success of the exhibition and tour. She travelled extensively throughout communities in NSW, setting up the tour in Aboriginal cultural and community centres and in regional art galleries, museums and libraries.

The *ILM* exhibition was part of a much wider role that Sue took on as Aboriginal Liaison at SRNSW in promoting access to State Records for Aboriginal communities. In this role, Sue worked extensively with other record-holding institutions, government and support agencies to assist clients to locate records. Sue developed strong working relationships with the Family Records Unit at Aboriginal Affairs NSW and Link Up NSW. In addition, Sue connected clients to many different archives held around Australia, including the Family History Unit at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the National Archives of Australia. Sue was responsible for assisting the organisation of many gatherings that brought these agencies together to work with the Aboriginal community. She regularly spoke to groups, both large and small, as part of public programs at SRNSW to introduce them to the State Records relating to Aboriginal people.

When the NSW Government established the NSW Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme (ATFRS), Sue gave much of her spare time in assisting with major indexing and documenting projects. She was a valuable part of the ATFRS and Public Access teams and was a great support person, who promoted ethical and sensitive engagement with the records, particularly in cases where staff were dealing with records that were confidential and sensitive in nature. Sue contributed to the drafting of the State Records NSW's *Protocols for Staff Working with Indigenous People* (2008)¹, which promoted respect and consultation with communities concerning records relating to them or the community. She always lent a helping hand in any project that she could or offered a cup of tea to clients or colleagues to make sure that they were comfortable and relaxed.

Sue talked at events held at national conferences of the archives profession and was an important member of the network of Indigenous archivists and librarians across Australia. Sue had been an executive member of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group (IISIG) and continued to be actively involved with the group until her passing. She was greatly respected by her colleagues and friends across Australia.

Sue commenced study in 2007 at Edith Cowan University to become an archivist, so she could use her knowledge of the records that she was working with to further help Aboriginal people make connections with lost families. In 2009, she won the Loris Williams scholarship, awarded by the ASA for an outstanding Indigenous archival student. Following the completion of her archives degree, Sue was proudly appointed the State Records' second Aboriginal Liaison Archivist in February 2011.

In the years that Sue was with State Records NSW, she was integral to all State Records' involvement with Indigenous communities. She was passionate about assisting Indigenous people to access records and re-establish links with families and communities. Sue provided help, advice and comfort to thousands of Aboriginal people who visited the *In Living Memory* exhibition, the reading rooms or who contacted State Records for information. Even after she needed more intensive treatment, Sue was keen to continue to work from home, answering enquiries and assisting the many people who still contacted her.

Sue touched many people with her caring nature. She was a wonderful and spirited woman. With a deep sense of compassion and empathy, she always made people feel valued and welcome. Sue was the much-loved wife of Bill, a loving mother to Matthew and Tracy, Robert and Lee-Anne and grandmother to Jack and Riley. She is sadly missed by her family, friends, colleagues and members of the Aboriginal community.

Endnotes

1. State Records NSW, 'Protocols for staff working with Indigenous people', 2008, available at <<http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/state-archives/resources-for/indigenous-people/files/Protocols%20for%20Staff%20Working%20with%20Indigenous%20People.pdf>>, accessed 26 February 2013.

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