

SAVING HISTORY

THE VERA DEACON REGIONAL HISTORY FUND



UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE



The University of Newcastle acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands within our footprint areas: Awabakal, Darkinjung, Biripai, Worimi, Wonnarua, and Eora Nations.

We recognise Aboriginal people's continuing connection to land, sea, waterways, sky and culture. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and celebrate the wisdom, courage, and expertise of our First Nations students, staff and community supporters.



📷 *Wun.ngul Yayan Mudyala (Yesterday Today Tomorrow) 2022, artwork by Frances Belle Parker. Commissioned by the University Library. Image courtesy of Frances Belle Parker*

📷 *Cover: A picnic at Toronto scanned from the original glass negative taken by Ralph Snowball. Part of the Norm Barney Photographic Collection, held by Special Collections. Image Identifier ASGN0020-B1. <https://livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/nodes/view/46592>*

SAVING HISTORY



The Vera Deacon Regional History Fund supports a suite of impactful projects to preserve and share the history of Newcastle and the Hunter, whilst building capacity in the local community for preservation, research and archiving skills.

In our region we have over 60,000 years of knowledge and culture, and more than 200 years of documented history. By preserving and sharing local historical records we can all have a better understanding of our roots. We can understand how the Hunter came to be how it is today, which will shape our direction for the future. We can tell emotive stories that open up important conversations, giving us the opportunity to reflect, to learn and to celebrate, whilst building our community, bringing us together and supporting our love for Newcastle as home.

Without this support, we risk cutting our ties to the past, and losing our sense of collective culture and history. Preserving history is a shared responsibility, and telling our stories is an act we all benefit from together. It is something we must do skillfully, thoughtfully, and before it is too late.

Thank you for considering a gift to support this valuable work. Your generosity will have impact in many ways, for many years to come.

Matthew Davis,
University Librarian

A GIFT TO THE VERA DEACON REGIONAL HISTORY FUND CAN:

- support future careers through the Vera Deacon Internship
- support community engagement through the 'Creative in Residence' program or video storytelling
- save precious records through digitisation and preservation

If you would like to donate, please visit newcastle.edu.au/donate-vera-deacon



MEET VERA

PRESERVING HISTORY

Even though she lived for more than nine decades, the passionate activist and volunteer Dr Vera Deacon OAM experienced more than her share of struggle and change. As an example, her childhood home and playground, Moscheto Island, was displaced to form the coal terminal at Kooragang. Vera was passionate about noticing and documenting the dynamic life of our city, including recognising the importance of archives and supporting their safeguarding. She was a writer, and a great raconteur, telling extraordinary stories in a matter-of-fact way, like the time she was rowing home across the Hunter River and a shark snatched her pet dog! Vera referred to the Hunter River as her mother, and felt its spirit driving her on in life. She dedicated her life to supporting the health of the river, and selflessly helping others tell the stories of the city it winds through.

The Vera Deacon Regional History Fund continues Vera's generosity and dedication to sharing and celebrating the history of Newcastle. It supports projects that provide access to hidden stories from

Vera's beloved region, and sparks the passions of future archivists and storytellers.

Supporting the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund allows us to build community, reflect and learn. It is a way of supporting regional history to ensure that the stories of the Hunter region are not lost, that our truths are not hidden, and that our heroes, like Vera, will not be forgotten.

The Vera Deacon Regional History Fund was established in 2008 to encourage regional history through acquisition, preservation and studying valuable regional historical resources.

Vera's passionate community spirit has inspired many others to generously support the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund. Individuals, local companies and community organisations together have enabled tens of thousands of precious and fascinating items to be shared with the community through expert digitisation and accessioning. These include



Hunter Regional maps and sub-division plans, local photographs, oral histories, and film. More than 5,000 Aboriginal placenames have been mapped across New South Wales and community members now have the opportunity to explore Awabakal Newcastle and Colonial Newcastle in 3D. The fund made it possible for care leavers to access their Children's Home records for the first time, and for whole series of NBN TV programs to be made available for researchers and creatives alike.

Gifts to the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund have also supported employment of more than 20 people. Students have gained valuable experience and skills in digitisation, curation and collections care, supporting them in galleries, libraries, archives and museum (GLAM) sector careers, so that they can continue to uncover fascinating stories, and share their learnings with the world.

 *Top: The University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor Professor Alex Zelinsky accepting a gift to the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund from the family of the late Charles Martin, a long term supporter of the Fund, and creator of the Digital 3D Model of 1825 Newcastle in partnership with the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund.*

Photo: (L-R): Merv Lindsay, Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Joanna Pickford, and Abra Schmidt, April 2023.

 *Page 4: Vera Deacon in her garden, July 2017. Taken by Charlie Hardy. From the University of Newcastle Library's Special Collections.*

 *Bottom: A historic visualisation of the convict lumber yard in Newcastle in 1825. This 3D artwork was created by Charles Martin in 2017, thanks to support from the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund. The 3D rendering is available online and has been used by researchers and community members who can explore an immersive view of the area during the early European colonial settlement.*

MEET RHYS

THE FUTURE OF HISTORY

As the 2024 Vera Deacon Intern, Rhys Burke has a unique opportunity to gain hands-on, close-up experience of working in an archive whilst still studying. Having earned the role from a competitive pool of students, each Vera Deacon Intern works part time with the University Special Collections team on a project that meets their career and learning objectives.

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE INTERNSHIP?

Since I was little I have known that that I wanted a career in archives or historical research. I have always loved museums and I remember being fascinated by the stories of people who have walked the same lands I do, and looked at the same views I can see. But I had no idea how to get a job in a museum - I didn't even know what all the people do! So I was really excited about the opportunity to learn directly from the people actually in the roles about the careers available and what I need to do to work in them.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED SO FAR?

So much! I'm sure my career has taken a jump forwards. I have been trained in different processes, I now have practical experience, and I understand more about the context of archiving, about the difference it makes, and the challenges faced. It has absolutely fuelled my passion - I'm really loving it!

WHY DO YOU THINK ARCHIVING IS IMPORTANT?

It is incredibly important to protect people's records. We need to take expert care of the information and resources we have, and we need to make that information available - that's where accessioning comes in. If you want to research your history, you are relying on someone protecting all the little details, so that you can join the dots between you and the family that came before you.



"In my internship I have learned plenty of examples of archives changing people's lives - in legal cases, or helping people learn of their roots, or designating land rights. Every extra box that's digitised could mean another really important connection between someone and the past."

MEET ISABEL

CREATING HISTORY



"The Vera Deacon Internship was probably one of the best experiences of my life. I learned skills in archival research and accessioning material, curating and researching for an exhibition, 3D scanning, digitising and using Photoshop. I was so lucky to be entrusted with curating the Glamour on Glass exhibition in the Library; I learned so much from that and I really enjoyed it. I was able to use that experience to gain my next role as a Young and Emerging Curator at the Lock Up art gallery in Newcastle. I was already passionate about the GLAM sector but now I can really see my place in it."

Isabel Whittle, 2023, Vera Deacon Intern





📷 Glenn Dormand interviewing Professor John Maynard for the *Stories of our Town* film telling the history of Whibayganba – Nobby's headland

MEET GLENN

MODERN HISTORY

Glenn Dormand's passion is to tell remarkable stories directly through the people who lived them. Working under his professional name of Chit Chat von Loopin Stab, in partnership with Tony Whittaker, their films combine records from archives with original interviews to create expertly researched short documentaries.

Stories of our Town showcase the quirky and significant Newcastle tales that have never been told before, featuring voices from across the community. Each production is a collaboration with local businesses, philanthropists, and organisations, including the University of Newcastle, who provide financial or other support to enable the films to be created.

From the Star Hotel Riot, to unique Indigenous stories like that of Biraban and Threlkeld, the short films have been watched by over 250,000 people in community viewings and on YouTube. They are shown in schools and First Nations organisations across the region thanks to their engaging production and accurate, diverse, local storytelling. The *Stories of our Town* were awarded a Highly Commended acknowledgement at the 2022 National Trust Heritage Awards and are shown on Foxtel, Binge, SBS and NITV networks.

The Vera Deacon Regional History Fund could support the creation of future *Stories of our Town* to bring to light more surprising stories of local heroes and pivotal happenings.

WHICH STORY WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL NEXT?

I can't wait to share the story of Ralph Snowball. He fell into photography but ended up taking over 10,000 images of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. His negatives were almost lost forever but by chance were discovered and rescued from a local basement. They have been preserved and digitised by the University of Newcastle – in a story of its own! - and together they show an amazing panorama of life here at the turn of the Century; the love, the despair, the faith, the heartache – all of it in incredible detail. It really brings their experiences to life, and I want people to see it. This kind of gold won't be here if we don't make the effort to share it now.



MEET CARL

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The Creative in Residence program was a long held ambition of the Library team and it has been finally achieved thanks to the generosity of donors to the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund. Dr Carl Caulfield is the University's first Creative in Residence.

Inspired by items in the Special Collections, each selected Creative in Residence is supported by the Library team to conduct research into a local person or event about which they will create an original work to bring the story to life for the community. This may take any creative form including an immersive experience, sculpture, art, a performance or a novella.

Carl, a local playwright, actor and director, is developing a dramatic performance piece exploring the extraordinary historic contribution of artist Joseph Lycett. Before the existence of cameras, convict Joseph Lycett captured traditional Aboriginal life in Newcastle as it had existed for millennia, at the nexus point before most of their lifestyle would be lost forever.

"I'm a storyteller – every creation should have something to say. The Creative in Residence program is a wonderful opportunity, not only to create a new story for the community, but to be able to inform that piece with such a depth of knowledge. There are all kinds of hidden gems in the Special Collections, and the community deserves to share them."

Dr Carl Caulfield

📷 Creative in Residence Dr Carl Caulfield exploring Joseph Lycett's artwork to inform his original creation, a dramatic piece to share with the community.

**SUPPORTING THE VERA DEACON
REGIONAL HISTORY FUND MEANS
DIRECT PRACTICAL SUPPORT TO BUILD
SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IN LOCAL
HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS.**

From helping to uncover new information, to connecting the community to knowledge, to changing the life of a future historian, your support makes a real difference to what we can achieve.

The Fund supports a specialist, expert team at the University, collaborating with students and community partners, to work hands-on with precious items which would otherwise be lost or hidden.

If you would like to know more about the Vera Deacon Regional History Fund, get in touch to see for yourself the treasures we are lucky enough to be custodians of.

 *Vera Deacon looking out over the Hunter River that inspired her.*
Photograph courtesy of Newcastle Herald.

A full-page photograph of an elderly woman with short, curly grey hair, wearing a light-colored trench coat. She is standing on a pier or walkway, looking out over a body of water towards a sunset. The sky is filled with dramatic, golden-hued clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong backlight effect. The water in the foreground is dark with some ripples. In the distance, a dark silhouette of a city or shoreline is visible across the water.

*“We are the custodians of our
history; and people will always
come together to help each other.”*

– Vera Deacon

**For more information, please contact:
philanthropy@newcastle.edu.au**

