



# AIATSIS

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

## Manuscript Finding Aid

**MS 5300**

### **Papers of Athol McGregor**

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MS 5300: Papers of Athol McGregor

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## Collection Summary

<b>Creator:</b>	McGregor, Athol
<b>Title:</b>	Papers of Athol McGregor
<b>Collection no:</b>	MS 5300
<b>Reference code:</b>	AIAS.326.260618
<b>Date range:</b>	1896 – 1977
<b>Extent:</b>	0.4 linear metres (2 archival boxes)
<b>Repository:</b>	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

## Cultural Sensitivity Statement

### Use of the material

When using this finding aid, and the collection described within it, clients are encouraged to be mindful and sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; particularly with regard to the use of this material.

### Language

This finding aid and collection may contain words and descriptions which may be culturally inappropriate and insensitive. The language used in this collection may not normally be used in certain public or community contexts. Clients may encounter terms and descriptions, which reflect the author's attitude or that of the period in which the manuscript was written, that may be considered inappropriate today.

### Deceased persons

Clients using this finding aid should be aware that in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, seeing images of deceased persons in photographs, film and books or hearing them in recordings etc. may cause sadness or distress; and in some cases offend strongly held cultural beliefs.

## **Access to the Collection**

### **Access conditions for this collection**

Open access – reading. Open copying & quotation. Not for Inter-Library Loan.

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### **Preferred citation**

Items from this collection should be cited as: Title or description of manuscript item, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, MS Number, Series Number, Subseries Number, Item or Folder Number.

For example:

Papers of Athol McGregor, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, MS 5300, Series 1, Item 3.

## Collection Overview

### Scope and contents note

This collection primarily contains working papers and handwritten personal letters of Athol McGregor from when he worked in the Northern Territory during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The collection includes letters, memoirs and diaries. Much of the collection relates to the Coniston Massacres and other associated events such as trials and enquiries. It also contains sermon notes and writings completed by Athol as part of his work for the Methodist Inland Mission. The material shows Athol's support for Indigenous Australians and willingness to broadcast discriminatory behaviour and systems towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The collection also includes personal handwritten letters between Athol and his wife Unita during this period.

The collection contains material for the period 1896 – 1977.

### Provenance

The material was donated to AIATSIS in September 2018 by June McGregor with the assistance of Catherine Bishop. Catherine Bishop met the McGregor family during her research on Annie Lock, a missionary that worked in the Northern Territory at the same time as Athol McGregor. June McGregor came into possession of the collection after the passing of John McGregor, her husband, son of Athol McGregor.

### Material separated from the collection

Material separated from the collection includes 254 photographic prints of daily scenes and historic events in Katherine and the wider Northern Territory between 1927 and 1932. These images are managed by the AIATSIS Pictorial Unit. See [Mura®](#) catalogue records: MCGREGOR.A01 and MCGREGOR.A02.

### Related material

For a complete list of works by Athol McGregor held by the Library, and for other related material consult [Mura®](#), the AIATSIS catalogue.

For access to Audio / Visual material please go to the 'Contact us' page on the AIATSIS website at [aiatsis.gov.au](http://aiatsis.gov.au) or phone (02) 6246 1111

**Important:** Before clicking on the links to the catalogue entries please read our sensitivity message found on the 'Search the Collection' page on the AIATSIS website at [aiatsis.gov.au](http://aiatsis.gov.au)

## Biographical and historical note

Athol Douglas Grant McGregor was born in Greenhill, Victoria in 1902, he was one of five children of William McGregor and Emma Frances Douglas.

In 1925, Athol completed training at the Home Missionaries' Training College 'Otira' in Walpole Street, Kew, Victoria. After training Athol worked as the resident missionary in Noojee, Central Gippsland. During the late 1920 and early 1930s, Athol worked for the Federal Inland Methodist Mission in Central Australia. Athol later returned home to Victoria to do ministry work at the Werribee Methodist Church.

During August to October of 1928, local police in the Central Northern Territory led a revenge attack on Aboriginal people in response to the death of Frederick Brooks, a dingo trapper. Official records show the police party killed 31 Anmatyerre, Kaytetye and Warlpiri people during this time, but other records and accounts suggest the party massacred up to 100 Aboriginal people. The police led party was made up of 11 men and 14 horses. Commencing near Coniston Station 160 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, the police party travelled 846 miles to locate those reportedly responsible for Brooks' death.

Athol McGregor questioned the actions of authorities and raised public awareness of the Coniston Massacres by contacting journalists and alerting media outlets. Athol also travelled to Darwin and sat in the public area of the court to view the trial of Padygar and Arkirkra, two Aboriginal men charged with the murder of Frederick Brooks. The court later dismissed these charges due to inconsistent witness evidence.

Athol McGregor was amongst a number of people who requested an official inquiry into the killing of Aboriginal people in the district. Athol and others also raised concerns about the social and living conditions of Aboriginal people in the area, such as their access to traditional land, food and water sources. A Board of Inquiry was held from 29 December 1928 to 18 January 1929, to investigate the shooting of Aboriginal people in Central Australia. Appointed to the board were Queensland Police Magistrate A.H. O'Kelly, Northern Territory Government Resident J.C. Cawood, and Northern Territory Police Inspector P.A. Giles. Inspector Giles was a Police Inspector in Central Australia at the time of the massacres and directly supervised police who were involved in the killings. The board found that the shootings were justified and without provocation.

Athol McGregor married Phyllis Unita McLeod (1902-1987) in 1928 in Darwin and they had two children, John and Ruth. Athol passed away in Healesville, Victoria in 1979, aged 77.

### References

1926 Central Gippsland Fire (Black Sunday), *Community Bushfire Connection*. Retrieved from <https://www.communitybushfireconnection.com.au/history/1926-fires/>

Cribbin, John. The killing times: the Coniston massacre 1928.

Crossroads Uniting Church, Connection. Retrieved from  
<https://www.crossroadsunitingchurch.org.au/connection-10-january/>

National Archives of Australia, NAA, A431, 1950/2768, Attacks on white men by natives – Killing of natives – Central Australia.

## Controlled Access Headings

Aboriginal Australians -- Australia, Central --History  
Aboriginal Australians -- Northern Territory -- History  
Aboriginal Australians -- Violence against  
Australia -- Board of Enquiry concerning the killing of Natives in Central  
    Australia by police parties and others  
Australia -- Race relations  
Arrente people  
Brooks, Fred -1928  
Coniston Station (N.T.) History  
Crimes against humanity -- History -- 20<sup>th</sup> century  
History -- Frontier conflict -- Northern Territory  
Kaytetye (Australian people)  
Massacres -- Australia -- History  
Massacres -- Northern Territory  
Massacres -- Northern Territory -- Coniston  
Massacres -- Northern Territory -- Coniston Station  
McGregor, Athol  
Methodist Church Missions  
Methodist Church Missions Australia  
Methodist Church Missions Northern Territory  
Missionaries  
Northern Territory -- History  
Northern Territory -- Race relations  
Race relations -- Violent -- Massacres, murders, poisoning etc. -- 1901-  
Religions -- Christianity -- Missionaries  
Warlpiri (Australian people)  
Yuendumu (South Central NT SF52-12)  
Yurrkarrn / Coniston (South Central NT SF53-09)  
Yurrkuru / Brookes Soak (South Central NT SF53-09)

## Series Description

### Series 1 Letters between Athol and Unita McGregor

#### Folder / Items

MS 5300/1/1-54 This series includes numerous handwritten and typed letters written between Athol McGregor and his wife Unita McGregor, from August 1930 to March 1931. During this time, Athol was working in the Northern Territory and Unita was in Melbourne for the birth of their son John.

### Series 2 Other correspondence and papers

MS 5300/2/1-6 This series contains personal and government correspondence and miscellaneous papers including:

- Personal handwritten letters and cards 1896-1917
- Uniting Church historical booklet 1999
- Letter from Office of Aboriginal Affairs to Athol McGregor, 1972
- Book extract, "Katherine is no lady", 1927

### Series 3 Journals, diaries and notes

MS 5300/3/1-14 This series contains Athol McGregor's handwritten diaries, memoirs and sermon notes as follows:

- Sermon notes 1927-1977
- Diaries 1927-1930
- Memoirs – undated to 1976

## Box List

Series	Item	Box
1	1-54	1
2	1-6	1
3	1-14	2

Finding aid compiled by Robyn Garcia, May 2021.

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