

Identity and Access to Government Records: Empowering the Community

Loris Williams, Kirsten Thorpe and
Andrew Wilson

Loris Williams, former Archivist, Community and Personal Histories, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Queensland, conceived this paper for the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) Conference *Archives and Communities* in Wellington, New Zealand 2005.

This article was prepared by Kirsten Thorpe, Archivist – Aboriginal Liaison, State Records NSW and Andrew Wilson, Senior Project Officer State Records South Australia with the assistance of the members of the ASA Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group (IISIG).

Kirsten Thorpe is a descendant of the Worimi people of New South Wales (NSW) and has been working at State Records NSW as the Archivist – Aboriginal Liaison since March 1999. Kirsten has completed the Graduate Diploma (Archives and Records) through Edith Cowan University. Kirsten is the Current Convenor of the IISIG and a Professional Member of the ASA.

Andrew Wilson is of Wirangu and Kokatha descent via his maternal grandparents. Both of these groups are located in the far north of South Australia. Andrew has been employed at the State Records of South Australia since November 1989 and is now the Senior Aboriginal Project Officer.

This paper has been prepared by the ASA IISIG on behalf of Loris Williams who sadly passed away on 28 August 2005. With input from staff at Community and Personal Histories, where Loris was employed as an Archivist, and with the support of the Williams family, this paper is

based on concepts originally conceived by Loris for presentation at the ASA's 2005 *Archives and Communities* Conference. It is hoped that the paper is able to express the deep passion and sentiment Ms Williams felt for her work and the importance of records and history for Indigenous peoples.

Introduction

In an abstract prepared for presentation at the ASA's 2005 Conference, Ms Williams wrote:

Records created by government agencies, organisations such as churches and individuals such as station owners; hold the key to the personal identity of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today – providing them with a link to family, kin and to country. The knowledge of who we are and where we come from are vital components of any families' culture. Unfortunately for many Aboriginal Australians, and to a lesser extent, Torres Strait Islanders, the widespread practice of forced removals from family and country means that significant cultural knowledge has been taken away from us. Gaining access to records in collections has mitigated the effects of these terrible practices to a certain extent for some individuals.

The Community and Personal Histories Branch of the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is one of many Australian agencies actively working to facilitate access to records they hold in relation to Indigenous peoples. Many of these agencies are working closely with the various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to identify issues relating to access and these agencies suggest possible solutions where access is difficult or where records no longer exist (or perhaps never existed).¹

In keeping with the scope of the paper conceived by Ms Williams, this paper will discuss how access to government records can assist with establishing identity and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This will be done by looking at:

- Why government records are important for Indigenous people.
- How records can assist in establishing identity and links to family, kin and country.
- An overview of achievements of the Australian archival community on Indigenous records access over the past decade.
- Issues for Indigenous people with access to government records.
- Examples of archival projects empowering Indigenous communities.
- Honouring the important work of Ms Loris Williams.

Why government records are important for Indigenous people

In April 2005, Ms Williams presented a paper at the ASA's *Made, Kept and Used* Seminar to celebrate the year anniversary of the Australian Society of Archivists. In the paper titled, 'Access to Indigenous related records from a Community perspective', Ms Williams wrote: 'The establishment of identity is a crucial component of major political issues relating to Indigenous peoples since the early 1990s'. Ms Williams went on to write:

The Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody report stated that a large percentage of Indigenous people who died in custody had been affected by removal from families, which could also be read as a lack of identity. The Stolen Generation children when they were removed and brought up in a non-Indigenous environment would lose their identity. Many today are still endeavouring to find that identity. In a native title claim a claimant must be able to produce written evidence of their connection to a particular family and country. Where is the evidence for that connection? For the most part in the records. That is why access is so important.²

One of the key issues noted by Ms Williams is the impact that government has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia. Although there are many unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander communities across Australia, they no doubt have shared experiences as the result of the implementation of government policies and legislation specifically related to Aboriginal people.

The various Protection Boards or Chief Protectors Offices were set up across Australia to legalise and formalise policies that previously had been occurring in a much more ad hoc and decentralised manner. Each colonial (and later State) Government in Australia created their own laws to control their Indigenous populations. This so-called 'protection' legislation was introduced in Victoria in 1869, New South Wales in 1883, Queensland in 1897, Western Australia in 1905 and South Australia in 1911. The legislation forced Aboriginal people (and later the Torres Strait Islanders of Queensland) to live under restrictive Acts that sought foremost to limit the practice of culture and language and remove children from their families and communities from their traditional lands.

The Governments responsible for the implementation of these policies are the keepers of the evidence of these historical practices that have impacted on individuals and communities. It was not until the late 1960s that these policies formally ceased to operate – so Indigenous people of Australia have both a recent and long history of governmental control over their Indigenous population.

The reports of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and *Bringing Them Home* (the National Report into the removal of Aboriginal Children from their families) have outlined the significance of records for establishing identity for those affected by past government policies. These reports have handed down specific recommendations relating to access to records that both address the impact of government policies on Indigenous people in Australia and lobby for improvements to be made in the future.

Recommendation 53 from the 1991 National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reads:

That Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments provide access to all government archival records pertaining to the family and community histories of Aboriginal people so as to assist the process of enabling Aboriginal people to re-establish community and family links with those people from whom they were separated as a result of past policies of government. The Commission recognises that questions

of the rights to privacy and questions of confidentiality may arise and recommends that the principles and processes for access to such records should be negotiated between government and appropriate Aboriginal organisations, but such negotiations should proceed on the basis that as a general principle access to such documents should be permitted.³

The 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report made a number of recommendations concerning records including that:

government record agencies be funded as a matter of urgency by the relevant government to preserve and index records relating to Indigenous individuals, families and/or communities and records relating to all children, Indigenous or otherwise, removed from their families for any reason. (Recommendation 22a)⁴

The recommendations set down have formed a path of accountability where government, including government archival institutions, can engage with Indigenous communities to assist in the process of reclaiming histories, and ultimately in healing. This leads us to the important question: How can records assist in establishing identity and links to family, kin and country?

How records can assist in establishing identity?

The records created by government relating to Aboriginal people are generally written by public servants fulfilling their roles as officials on behalf of their respective Protection Boards or similar agencies. Indeed, clients accessing government archives are faced with the fact that they are accessing material that was never intended to be viewed by the subjects (or their descendants). The records are often bureaucratic and administrative in nature and reflect the attitudes of the organisation.

Clients are faced with the challenge of the need to access government archives to obtain vital facts about their past, however are at the same time exposing themselves to personal and sensitive information that could potentially cause further harm. Clients have to be supported through this process to ensure that their journey into archives is a safe one that does not cause any more personal damage to themselves or their families.

There is no doubt however, that the records can provide significant information to greatly assist a client's search for information.

Client groups

There are distinct Indigenous client groups who visit archives, and the ways in which the records can assist in establishing identity and links to family, kin and country differ with each (although there is undoubtedly a crossover between each group).

Stolen Generation clients

Stolen Generation clients are often acknowledged as being a first priority when providing assistance to access records.⁵ Here the records are vital, and can often be the only place that a person can locate information on their past.

The *Bringing Them Home* report provides two key quotes in relation to access to records and why this information is of such importance. In confidential submissions in Queensland and Victoria:

I wanted to find out my right age and where all my family came from and who I was related to.⁶

(Confidential submission 110, Queensland.)

Establishing identity is vital – some people are not even aware of their birth date, and find out after many years that they have been celebrating on a different day. The second quote reads:

That's why I wanted the files brought down, so I could actually read it and find out why I was taken away and why these three here [siblings] were taken by [our] auntie ... Why didn't she take the lot of us instead of leaving two there? ... I'd like to get the files there and see why.⁷

(Confidential evidence 161, Victoria.)

Making sense of your past requires an understanding of the struggles that your family may have been through and the difficult decisions that people must have had to face under the policies of the Boards or government departments.

To reiterate the sentiment expressed previously by Ms Williams: 'The knowledge of who we are and where we come from are vital components

of any families culture'. It is an essential component of a person's identity to know the history of where they are from – where they fit into their wider world. For Stolen Generation clients the information contained in the files can answer the vital questions: 'Who are my family', 'Do I have siblings', 'Where is my family from', 'Who are my mob'?

Other significant details held in records can include any former medical conditions or details of treatments as a child while ward of the State, information about work or being apprenticed as a domestic worker or a labourer, and school reports and histories. For many Indigenous people the only way of accessing these earlier details of childhood is by accessing government archives.

It should be acknowledged that although government records can provide vital information for Stolen Generation clients, often they cannot find answers that clients are seeking to have answered. Records then act as an important starting point on a journey back home. In talking about Stolen Generation research into government records, an Indigenous colleague reflected:

Rarely have I seen the records provide the answers people are asking. Records in this instance are more of a journey tool that enable people to gather specific information to help reach the end of their journey.⁸

General family and community research

There is a great deal of cultural renewal that occurs from Indigenous people accessing information held in archives. For some, one small piece of information can bring understanding about past struggles faced by families and communities.

Because of the impact of past government policies on Indigenous communities, archives can sometimes be the only place of recorded information about language and cultural practices. Although the information was originally recorded for a different purpose, it is now being re-utilised by communities for cultural renewal. In NSW, the Geographical Names Board has undertaken a dual naming of places. What will eventuate will be the recognition of Indigenous placenames alongside a town or suburb name. Government archives have been a significant source of information to assist the dual naming process, as

researchers locate or confirm the original Indigenous placenames from records such as those written by the Surveyor General's Department.

Indeed, government archives hold a wealth of information about culture, mixed between the various agencies, containing knowledge just waiting to be returned to their original owners: from reports about ceremonies and important leaders in communities; to records that document significant cultural spaces; to providing translations of language and dreaming stories. As a member of the Indigenous Issues SIG stated:

We have a rich culture of storytelling and passing down knowledge where possible, but where it is not, the records now take over as one of our only visions back into the past struggles and triumphs our people faced ... Through these records we are making sure that our stories, struggles and triumphs are forever captured and utilised by people today and [are preserved for] future generations.⁹

Around the country, government archives are engaging in different ways with community groups to promote their collections and provide assistance for researchers. This work is contributing and assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in establishing identity and links to family, kin and country. Information is being handed back to communities, and stories are being retold, a wonderful act of empowerment for a local community to be engaged in.

Native title claimants

The final key group that uses government records for establishing connections are native title claimants. Because of the tight restrictions in Australia in relation to recognition of Native Title, government archives assist oral histories in connecting people to place and family. This information is critical as evidence in court cases and claims for recognition of prior relationships to land.

Native title researchers often use the full scope of historical records, far beyond the administration of the Protection Boards or the records created by the Protectors, to establish traditional owners of an area. The records in this case, will always be a supplement to oral histories.

Access achievements over the past decade

A significant amount of work has been carried out in the past decade by the Australian archival community, recognising the importance of records to Indigenous people and assisting in facilitating access to these significant records.

A number of passionate archivists around Australia have been responsible for bringing Indigenous issues to the forefront in the profession. There are a small but growing number of Indigenous people working in archives, and even more that are now undertaking studies to become professionally trained.

The contribution of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals has led to some major change in the past decade, and some key achievements that have taken place on a national level are described below.

ASA Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

The Australian Society of Archivists in May 1996 issued a Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The statement outlines the role archives, and archivists in Australia, can play in assisting the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. An excerpt from the statement reads:

Notwithstanding the insensitive or inappropriate manner in which many archival records relating to Aboriginal Australians were created or the offensive nature of many of the representations of Aboriginal people in these records, the network of Australian archives nevertheless contains an unparalleled storehouse of recorded knowledge relating to such matters as Aboriginal customs, traditions, genealogies and the experience of European invasion and the imposition of foreign laws and administrative systems.

Much of this information which exists in written form amongst archival records has been lost to the oral tradition and memory of Aboriginal people or was deliberately kept from them. Archives have the opportunity and a responsibility to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people to make maximum use of archival holdings and services and to facilitate Aboriginal access to records of their own cultural heritage and historical experience. To assist this process archives and archivists need to design and implement service environments, systems, routines, finding aids and promotional material which do not discomfort or embarrass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander users, but which make appropriate access to records a culturally-sensitive, welcoming and relatively stress-free experience for Aboriginal Australians.¹⁰

The Policy Statement made by the ASA has indeed laid the foundation for the ASA's ongoing commitment to Indigenous issues in the profession. The ASA continues to support and encourage discussion with Indigenous people about archives and records, and actively works to redress any issues.

The ASA Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group

The ASA has an Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group, which was formed following the Annual Conference of the ASA in Alice Springs in 1996. The IISIG provides a network to discuss new initiatives, programs and common goals for records access. It is a most supportive site to discuss best practice for archives providing access to sensitive and personal records.

The IISIG produce a newsletter to disseminate information to members around Australia. More recently the SIG has been involved in the production of the Brochure 'Pathways to your future and your past: careers for Indigenous Peoples in archives and records'¹¹ which is being used as a tool to promote archives as a career to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

National Forum on Access to Indigenous Records

A National Forum on Access to Indigenous Records was held in Brisbane June 19 to 20, 2003. Government and non-government representatives involved with access to records relating to Indigenous peoples attended from around the country. The Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (Community and Personal Histories) and the Queensland State Library hosted the event.

The forum facilitated discussion about access policies in general, with a key outcome being a commitment to develop a national Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between government and non-government sectors to ensure a more consistent approach to access provision to sensitive information (as well as dealing with inter-state enquiries).

This was a significant meeting of nation-wide government record-holding agencies that has had a lasting impact. It is hoped that there will be more forums such as this.

Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities: Statement of Principle

Partially in response to the National Forum, and also in the scope of their commitments, the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA) produced a Statement of Principles, adopted in April 2004 on *Access to records of Indigenous Australians affected by past separation policies*. The Statement of Principles, signed by the network of Government archives around Australia reads in part:

CAARA institutions recognise the importance of and are committed to the appropriate referral of enquiries about records of Indigenous Australians who have been affected by past government separation policies.¹²

The Statement of Principles has provided a high-level commitment to Indigenous people, and acknowledges the importance of the material held in archives, and the important role of archives in assisting Indigenous people to reclaim their history.

Pathways Brochure

In 2004, with the support of the Records Management Association of Australasia, IISIG produced the brochure 'Pathways to your future and our past: careers for Indigenous Peoples in archives and records'. The Brochure was designed to encourage more Indigenous people to consider careers in archives and records.

The Brochure aims to encourage and facilitate:

- Contact and discussion amongst members of the ASA involved with or interested in issues relating to records relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and services provided to Indigenous peoples of Australia.

- The dissemination of information on developments, achievements and initiatives in the area of archival services to Indigenous Australians.
- Contact with allied professionals concerned with the delivery of archival services to Indigenous Australians.

The Brochure was launched in September 2004 at the ASA Conference in Canberra and has been widely distributed throughout Indigenous Education networks since its release. The next phase of this work by the SIG is to look into meaningful scholarships to increase the rates of Indigenous people both studying archival courses and entering the profession.

These are but just a few key developments that have taken place on a national level. Much more has been achieved at a local level where the exchange of information has taken place between record-holding agencies and those communities who their records document.

Issues for Indigenous communities with access to records

There are a number of recurring issues for Indigenous communities in relation to access to records. These relate to the need to increase access to collections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a way that best meets communities' needs. In other words, consulting with the community to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Another challenge for government archives is the essential need to provide access in an appropriate and sensitive way. Often the way that the records were created does not cater for ease of access. Support systems need to be in place for clients who visit an archive to access records, and counselling services should always be available as part of the process.

Another concern is cost associated with research, particularly for Indigenous people living in regional areas throughout Australia. In other words, how do we get the information out there with minimal cost, both personal and financial?

More Indigenous people need to be employed in government archives. Long-lasting careers need to be established where more than one person is employed to ensure a transfer of knowledge from one archivist to another.

It is essential that we locate all relevant records that hold important information for Indigenous peoples. If empowerment can come from access and communities gain strength from this, then custodial institutions have an obligation to ensure that communities are aware of the existence of records about themselves.

Gaps in the records – Indigenous history

In her original vision for this paper, Ms Williams wanted to discuss how important oral history projects are in supplementing the written official record by filling gaps in our history. This paper has explored the importance of government records for Indigenous people and the significance of information held in archives in establishing identity and connecting Indigenous people to family, kin and country.

What happens when these vital records are lost? What affect does that have on individuals and a community as a whole? And what responsibility does government have, as the keepers of evidence of government policy, in addressing these gaps? Should oral history projects be seen as a priority for government archives where there are gaps evident in the records?

The *Bringing Them Home* report noted with concern the high rate of destruction of records relating to the removal of children around Australia.¹³ The report highlighted examples from across the country where records were culled or where unexplained gaps have appeared in the recordkeeping. These gaps were in part due to the absence of legislated Archives Acts, which are now present across each State and Federal jurisdiction. The effects on a researcher faced with these gaps are often extremely detrimental; they are faced with a longing and searching for records that may never appear. The allusive talks about records being held in garages and in private hands may or may not be urban myths, however the reality for that client at that present time is that they are left with no official avenue to search their past. What are the obligations of government in these situations?

To highlight two examples, this article draws from work Ms Williams was carrying out at the Centre for Community and Personal Histories leading up to her passing.

Archival projects empowering Indigenous communities

The importance of oral evidence

Ms Williams spoke of the importance of oral evidence at the 2005, *Made, Kept and Used Seminar*. The key focus was on lack of access to knowledge not recorded.

As more and more Indigenous peoples seek to access records in their quest to make connection to kin and country, an issue that has been emerging is the communities' need to access information that has not been captured or is no longer available. I am certainly not advocating this idea as being new and fresh as I know oral histories have been undertaken as a means of capturing knowledge for many years ...

However, a huge amount of unrecorded knowledge exists in the Indigenous communities that relates not only to family histories but general history about Indigenous peoples.¹⁴

Ms Williams' research into Indigenous voting rights in Queensland certainly illustrated this gap in recorded information in government records.

Research into Indigenous voting rights in Queensland

One of the last projects that Ms Williams was involved in was research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voting rights in Queensland. This was in response to celebrations held in Queensland 2004 to celebrate one hundred years of white womens' right to vote.

Queensland holds the dubious honour of being the last of the Australian states to grant all of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents the right to vote in State elections. However, research into State Government files revealed that significant numbers of Indigenous men and women were on the State Electoral rolls until 1930 after which time they were deliberately disenfranchised when the States' Electoral Act was amended. Even the fact of an exemption from the Queensland 'Protection' Acts did not give Indigenous Queenslanders an automatic right to vote as the Electoral Act provided that those persons deemed to have 'a preponderance of aboriginal blood' were automatically disqualified from voting. It was not until 1965 that the Queensland

Cabinet agreed to amend the State Electoral Act, thereby granting all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in Queensland the right to enrol and vote in their State elections.

But what was the 'real' story? Through Ms Williams' research it was becoming very clear that government files could only tell part of the story. To quote Ms Williams:

Government files are able to detail policies at the various times relating to the right to vote for Indigenous peoples but to gain the full picture an oral history project needs to be undertaken to gain knowledge of Indigenous people's personal experiences.¹⁵

In the process of researching this history Ms Williams had also begun talking to Elders as well as asking friends and older members of her own family to recall their experiences in relation to the right to vote. These discussions revealed a complex and multi-layered history: some Aboriginal women in Queensland remember being told by police that they had to vote because they were exempted from the 'Protection Act', while others in the same position were told the opposite. Others recall that they were allowed to enrol to vote, but they deliberately refused as an act of defiance or resistance.

Ms Williams' mother was one such woman who refused to vote. Ms Williams' mother is also famously remembered for tearing up her exemption ticket immediately after receiving it from the local Protector. These are the stories that are never officially documented. For Ms Williams: 'oral histories need to be undertaken to capture this knowledge as a matter of urgency, before too many more of our people holding the knowledge pass on. Whenever possible it needs to be made a priority'.¹⁶

In April 2006 Loris presented a paper at a University of Queensland seminar on Queensland women's voting rights. Brisbane-based Aboriginal artist Judy Watson also attended the seminar and she was so inspired by Loris' lecture that she 'felt compelled' to produce an artist's book consisting of sixteen etchings entitled 'a preponderance of aboriginal blood'. By sad coincidence the exhibition opening featuring Judy Watson's work was launched on the day that Loris was laid to rest. Artist Judy Watson has dedicated this series of works to the memory of Loris Williams.

New South Wales Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme

In March 2004, the then NSW Premier Bob Carr formally apologised to Aboriginal people in NSW following the much publicised debate on stolen wages and the Trust Funds administered by the NSW Aborigines Protection and Welfare Board. In his apology he assured the Aboriginal community that if government could establish that any individual is owed money that they would have it returned. The NSW Government established a three-person independent panel to consult with communities and recommended how the payment scheme would work to pay back unclaimed monies.

The final report handed down by the panel had great focus on records and in particular worked through challenges where gaps existed in the records. The panel saw this as important, firstly, in relation to the lack of evidence specific to the funds, and secondly for our broader understanding of history. A significant recommendation of the panel was that the scheme be evidence-based, which means identifying all records relevant to a claim from the former Board's records, processing claims, and where the records have not survived, the panel recommended that oral evidence be sought in support of a claim. The panel reported:

The scheme will investigate unclaimed monies that were held in Trust for Aboriginal people from apprentice wages, child endowment, pensions and lump sum payments administered by the Board.¹⁷

One other positive outcome of the NSW Aboriginal Trust Fund Scheme's operation is a thorough re-indexing of Aborigines Protection and Welfare Board files. The NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs (the agency responsible for administering access to the Board's records) has recently employed four indexing staff to work full-time for two years extracting names from the records and entering them into a database. This will provide long-term benefits to the Aboriginal community in NSW, both in terms of assisting greater access and ensuring greater privacy in the records, as they will be indexed to page level.

Acknowledging similar work throughout Australia

Of course, the authors would like to acknowledge that there are many significant projects occurring around Australia with Indigenous people being given the opportunity to add to the archival record. In exhibitions,

websites and programs, government is responding and Indigenous people's voices are being brought into the archives to complement the written record.

Honouring the work of Ms Williams

In conclusion, this paper has been dedicated to the memory of Loris Elaine Williams, Queensland's first qualified Indigenous Archivist and Australia's second. Ms Williams had strong family connections to the Mulinjali Aboriginal group of Beaudesert (south of Brisbane) through her father Cyril Williams, and the Birra Gubba people of North Queensland through her mother Agnes Williams (nee Bell). She grew up in suburban Brisbane, the second eldest in a close-knit family of three sisters and three brothers.

Ms Williams started her working life at the age of sixteen firstly as a machinist, then as a telephone operator for Telstra. After working for Telstra for over twenty-five years she was made redundant, so, at the age of forty-two, she decided to start studying towards a Bachelor of Education at the University of Technology, Sydney, where she majored in Aboriginal Studies. In 1994 she began a new career. Her first position was with the State Library of Queensland where she worked in the Indigenous Resource Unit. Here she was responsible for providing assistance to researchers accessing the Library's Indigenous resources. She was also an early member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN). She became the President in 2000, and also organised the ATSILIRN annual conference in Brisbane in 1999. In 1998 she started working for Community and Personal Histories helping Indigenous people to gain access to government records. She was first employed as a researcher, later taking up the position of the Community and Personal Histories Archivist.

Ms Williams was a passionate advocate of Indigenous people's right to know, even though she knew from personal experience that the process of uncovering the past could be very painful. Her convictions led her to seek further training in managing archival collections. In 1999 Loris started studying part-time towards a graduate diploma in archives and records at the Edith Cowan University. She consistently received distinctions and high distinctions for her coursework.

Even before her graduation Ms Williams had become very active in her new profession (although, to be honest, she didn't really have much of a choice). She was a current serving member of both the Indigenous Advisory Committees of the Queensland Museum and the State Library of Queensland. She was also the current convenor of the Indigenous Special Interest Group of the Australian Society of Archivists. As convenor of this group, she was instrumental in producing and circulating a promotional brochure aimed at introducing Indigenous Australians to careers in archives and records.

Ms Williams was also a gracious and accomplished public speaker. The last time she addressed a large public gathering was in April 2005 in Canberra when she presented a paper entitled 'Access to Indigenous Related Records from a Community Perspective' at the Australian Society of Archivists' thirtieth anniversary celebrations. She used this opportunity to reflect on the short history of Indigenous people's access to records and the potential of the evidence in the records to re-unite Indigenous peoples to family and country. She also emphasised the centrality of oral histories in this process, taking as her inspiration the words of Dr Eric Ketelaar who wrote that: 'a country does not become fully democratic until each of its inhabitants has the possibility of knowing in an objective manner all the elements of their history'.

Loris Williams has left an indelible imprint on this important area of accessing community and personal histories which will be of lasting benefit to Indigenous communities in the years to come. She will be sadly missed by all of us who knew her.¹⁸

Selected Web resources relating to Indigenous archival issues in Australia

Australian Society of Archivists <www.archivists.org.au> Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group page <<http://www.archivists.org.au/structure.html#indig>> provides constitution, newsletter and text and background for the brochure *Pathways to your future and our past: careers for Indigenous peoples in archives and records*. Council's Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1996 is at <<http://www.archivists.org.au/pubs/positionpapers/atsi.html>>.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN) <<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~atsilirn/>>.

Council of Federal, State and Territory Archives (COFSTA) *Statement of Principle: Access to records of Indigenous Australians affected by past separation policies*, 2004. <<http://www.cofsta.org.au/Policy/policy14.htm>>.

Cultural Ministers' Council Archives Working Group *Records of National Cultural Significance: Indigenous Australians*, 1997, includes details of records in more than fifty-five institutions.

<http://www.dcita.gov.au/arts/councils/cultural_ministers_council/media_releases_and_publications>.

National Council of Churches in Australia Stolen Generations page provides access to *A Piece of the Story: National Directory of Records of Catholic Organisations Caring for Children Separated from Families*, 1999.

<http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec/issues/stolen_generations>.

National Archives of Australia <www.naa.gov.au> Indigenous Records page at the following address <http://www.naa.gov.au/the_collection/indigenous_records.html#guides> includes information about the *Bringing Them Home* indexing project and Memoranda of Understanding with Indigenous communities. A guide to *Australian Indigenous Serviceman: World War I* is planned for 2006. The Uncommon Lives Website <<http://uncommonlives.naa.gov.au/>> tells the story of Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda the first Aboriginal Australian to have case heard in the High Court, using the records of Australian governments and the account of descendants.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies <www.aiatsis.gov.au>

This library page provides access to the catalogue (Mura), the 'Family History' page and information about the conference *Deadly Directions: current and emerging trends in Library Archives and Information Services for Indigenous knowledge* held August 2005.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services 2000 <<http://www.cdu.edu.au/library/protocol.html>>.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission *Bringing them Home: report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, 1997. Section 16 Family and Personal Records can be found at: <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/stolen37.html>>.

Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Records Office <<http://www.territoryrecords.act.gov.au>> has an Advisory Council which must include one person to represent entities interested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage <<http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2002-18/current/pdf/2002-18.pdf>> (Part 5, division 15.1 section 44). The ACT will make records publicly available from 1 July 2007. Access for Indigenous people is covered under Equity in their Access Guideline 2003 <<http://www.territoryrecords.act.gov.au/guidelineno4.pdf>>.

State Records New South Wales (NSW)

<<http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/staterecords/>>

The State Archives sub-site has a page for Indigenous people at <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/for_indigenous_people_1471.asp> with the full text of *A Guide to NSW State Archives relating to Aboriginal People*.

Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme (NSW) <<http://www.atfrs.nsw.gov.au/>> reimburses Aboriginal people owed money from NSW trust funds. Records are used to verify claims.

Department of Community Services (NSW) provides the full text of *Connecting Kin – A Guide to Records* - A guide to help people separated from their families search for their records at <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/documents/connectkin_guide.pdf>.

Northern Territory Archives Service

<http://www.nt.gov.au/dcis/nta/site_directory.htm>

‘Guides to Archives Collection’ includes brief descriptions of personal, corporate and government collections ‘Research Services’ provides Protocols for Aboriginal Access and application forms.

Queensland State Archives <www.archives.qld.gov.au>. Resources Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People are available at <<http://www.archives.qld.gov.au/research/atsi.asp>>.

Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP) <<http://www.indigenous.qld.gov.au/>> provides information about Community and Personal Histories Section which traces family histories and the Work and Savings Histories program which compensates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose lives were affected

by past government policies which resulted in controls over their wages and savings, from the DATSIP Programs link.

Department of Communities maintains *Missing pieces: Information to assist former residents of children's institutions to access records*, last updated 2002 and includes Indigenous institutions <<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childprotection/publications/documents/pdf/missingpieces.pdf>>.

State Records South Australia <<http://www.archives.sa.gov.au/>>. The Aboriginal Services page <<http://www.archives.sa.gov.au/aboriginal/index.html>> includes sample records to view and a links page. The Aboriginal Access Team can consult a name index which currently contains 78 000 names. Hardcopy publications are available for purchase including: *Aboriginal Resource Kit* (for schools) and *Distant voices – Using the Archives of State Records to un-lock our Indigenous past* (video).

SA Link-up and Nunkuwarrin Yunti have produced *Finding Your Own Way: A guide to records of children's homes in South Australia*, 2005 <http://www.salinkup.com.au/content.php?page_id=4>.

Archives Office of Tasmania <<http://www.archives.tas.gov.au/default.asp>> 'Brief Guides' numbers 16 to 18 cover Aboriginal issues including documenting Tasmanian Aboriginal descent.

Public Record Office Victoria <<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/>>. Research Pathway - Koorie People and Places <<http://www.access.prov.vic.gov.au/public/pathways/pathway3/pathway3.jsp>> is accessible from the Quick Link: 'Services to the Public'. It provides access to the full-text of *Finding Your Story: a resource manual to the records of the Stolen Generation*. There are also links to the Koorie Heritage Trust's Family History page at <http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com/oral_history/koorie_family_history>.

State Records Western Australia (WA) <<http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/index.html>>. The Aboriginal Records Page <<http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/collection/aboriginalrecords.html#indexes>> is available from Family History - Services to the Community. *An Index to the Chief Protector of Aborigines Files 1898-1908* <<http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/community/aboriginalhistory-index.html>> has online indexes.

Department for Community Development WA <<http://www.community.wa.gov.au/>> developed *Looking West – A Guide to*

Aboriginal Records in Western Australia <<http://www.lookingwest.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au/>>.

Endnotes

1 Loris Williams, Abstract submitted to the Australian Society of Archivists to present a paper at the 2005 Archives and Communities Conference in Wellington, New Zealand.

2 Loris Williams, 'Access to Indigenous related records from a Community Perspective', at the Australian Society of Archivists' *Made, Kept and Used Seminar*, 2005.

3 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody *Final Report*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991.

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Recommendation 53 <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/rciadic/national/vol2/36.html>>.

4 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, *Bringing Them Home - The Report*, 'Access to Personal and Family Records', at <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/stolen37.html>>.

5 The Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities have developed a Policy Statement, No 14 'Statement of Principles: Access to records of Indigenous Australians affected by past separation policies', Adopted 1 April 2004 <<http://www.caara.org.au/Policy/policy14.htm>>.

6 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, *Bringing Them Home - The Report*, 'Access to Personal and Family Records', at <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/stolen37.html>>.

7 *ibid*.

8 Interview by Kirsten Thorpe with Simon Flagg, Joint NAA/PROV Koorie Reference Officer. June 2005.

9 *ibid*.

10 Australian Society of Archivists, *Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, at <<http://www.archivists.org.au/pubs/positionpapers/atsi.html>>.

11 Australian Society of Archivists, *Pathways to your future and our past: careers for Indigenous Peoples in archives and records*, at <<http://www.archivists.org.au/pubs/brochures.html>>.

12 The Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities have developed a Policy Statement, No 14: *Statement of Principles: Access to records*

of Indigenous Australians affected by past separation policies, Adopted 1 April 2004
<<http://www.caara.org.au/Policy/policy14.htm>>.

13 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997 *Bringing Them Home – The Report, ‘Access to Personal and Family Records’*, at <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/stolen37.html>>.

14 *ibid.*

15 *ibid.*

16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.*

18 Extract from obituary written by Margaret Reid , *Courier Mail* on Tuesday September 20 2005.