

ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN EARLY CONTACT HISTORY

JEN MOES

Jen Moes offers an insight into Aboriginal women's history, focussing on two extraordinary women from early contact history...

When investigating and reclaiming the voices of women in Australian history, it is essential that we include the voices of Aboriginal Women and Torres Strait Islander Women. I write this expressly acknowledging that this piece is exploring the reclaiming of invisible Aboriginal women in the records of western, post invasion history. Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have, since time immemorial, valued equally the roles of women and men. Both women and men have shared the responsibilities of lore, custom and practice. Women's lore is equally as important as men's lore in maintaining social and cultural practice.

In 1788, when the way history was recorded on this continent changed dramatically and irreversibly, Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander People's experience and history was recorded through the lens of western patriarchy. The experiences and voices of Aboriginal Women and Torres Strait Islander Women, like those of other women, were rarely publicly recorded and therefore their voices are either missing, forgotten, ignored or subject to interpretation by the men recording and publishing their experiences.

Contact history is a great place to begin exploring the hidden history and women's voices in early European records in NSW. By exploring the experiences of women, we see a more diverse range of social and cultural contacts and interactions than those traditionally presented. By exploring the experiences of Aboriginal women in early contact history, we can broaden our understanding of the shared experience that contact is. Contact is not just an experience one group has over another, or something that happens to one group by another group.

Here are just two examples to get you on your way exploring the hidden histories of Aboriginal women:

PATYEGARANG

Patyegarang was a young woman who spoke the Gadigal language and is recorded in some of the very earliest written records as the first teacher of Gadigal Language in the new colony.

William Dawes was an English Lieutenant and scientist who arrived on the First Fleet and remained in the colony until 1791. He recorded his experiences in the colony in detailed notes and manuscripts.

Patyegarang and William struck up what appears to be an unlikely friendship based on mutual respect, humour and a shared curiosity and interest in each other's ways. In his notes Dawes records the conversations between them across a broad range of subjects.

Patyegarang taught Dawes Gadigal and she learnt English herself. Both learnt each other's language in a functional manner which allowed them to communicate in depth and showed the intellect of both. Dawes recorded a conversation where Patyegarang explained the anger of the local people, that the colonists had stayed on their land and that they were afraid of the guns. Dawes later refused to follow orders to participate in punitive and violent actions against the local peoples and was likely sent back to England due to his sympathetic views towards the local Aboriginal peoples.

MARIA LOCKE

Maria, a Dharug woman, was born on the Hawkesbury River between 1794-1804.

In 1814, Maria was in the first group of children placed in the newly created 'Native Institution for tuition', which was created to teach Aboriginal children basic education, moral and religious instruction and manual skills, to allow them to be useful to the new colony. Despite this

radical and total upheaval in the young Maria's life, she excelled in learning. In 1819, Maria won the top prize in the yearly exam for the children engaged in education in the colony, including nearly 100 European children.

In 1822, Maria married William Walker, a Dharug man she had spent time with at the Native Institute. Unfortunately, within weeks of their marriage, William died of illness. In 1823, Maria married convict, Robert Locke, in the first sanctioned marriage between an Aboriginal person and a European. As Robert was a convict, he was 'assigned' to Maria, making her the first Aboriginal supervisor of a convict.

In 1831, Maria petitioned Governor Darling to be given her deceased brother's land grant at Blacktown. Maria had been promised a grant of land as part of her marriage to Robert but this had not been provided. The grant was not given; however, 40 acres of land were granted to Robert on Maria's behalf. In 1833 a further 44 acres of land was granted to her in Robert's name at Liverpool and in 1843, after 10 years perseverance, Maria was granted her brother's land.

Maria outlived Robert by 24 years. She spent her life engaged in the day-to-day life as a land holder in the colonies. On her death in July 1878, her land passed to her nine surviving children.

REFERENCES

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[Significant Aboriginal women: Maria Lock | Parramatta History and Heritage](#)

[Lock, Maria | The Dictionary of Sydney](#)

[Maria Lock's 1831 petition](#)