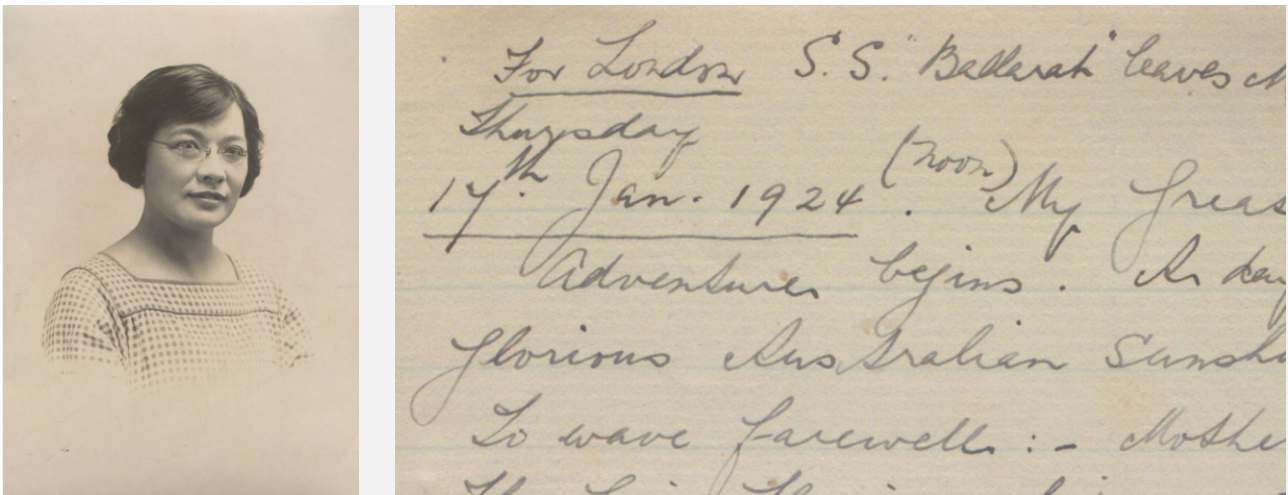


The National Library of Australia holds one of the richest collections of women's history in this country: books, journals, diaries, letters, photographs, watercolours, oral histories, objects, and more. Many Australians have no idea what's there. And much of what's in it has never been seen by the general public.

Rose Quong



Portrait of Rose Quong, c.1920 and *Rose Quong's Diary*, 1924, in Papers of Rose Quong (Manuscripts), National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn3334024

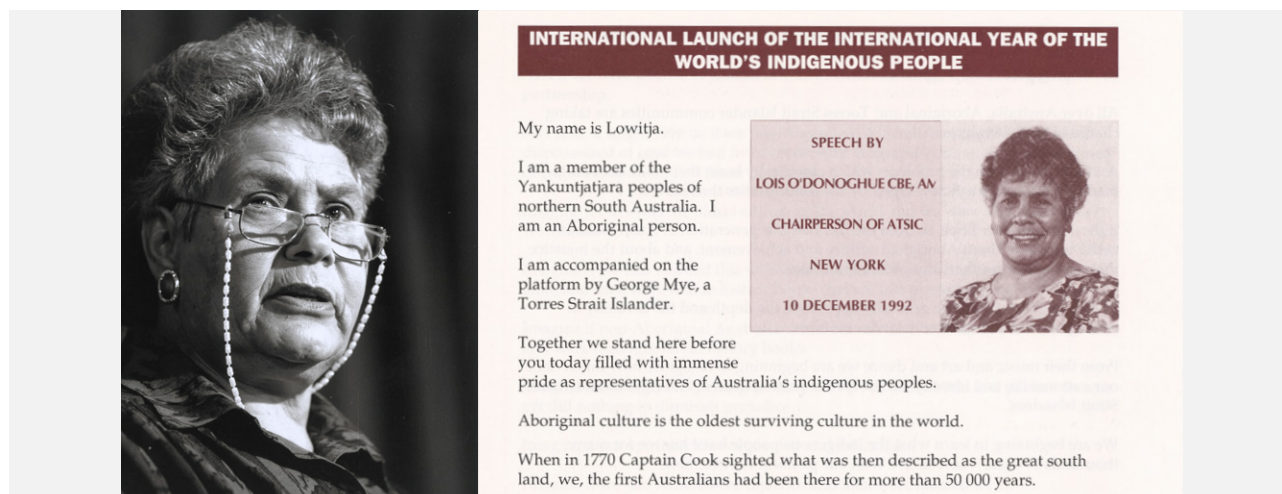
Significance

On Thursday 17 January 1924 at noon, Australian-born actor of Chinese heritage, Rose Quong (Rusi Guang) set off for England to study acting. She was 40. There, she performed with Dame Ellen Terry and a young Sir Laurence Olivier. Later, she found she became typecast in the roles she was offered. The Library recently digitised her papers. Rose's diary covers her sea voyage and early months in London. It starts as she set off from Melbourne on the S.S. *Ballarat*: 'My Great Adventure begins. A day of glorious Australian sunshine. To wave farewell:--Mother, Lali, Flo, Eric, Florrie & kiddies...'

Curator's comments

While Rose should always have been considered historically significant, there is no denying that her story is not a typical one for her time. I chose it because I was captured by her verve, her get-up-and-go. Even though she wrote a hundred years ago, I'm sure we can all relate to, particularly in Australia, the urge to see the world and make our life happen.

Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue



Loui Seselja (b.1948), *Portrait of Lowitja O'Donoghue addressing the National Press Club, Canberra*, 1992, photograph, Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn2132640

'Speech by Lois O'Donoghue CBE, AM Chairperson of ATSIC, New York, 10 December 1992, International Launch of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People' in Papers of Lowitja O'Donoghue (Manuscripts), National Library of Australia. [View the speech on Trove.](#)

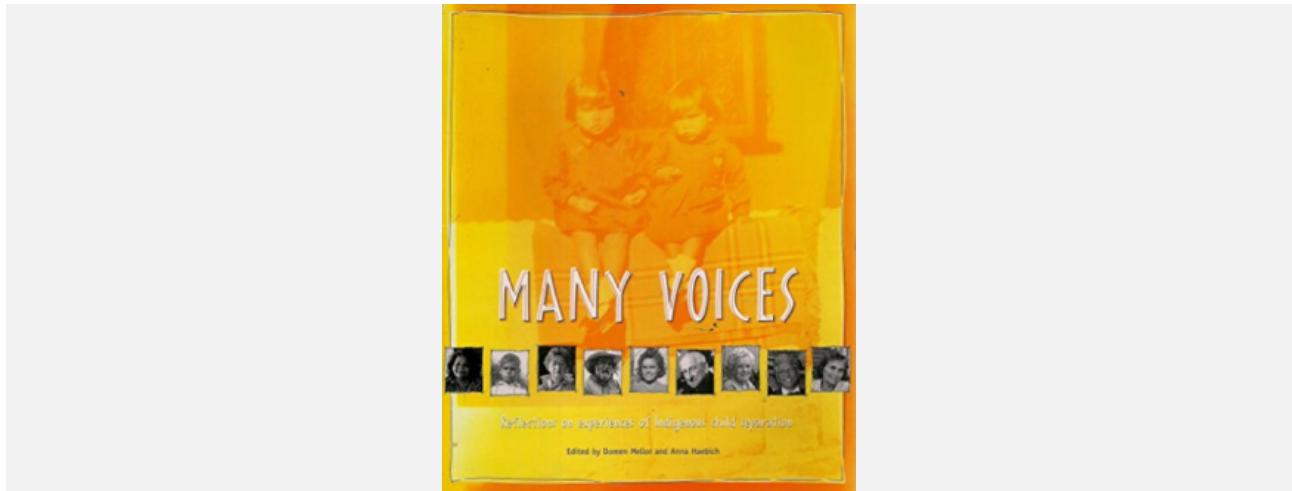
Significance

'We do not wish to conquer or oppress. Nor indeed do we wish to retaliate for two centuries of injustice. Rather we seek to create a new partnership based upon understanding, cooperation and goodwill. The past cannot be changed; our future is in our hands. We will empower ourselves.' Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG delivered these words in a speech at the International Launch of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People in New York in December 1992.

Curator's comments

Dr O'Donoghue was a significant leader whose untiring work should be better known. The quote in the significance statement is from her speech at the launch of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People in New York in 1992. They are powerful words, part of a speech which is an important part of the Australian and international record. Yet it is Prime Minister Paul Keating's words at the National Launch in Redfern which have resonated through history. The Redfern speech, as it is known, was an historically significant moment in Australian history, but it is only half the story. Dr O'Donoghue's speech – and her work and leadership across decades – should be as prominent in the collective memory. The digitised speeches in the Papers of Lowitja O'Donoghue offer a chance for people to explore the thoughts of this significant leader. Dive in and you will find many quotes which still resonate today.

Judith Stubbs



Doreen Mellor and Anna Haebich, eds, *Many Voices: Reflections on experiences of Indigenous child separation*, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002, [nla.cat-vn683484](#)

Judith Stubbs interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens for the Bringing them home oral history project, 2000, Oral History and Folklore Collection, National Library of Australia, [nla.cat-vn649232](#)

[Listen to an excerpt of the interview.](#)

Significance

Our [Bringing Them Home oral history project](#) delivered a collection of interviews with individuals involved with or affected by the Australian Government's child removal policies and practices. Between 1998 and 2002, people from all over Australia told us their stories as part of this project. Forty-one interviewers recorded 340 interviews with families and children who had experienced separation, as well as with those who cared for them, worked in institutions, and were involved with administration, policy and implementation in a professional capacity.

Curator's comments

This quote speaks to the lack of control that Aboriginal people under the control of the Aboriginal Welfare Board had over their own financial affairs. This took place in the late 1950s when Aboriginal people were denied free access to their own earnings – what we now refer to as Stolen Wages. My Mum was eventually awarded compensation for her Stolen Wages, including those accrued from her time working as a domestic on pastoral stations from the age of 12.

(Rebecca Bateman, daughter of Judith Stubbs)

Eirene Mort



Eirene Mort and Nora Kate Weston, photograph, in Papers of Eirene Mort (Manuscripts), National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn3641936

Significance

Australian artist Eirene Mort (1879–1977) studied in London when young and returned home bringing the English Arts and Crafts movement to her work in Australia. Throughout her life, she worked in a range of media, in design, graphic and applied arts, and she taught. She was one of the organisers of the Australian Exhibition of Women's Work in 1907, a national exhibition held over 39 days in Melbourne. Library holds papers relating to her life and work. She lived and worked collaboratively with artist Nora Kate Weston for decades, and recent work has revisited that relationship. The Library recently published Sylvia Martin's book about the couple. In this book, Martin focuses on this photograph—why does it have an axe, a plane (wood) and why is a theodolite tripod there as an easel?

Curator's comments

The relationship of Eirene Mort and Nora Kate Weston was, to their families, one of companionship over decades. In recent years this relationship has been revisited with a queer lens, exploring their partnership in life and artistic practice in a contemporary context. Photographs such as this have been explored for evidence as to the nature of their relationship.

Judi Summers from Knitting Nannas



Olya Willis, *Judi Summers*, 2024, photograph, National Library of Australia

Judi Summers interviewed by Rob Willis and Olya Willis for the **Voices of the bush oral history project**, 2024, Oral History and Folklore Collection, National Library of Australia, [nla.cat.vn-10035390](#)

[Listen to an excerpt of the interview.](#)

Significance

Judi Summers is part of Knitting Nannas, who work on 'Saving the land, air and water for the kiddies'. The Knitting Nannas are activists. This oral history was commissioned as it met two of the Library's collecting priorities – it documents the relationship Australians have with their environment and it conveys stories and experiences of rural, regional and remote communities. Judi Summers is a prominent Australian environmental activist and a central leader within the Knitting Nannas Against Gas (KNAG), a movement she helped grow from its origins in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales. Based near Lismore, she has served as a key "Spokesnanna," transitioning from local grassroots organising to international advocacy after training with Al Gore's Climate Reality Project. Her work focuses on protecting land, water, and air for future generations by opposing unconventional gas mining and coal exploration through the unique medium of "craftivism."

By "knagging" (nagging) politicians and leading public "knit-ins," she has successfully used the grandmotherly persona to keep environmental issues in the media spotlight and hold government officials accountable for climate policy.

Curator's comments

We selected Judi Summers because oral history is an important way to capture the voices and experiences of regional and rural Australia—stories that are often overlooked and less likely to appear in the written record. Oral history preserves the perspectives of everyday Australians and serves as a valuable tool for documenting the work of grassroots organisations, whose contributions may not be recorded elsewhere.

Margaret Tucker



Margaret Tucker MBE (1904–1996), *If Everyone Cared Enough: Her Voice Reclaimed*, Canberra, ACT: National Library of Australia Publishing, 2024, nla.cat-vn10034949

Margaret Tucker (1904–1996), *If everyone cared*, 1970s, manuscript, Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn326710

Significance

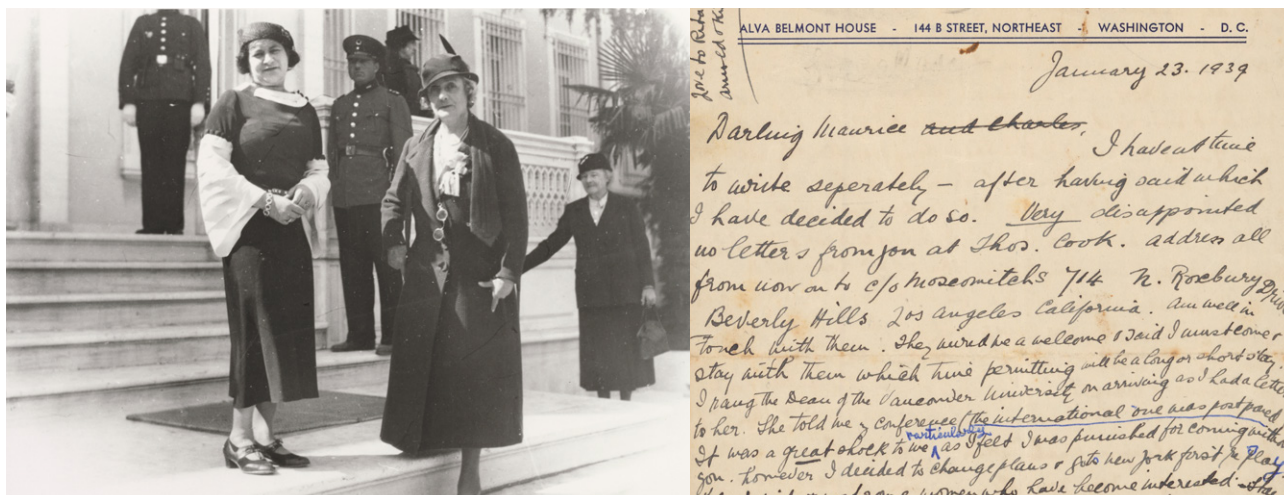
Significance: Aboriginal activist Margaret Tucker MBE published her autobiography in 1977, *If Everyone Cared*. But her book was heavily edited, obscuring her voice and message. In 2024, the Library, which holds her original manuscript, published what she originally intended:

If Everyone Cared Enough.

Curator's comments

The republishing of this title in 2024, without the significant alterations that were made to the content when it was first published, highlight the strength and power of Margaret Tucker's own words as a significant Aboriginal activist and one of the first Aboriginal women to publish for mainstream audiences. Her words are now her own, not changed to cater to the understanding of a non-Indigenous audience.

Ruby Rich



Bessie Rischbieth and Ruby Rich attending the 12th Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance at the Palace of the Sultans, Istanbul, Turkey, 1935, photograph, Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn7761300

Letter from Ruby Rich to Maurice [Rich?], 23 January 1939, ink, in Papers of Ruby Rich (Manuscripts), National Library of Australia, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3516469933

Significance

Ruby Rich was born in Walgett, N.S.W., grew up in Sydney and was a concert pianist in Sydney and London. Joined Feminist Club in Sydney in 1923 and in next 50 years was member and office-holder in numerous feminist, family planning, peace, international and Jewish organisations. Like Jessie Street, she also worked internationally. Her papers have been digitised.

Curator's comments

From the late 19th century, through the First and Second World Wars, numerous Australian women played a significant role both in Australia and on the world stage in organizing collectively for women's rights and other causes. Ruby Rich was one of those women. The Library has recently digitized her papers, along with rough contemporaries such as Bessie Rischbieth and Jessie Street. These women's activism had an extraordinary impact, leading to institutions

such as the Office of the Status of Women.

The digitised papers offer people at home the opportunity to dig deep into topics and see the depth and breadth of thinking and interactions between activists on an international level.

I like this letter from Ruby Rich, which gives an account of her time at the American Women's National Conference on the Cause and Cure of War. "They asked me to speak at their opening meeting day. There were 4 other speakers - with all modesty possible I must say I got much more applause and many told me I was the best. It was on the situation in our different countries. There must have been about 900-1000 women present nearly all representatives of organisations. I am making valuable contacts for work in the future."

Kwong Family Christening Jacket



Christening jacket of May (Mui Ying) Kwong, 1901, in Papers of the Kwong family (Manuscripts), National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn3006822

Significance

This christening jacket was made for May (Mui Ying) Kwong who we believe was born in Australia. She was the daughter of Kwong Sue Duk (1853–1929), Chinese herbalist and entrepreneur, who migrated to Australia with his first wife in 1875. He established a general store in Darwin, trading under the name of Sun Mow Loong. He and his family prospered and May was the daughter of Kwong Sue Duk's 4th wife, and she was one of 24 children. Kwong Sue Duk has at least 800 descendants, now living throughout the world.

Curator's comments

This christening jacket worn by May (Mui Ying) Kwong in 1901 documents the existence and continuing culture of Chinese Australians in the same year that the White Australia Policy came into law, via the Immigration Restriction Act. Following this change in the law, Chinese Australians who left the country would be made to sit a dictation test in a language chosen by the immigration officer on return to Australia, unless granted a certificate of exemption. Although the White Australia Policy aimed to limit non-British migration to Australia, Chinese Australians continued to exist and contribute to Australian society throughout the life of the laws, as evidenced by this collection.

Kookaburra Collection



The Kookaburra Collection, 1905, mixed media, Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Australia, [nla.cat-vn1913939](#)

Significance

Compiled by a group of prominent teenage girls in Sydney in 1904–1905, *The Kookaburra* monthly magazine was filled with beautiful manuscript stories and hand-drawn illustrations. Contributors included Nesta Griffiths and Nita Walker, whose later lives can be traced through digitised newspapers.

Curator's comments

The Kookaburra collection is special because it's a rare example in our collection of creative production from teenagers. This kind of ephemeral material from young women doesn't always survive. It gives us insight into their lives in the early twentieth century and their passions. Aesthetically they are beautiful objects, I love the covers and illustrations within. One of my favourite articles included pasted in photographs with a caption of the 'first motor car from Blackheath to Jenolan Caves'. The article shows us a young woman's perspective and reporting on the impact of changing technology on their lives.

Aarju Neupane



Lisa Maree Williams, *Fashion assistant Aarju Neupane poses at RaShi's fashion boutique on Wigram Street, Little India Precinct, Harris Park, Sydney, New South Wales, 2 November 2024*, digital photograph, Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia. [View the finding aid.](#)

Significance

This photograph was taken as part of the Indian Diaspora in Australia collecting project. It is one of 20 photographs documenting the Little India Precinct in Harris Park, Sydney, NSW. This series was commissioned by the Library.

Curator's comments

We chose this portrait because it does more than document the experiences of a part of the Indian diaspora in Australia—it brings to life the ways in which culture is lived, carried, and renewed. It captures not only how people work and build their lives here, but also how a younger generation is actively embracing and reinterpreting their heritage. There is a quiet sense of continuity in the image, suggesting that these traditions and connections will not only endure, but flourish across generations to come.

Rose de Freycinet



Jacques Arago (1790–1855), *Réception à Diely, Timor* (Reception at Dili, Timor) 1818, watercolour and ink on paper, Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn5016825

Significance

Rose de Freycinet dressed up as a boy to accompany her husband Captain Louis de Freycinet on his great scientific expedition around the world of 1817–1820. They came to Australia as part of that voyage. Rose's presence aboard the ship was erased from the published account. This was deliberate – women were not permitted aboard French navy ships. Louis de Freycinet himself was in charge of the publication of the official account, a lavish multi-volume work. This is one of the surviving watercolours that shows her, in 'all the finery I had'.

Curator's comments

Rose's travels have captured the attention of many in recent years. Her story has all the romance of the intrepid adventurer, enhanced by the survival of her diary, which the Library holds in a later manuscript version. Her husband Louis was very much in charge of the publication, however, so we should not see the deliberate absence in the final publication as his wanting to silence her, but rather the bureaucratic constraints of the day. Depicting her in numerous preparatory works such as this one, could be read as a deliberate act of defiance against the French government.

Gail Mabo



Gail Mabo (b.1965), Mer, Torres Strait, *Mabo Claim I*, 2022, bamboo, cowrie shells, cotton twine, flex glue, shellac, Maps Collection, National Library of Australia, nla.cat-vn10087353

Significance

Gail Mabo is a multidisciplinary artist and daughter of Edward Koiki Mabo, whose native title Claim led to the overturning of Terra Nullius. Mabo's hand drawn maps were important in the case as they showed ongoing land use and custodianship. They were inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World International Register in 2001 and are held by the National Library. *Mabo Claim I* combines the iconography of Mabo's maps with stick charts, traditionally used in Micronesia and the Torres Strait for navigation.

Curator's comments

While the Library has a large map collection, most people think of maps as printed on paper, including perhaps globes. However, the National Library also holds other types of maps such as navigational stick charts used by people across the Pacific for thousands of years. This work by Gail Mabo combines the iconography of her father's (Edward Koiki Mabo's) maps documenting ongoing land use and custodianship of Mer, with this tradition of navigational stick charts.

Black Convicts



J.S. Prout (1805–1876), *The Female Factory from Proctor's Quarry*, lithograph, Hobart, Van Diemen's Land: L. Bluett, Printer, [1844], Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia, [nla.cat-vn2903234](#)

Augustus Earle (1793–1838), *Female penitentiary or factory, Parramatta* [i.e. Parramatta], N.S. Wales, c. 1826, watercolour, Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia, [nla.cat-vn794046](#)

'Quarter Sessions', *The Tasmanian*, 20 July 1832, p.5. [View the article on Trove.](#)

Significance

For historical reasons, other institutions such as the State Library of New South Wales, State Records NSW and State Library and Archives of Tasmania have stronger First Fleet and convict collections, and consequently records relating to convicts of colour. The National Library of Australia, however, does have the manuscript journal (one of three versions) of Arthur Bowes-Smyth, the surgeon on the First Fleet transport, the *Lady Penhryn*, the ship with the largest concentration of women. It has a list of the women aboard, but it does not describe the backgrounds of the women, only their names, ages, crime, trade and the number of years they were sentenced to: [Journal of Arthur Bowes Smyth, 1787 March 22–1789 August \[manuscript\]](#).

The Library, however, does have images of what were called 'female factories' in Tasmania and Parramatta, which were well known to convict women.

Digitised Australian newspapers (available through Trove) are an amazing resource to trace the history of women over time. One of the female convicts explored in *Black Convicts* (pp.144–145) was Maria Middleton, later Maria Murray. Articles such as this example can record details that may not be found elsewhere.

Curator's comments

As more and more original, primary sources are digitised, and easier to find, revisiting evidence for the past is increasingly important. The National Library is committed to making collections accessible. Digitised newspapers can be incredibly useful for research of all kinds. I have used digitised newspapers to date objects for which we only had a suggested 20-year timespan. In the case of tracing the lives of convicts of colour, they provide another important resource for researchers such as Santilla Chingaipe.