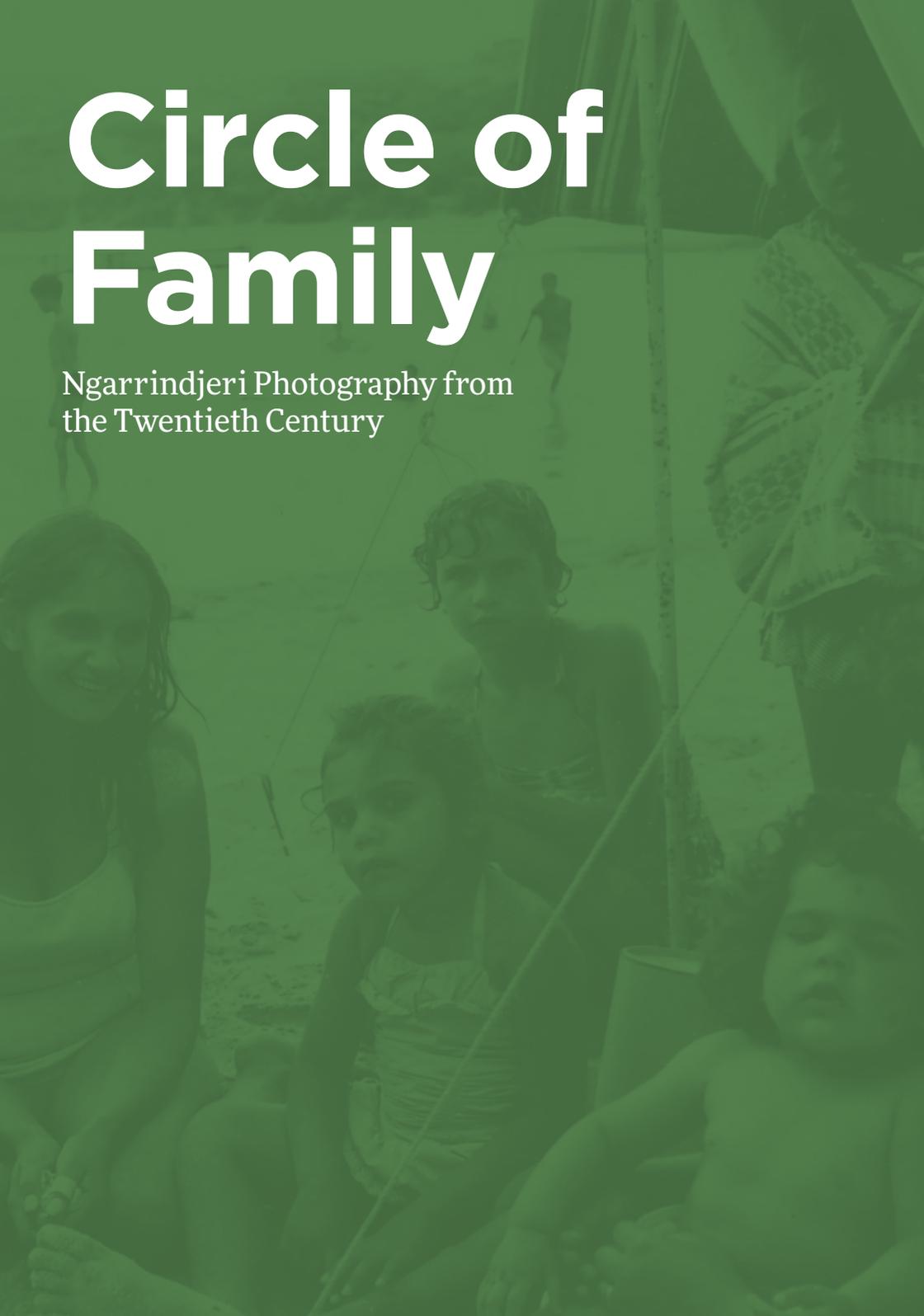


# Circle of Family

Ngarrindjeri Photography from  
the Twentieth Century



## Foreword

From the moment small consumer cameras became available in Australia in the early twentieth century, Ngarrindjeri people embraced photography as a means to record their history, and represent their families, aesthetic traditions, and world views against the perilous times of attempted assimilation by the state, including the rampant forced removal of Aboriginal children that came to be known as the Stolen Generations.

For the first time such a large body of photographs had been shared outside a deeply protective family context. Previously, the photographs were preserved in albums, picture frames, biscuit tins, and timeworn suitcases across the various locales where Ngarrindjeri live, some making their way onto tablets and mobile devices. Many had survived the ravages of fires and floods and the enforced movements by governments over three-quarters of a century.

This collection of digitised rare historical photographs, taken by Ngarrindjeri photographers and retained in Ngarrindjeri families, operates both as a rich counter archive to colonial representations and settler memory, and as esteemed cultural objects capable of drawing the weight of the ancestral past into the present moment, tangibly enlivening cultural and spiritual connections generationally today.

The Ngarrindjeri are a South Australian Aboriginal nation, whose extensive lands and waters take in the River Murray, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert, the vast Coorong wetlands, and parts of the Southern Ocean coast. Even before the local



Edith Kathleen Keys (nee Lovegrove), daughter of Frank Lovegrove and Rose Mack, On Vacation in the USA, gelatin silver print, late 1940s. Edith married US air force pilot Fred Keys who was stationed in Australia during the Second World War, and immigrated to America in 1946. She lives in Florida, USA, with her grandson Fred Keys III and great grandson, Colin. Courtesy of Lyn Lovegrove-Niemz. Photographer Frederick Keys.

availability of personal cameras, Ngarrindjeri aimed to deploy photography as a medium for cultural production, performance, and intercultural diplomacy. Albert Karloan, an esteemed Ngarrindjeri Elder and the bearer of an immense body of cultural knowledge, hoped to represent his people to a wide Australian public through storytelling that employed moving and still photography. Supported by the mission superintendent, in 1916 he wrote to the South Australian Protector of Aborigines (a paternalistic title given to the government position in charge of administering Aboriginal people) requesting to borrow £150 to purchase a cinematograph he had located, to be able to 'travel the country in company with my Son Clement giving entertainment of illustrated Songs and Recitation by Slide pictures as well as Film Pictures'. He provided an entrepreneurial plan by which to pay back the loan. Significantly, this is the earliest known instance of an Australian Aboriginal nation proposing to document its history of photography and colonialism. The Protector, however, labelled Karloan's venture 'ridiculous' and refused the loan.

Yet, despite such setbacks, Ngarrindjeri never lost interest in harnessing photography for their own purposes, to sit within their long-developed visual and performative traditions that predate colonisation and continue into the present. Critically, however, from the 1930s, when Box Brownie and later instamatic cameras became available and affordable, Ngarrindjeri rapidly grew to be prolific agents of their own visual narratives, as witnessed in this exhibition. In Ngarrindjeri hands, and through Ngarrindjeri ways of seeing, photography became a potent tool of memory that displaced and offered a tangible form of resistance to the settler colonial representations. Pioneering Ngarrindjeri women and men framed rich alternative narratives that relate community connectivity, passion, resilience, cross-cultural exchange, entrepreneurship, and their own labour histories.

The noted contemporary Ngarrindjeri photographer Polly Sumner remembers the heady buzz of the crowds assembled on the 'big lawn' at Raukkan on mail delivery days in the 1950s, as she and her mother, Charlotte Sumner Dodd, eagerly awaited the return of films they had dispatched for processing. Simultaneously, Ngarrindjeri began to experiment with aesthetic innovations to assert distinctive visions. Some trialled methods of film development and hand-printing in makeshift darkrooms on the government reserves of Raukkan and Gerard, or in the independent fringe camps edging rural towns, where, in the absence of electricity or running water, they used 'candle power' and well water. The rare photographic archives Ngarrindjeri produced for their own communities assert a visual sovereignty, and narrate vital histories not often known through other means. Such archives now serve in multiple processes of reclamation and decolonisation.

Photographs can demonstrably help complete the circle of family, working with reminiscence to sustain connections between ancestors and living generations of Ngarrindjeri through drawing the past into the present. For members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants, and for new generations at risk or for others who have become dissociated from their culture for a range of reasons, photographs can help restitch this connection. As Aunty Ellen Trevororrow describes, 'with the photos there is always this link, going out', expressing a multilayered connectivity that can recuperate fractured relations between people and place, bringing a sense of belonging that is anchored in a palpably deeper experience of time that reaches beyond colonial interference.

*Karen Hughes and Aunty Ellen Trevororrow, July 2019*

**Left**

Blanche Ballard (nee Gollan, b. 1877) and William Ballard with their children Andrew, Florence, Adeline, Mary and Theresa outside their home on Rabbit Island, (Koromarangul), the Coorong, South Australia, gelatin silver print, ca.1910. Ballard family archives. Photographer unknown.

**Right**

Andrew James Enoch Rankine (1898-1963), with his mother Blanche Ballard (nee Gollan, formerly Rankine) and Mary Rankine, Raukkan, gelatin silver print. Ca. 1940s. Ballard family collection. Photographer unknown.





#### Right

Sisters Irene Hunter and Charlotte Richards, gelatin silver print, Meningie One Mile Camp, ca.1945, courtesy Walter Richards and Jeffrey Hunter. Aunty Irene Hunter was the mother of the singer Ruby Hunter and of Walter Richards, Iris and Jeffrey Hunter. Aunty Charlotte Richards (ca. 1930– 87) was a prolific pioneering Indigenous photographer who was never without her Box Brownie camera. Her work is only now beginning to attract wider recognition. She lived in the fringe camps along the River Murray and Coorong, making her extended family and community the subjects of a large and important body of work. Here she holds one of her pet magpies, also her ngatiji (close friend, relation). Photographer unknown.

#### Left

Isabel Koolmatrjie (Aunty Belle), Joe Walker Jr (Uncle Poonthie) and Irene Hunter, Meningie One Mile Camp, gelatin silver print, 1940s. Courtesy Ellen and Tom Trevorrow. As Aboriginal people became increasingly excluded from the Australian nation state, and were not allowed to live in 'white' towns, and as conditions on government reserves declined, living with extended kin on fringe camps on the outskirts of towns, such as the Meningie One Mile Camp depicted here, became a way of maintaining continual, if changing, connections to Country. Fringe camps were also a way of keeping languages alive, of obtaining regular agricultural work, and of living largely independent lives. Photographer Charlotte Richards.

**Right**

Alice Walker and Jim Trevorrow with their family and friends on the Coorong, near Salt Creek, for a Christian fellowship-gathering, gelatin silver print, 1930s. In the rear are Jim Trevorrow, Alice Walker, and Johanna Trevorrow. Alice Walker was known as the 'Good Samaritan' for her kindness in offering hospitality and assistance to travellers stranded on the sand roads of the Coorong. Courtesy Ellen and Tom Trevorrow collection. Photographer unknown.

**Left**

Mary Trevorrow Vizzard, outside her home with "Cocuboy", her sulfur crested cockatoo, Meningie, South Australia, gelatin silver print, ca. 1940. Courtesy of Gary Sutton. Photographer Joyce Kerswell.

**Left**

Ethel Hilda Wachman (née Ellis) with two of her eight children. Ethel (of Western Arrente heritage) married Arthur Ahang of Ngarrindjeri (Tanganekald clan) and Chinese heritage. They were part of the Blackford (Murrabinna) Aboriginal community near Kingston, where this photograph was taken. Their daughter Ruby Hammond was the first South Australian Aboriginal person to seek election to Federal parliament. Gelatin silver print. Ca. 1939. Courtesy of Kingsley Ahang and Irene Allen. Photographer unknown.

**Right**

Albert (Bronco) Lovegrove (b 1924), pictured playing his guitar near the River Murray, gelatin silver print, 1940s. Famed for his horsemanship and music, he travelled around Australia with a circus in the 1940s. Courtesy of Lyn Lovegrove-Niemz. Photographer June Lovegrove.





#### Left

Frank Lovegrove (ca. 1885 – 1967) with his youngest daughter Vera Lovegrove, and grandchildren (left to right) Victor Rigney, Cecil Rigney, and Fred Kelly, gelatin silver print, ca.1942. Born in 1885 at Streaky Bay on the remote west coast of South Australia, Uncle Frank Lovegrove Snr was a Wirungu man (also of Scottish ancestry), who came to Ngarrindjeri country as a small child. Striking about this picture is the loving way Frank holds up his grandson, Victor Rigney, and the baby Victor's visible delight and comfort in this, reflecting the highly valued supportive and caring role Ngarrindjeri men took in 'raising up' families. Lovegrove family collection, courtesy of Lyn Lovegrove-Niemz. Photograph attributed to Albert Lovegrove.

#### Right

Bessie Rigney (nee Gollan, 1888 -1965), younger sister of Blanche Ballard, with members of the Ballard family, Raukkan, gelatin silver print, 1940s. Ballard family collection. Photographer unknown.

**Left**

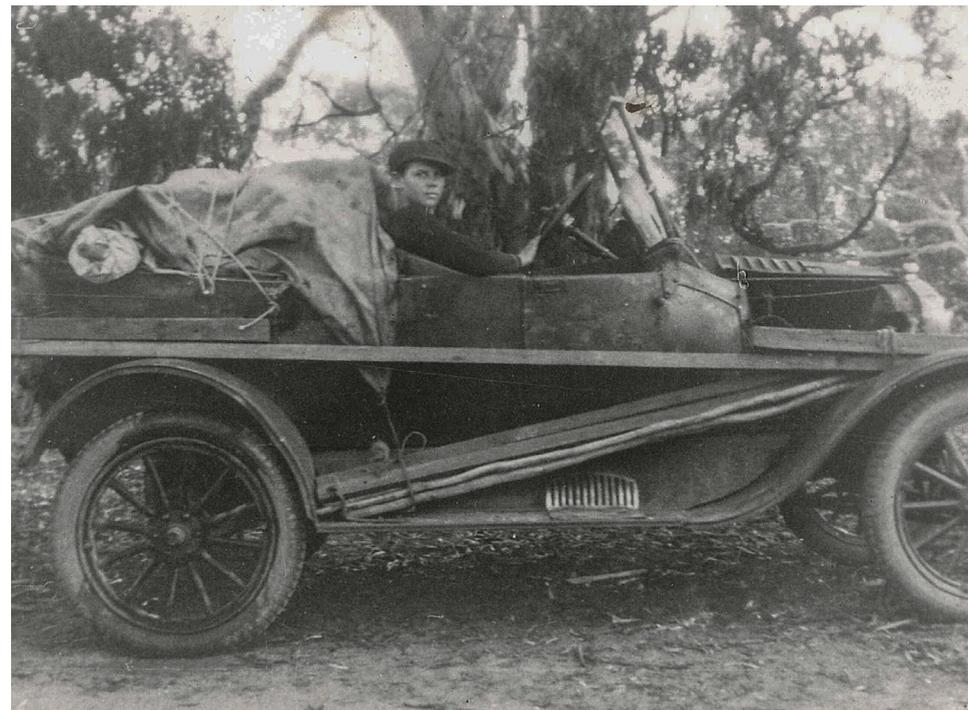
Burial of W. T. (Wilfred Theodore) Lawrie, Headmaster of Point McLeay School from 1914-1951, Payneham Cemetery, Adelaide, gelatin silver print, 1951. Included are Auntie Dulcie Wilson, Auntie Maggie, Uncle Bruce Carter, Rebecca Wilson, Elsa Sumner, Garnet Wilson junior, Mary Sumner Dodd, Enid Laurie, Mrs Laurie Clive Rigney, Mac Laurie, Eillie Wilson, Bessie Rigney, Roland Carter, Elva Milera, Doug Milera, Valerie Rigney, Vera Carter, Elsa Schiller, Laurel Rankine, Howard Sumner, Proctor Sumner, Myra Kropinyeri, Frank Lovegrove, Fanny Rigney, Barbara Sumner, Rita Rigney, — —, Laurie Sumner, Archie Kartinyeri, Mildred Rankine, Joyce Rigney and Prouton Carter. Front: Sally Kartinyeri, Kathleen Sumner.. Some of the wreaths are made of pelican feathers, crafted into flowers by Ngarrindjeri women. Courtesy of Dorothy Shaw. Photographer unknown.

**Right, top**

Joyce Kerswell with her buckboard car on her way to the fairground, where she performed a snake-charming act, Coorong, gelatin silver print, 1950s. Underneath the tarpaulin are her snakes, highly venomous tiger snakes and brown snakes, used in her performance. Aunty Joyce was also a prolific photographer. Courtesy Ellen and Tom Trevor collection. Photographer Charlotte Richards.

**Right, bottom**

The Walker family including children of Margaret (Aunty Nini) and Charles (Charley) Walker, Meningie One Mile Camp, gelatin silver print, ca. 1960. The children include Audrey, Fay, Isabel, Rosie and Ron. Behind them is one of the handmade homes at the One Mile Camp, fashioned from salvaged corrugated iron. Courtesy of Hilda and Robert Day. Photographer unknown.





#### Right

Charlotte Sumner (nee Dodd), holding baby Karen Sumner, at the beach with her family on the Coorong, possibly taken at Marks Point, Coorong. Polly Sumner and Tiggy Sumner are pictured second from left. Gelatin silver print, ca.1960. Charlotte Sumner Dodd collection, courtesy of Polly Sumner. Photographer unknown.

#### Left

Wedding Reception of Muriel and Arthur Van Der Byl, Adelaide, gelatin silver print, 1964. Aunty Muriel (nee Karpany), is a renowned artist and activist. Most recently she created the artwork Miwi for the background design of the Next Generation \$50 banknote, David Unaipon side. Courtesy of Aunty Muriel Van Der Byl. Photographer unknown.



**Right**

Brenda Gollan (Edwards), Dorothy Rigney (Shaw), Cynthia Gollan, Gladys Karpany (Love), Miriam Sumner (Weetra), Derek Gollan, at Aunty Jean Gollan's place, Raukkan. Gelatin silver print, 1960s. Courtesy of Dorothy Shaw. Photographer unknown.

**Left**

Maria Lane (nee Rigney) in front of the old cottages at Raukkan, gelatin silver print, ca. 1965. Maria later became a senior academic in Aboriginal education at the University of South Australia. Courtesy of Lena Rigney. Photographer unknown.



Gathering of Ngarrindjeri Veterans from the First World War and the Second World War: from left to right, Proctor Sumner (Uncle Nink), Howard Sumner, Steve (Uncle Fuller) Lampard, Wiltshire Sumner, seated, Walter Gollan, possibly taken at Raukkan Hall on Remembrance Day, gelatin silver print, late 1940s. Courtesy of Auntie Sandra Wilson. Photographer unknown.



Gathering of Ngarrindjeri families for Lutheran fellowship at Marungung, East Wellington. Rear: Auntie Daisy Rankine with Jimmy Rankine, Pukana Ken Karpany, Nanna May (Wilhemenia) Sumner, Old Dardle (Mitchie Karpany), Auntie Dora Mason, --, Nita Kartinyeri, Nanna Laura Sumner (Kartinyeri), --, Auntie Annie Koolmatricie, Uncle Jack Koolmatricie, Old Yowl (Hughie McHughes), Nanna Ellen Brown. Front: Ritchie Koolmatricie; Grannie Rita Mason (seated); Billy Rankine; Millie Rankine (Rigney), Ellen Rankine (Trevorrow); Karno Walker, Michelle Brown (Gollan), Kartinyeri, Elsie Sumner. 'Matthew Kropinyeri built that house,' Ellen Trevorrow. Gelatin silver print., ca. 1961. Courtesy of Margaret Sumner. Photographer unknown.

# Thanks to

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