Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0082

Oodgeroo Noonuccal

(1920 - 1993)

Born	19201103, Bulimba Queensland Australia
Died	19930916, Brisbane Queensland Australia
Occupation	Artist, Educator, Poet, Political activist

Summary

Oodgeroo Noonuccal was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska, on Minjerribah (the Stradbroke Islands). Oodgeroo Noonuccal means Oodgeroo of the tribe Nunuccal; spelling variations include Nunuccal, Noonuckle and Nunukul. In 1970, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (under the name Kathleen Walker) was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil) for services to the community. She returned it in 1987 in protest against the forthcoming Australian Bicentenary celebrations (1988).

Details

Oodgeroo Noonuccal has written about her life and work in several publications, including a short account in Roberta Sykes's 1993 *Murawina: Australian women of high achievement*. In addition, extremely numerous publications by and about Oodgeroo Noonuccal are available in most libraries. Janine Little has compiled a bibliography of Oodgeroo's verse, prose and other works, reviews and critical works on her work, obituaries, and audiovisual and performance material featuring Oodgeroo. See 'Oodgeroo: A Selective Checklist' in *Oodgeroo: a tribute* (Shoemaker (ed), 1994).

Oodgeroo Noonuccal was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska on 3 November 1920, on North Stradbroke Island, country of the Noonuccal tribe. She attended Dulwich Primary; left school and became a domestic in Brisbane at the age of 13. As an Aboriginal person, she said, 'there wasn't the slightest possibility of getting "a better job" [even] if you stayed on at school' (*Murawina*, 1993).

Oodgeroo served in the Australian Women's Army Service (1942-1944). She published her first book of poetry, *We Are Going*, in 1964, going on to become a trailblazer in published Aboriginal writing in Australia. Oodgeroo was Queensland State Secretary of FCAATSI for ten years in the 1960s and from 1972 was managing director of the Noonuccal-Nughie Education Cultural Centre on Stradboke Island. Throughout her life, she was a renowned and admired campaigner for Aboriginal rights, promoter of Aboriginal cultural survival, educator and environmentalist. She stood as the Australian Labor Party member for the electorate of Greenslopes in the 1969 State election. Although voting rights had only been in place four years, Oodgeroo decided it was time to '[s]how our black faces in parliament.'

Oodgeroo's work has been recognised by numerous awards, including the Mary Gilmore Medal (1970), the Jessie Litchfield Award (1975), the International Acting Award and the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Award. She also held an honorary doctorate of letters (Macquarie University) and was awarded the degree of Doctor of the University from Griffith University. In 1970, Oodgeroo (under the name Kathleen Walker) was appointed as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil) for services to the community. She returned it in 1987 in protest against the forthcoming Australian Bicentenary celebrations (1988). It was around this time that she reclaimed her traditional name, Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal Tribe.

Oodgeroo originally accepted the nomination as MBE after discussing the honour with members of the Brisbane Aboriginal community who felt that acceptance of the honour could 'open doors that were still closed to the Aborigines' ('Why I am now Oodgeroo Noonuccal', *Age*, 1987). However, Oodgeroo came to reconsider her acceptance. In her own words:

'Since 1970 I have lived in the hope that the parliaments of England and Australia would confer and attempt to rectify the terrible damage done to the Australian Aborigines. The forbidding us our tribal language, the murders, the poisoning, the scalping, the denial of land custodianship, especially our spiritual sacred sites, the destruction of our sacred places especially our Bora Grounds … Next year, 1988, to me marks 200 years of rape and carnage, all these terrible things that the Aboriginal tribes of Australia have suffered without any recognition even of admitted guilt from the parliaments of England … From the Aboriginal point of view, what is there to celebrate?… I have therefore decided that as a protest against what the Bicentenary 'Celebrations' stand for, I can no longer, with a clear conscience, accept the English honour of the MBE and will be returning it to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England, through her representative, the Queensland State Governor, Sir Walter Campbell.'

Events

2001 - 2001
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

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Edited Book
The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia : Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, society and culture, Horton, David, 1994

Who's Who of Australian Women, Lofthouse, Andrea, 1982

Who's Who in Australia 1980, Draper, W. J., 1980

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http://www.abc.net.au/btn/australians/noonucca.htm

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http://www.ww2roll.gov.au/script/veteran.asp?ServiceID=A&VeteranID=97434

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Aboriginal betrayal poster : land rights (makarrata) [Poster], Kath Walker [Oodgeroo Nunuccal], 1981

Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal, custodian of the land Minjerribah [sound recording; broadcast on 3/1/1994], Stuart, Ellen and Remedio, Theresa, 1994

Shadow sister [motion picture], Frank Heimans; Geoff Burton; Jenny Baird Nussinov, 1977

Kath Walker: This is your life. Series 6 ; ep. 1 [videorecording], 1980

Dream Time Machine Time [videorecording], Joanna Penglase; Don Featherstone, 1987

Fringe Dwellers, Bereford, Bruce; Oodgeroo Nunuccal [actor and script consultant], 1986

Australian literature : an historical introduction, McLaren, John, 1989

Australian women writers : a bibliographic guide, Adelaide, Debra, 1988

Australia's unwritten history : more legends of our land, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, c1992

The dawn is at hand : poems, Kath Walker [Oodgeroo Noonuccal], 1966

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Legends of our land, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, c1990

My people, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 1990

Quandamooka, the art of Kath Walker, Ulli Beier, 1985

The Rainbow serpent, Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Kabul Oodgeroo Noonuccal, c1988

The spirit of Australia, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 1989

Towards a global village in the southern hemisphere, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 1989

Stradbroke dreamtime, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 1993

We are going, Kath Walker [Oodgeroo Noonuccal], 1964

Talkin' up to the white woman : Aboriginal women and feminism, Moreton-Robinson, Aileen, 2000

You'll be sorry!, Howard, Ann, 1990

Some Aboriginal women pathfinders : their difficulties and their achievements, Beeson, Margaret J (compiled by), [1980]

The Complete Book of Great Australian Women: Thirty-six women who changed the course of Australia, De Vries, Susanna, 2003

Newspaper Article

Kath Walker makes a stand in the sitting-down place [Oodgeroo Nunucccal], Roberts, G., 1987

The struggle goes on. -In death as in life, controversy continues to surround Oodgeroo Noonuccal-, Roberts, Greg, 1993

Kath Walker, activist, artist finds a new medium for her cause. - playing the old woman in the film <I>The Fringe Dwellers</I>, Neller, Shelley, 1985

It's 'bloody minded revenge', says Kath Walker. - Queensland State Lands Administration refuses to alter tenure of land on Moongalba Reserve-, Roberts, Greg, 1984

Utopia Australia [Series of six parts] Part 6: A republic in which we all share. -Interview with Kath Walker-, Broadbent, David, 1983

Neville Bonner takes on the role of elder, Stokes, Charles, 1982

Born to be a poet: 1982 James McAuley Memorial Lecture: Kath Walker. - Interview-, Errey, Howard, 1982

Stradbroke dreamtime and beyond: conversations with Kath Walker at Moongalba, Shiels, Rosa; Leimbach, Claire, 1981

Kath Walker and the bridge to the Dreamtime, Barnes, Mick, 1980

Why I am now Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Oodgeroo Nunuccal, 1987

Poet swaps name in protest, Roberts, Greg, 1987

Honours for Aborigines, 1971

Details of pioneers in Aboriginal movement., Horner, Jack, 1972

Aboriginal Writers in Australia, Beston, John B., 1976

Journal Article

They spoke out pretty good: the leadership of women in the Brisbane Aboriginal rights movement, 1958/ 1962, Darling, Elaine, 1996

The role of teachers in the Year of Indigenous People: Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal (Kath Walker) interviewed by Rhonda Craven, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 1994

Obituary: Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal, Collins, John, 1994

Oodgeroo as friend and artist, Beier, Ulli, 1994

Oodgeroo in China, Nicholas Jose, 1994

From Kath Walker to Oodgeroo Noonuccal?: ambiguity and assurance in My People, Eva Rask Knudsen, 1994

Oodgeroo Noonuccal/Kath Walker 1920/ 1993. [Obituary], Cochrane, Kathleen J., 1993

The poetry of Oodgeroo. -With poem "Mudrooroo Remembers Oodgeroo"-, Page, Geoff; Mudrooroo, 1993

Kath Walker: an extraordinary life. -An interview by Christine Hogan-, Hogan, Christine, 1987

I used my art for sanity's sake. -Comments on the author's drawings-, Walker, Kath [Oodgeroo Nunuccal], 1986

Kath turns to painting. -Poet Kath Walker-, 1985

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Where are my first born?: Aboriginal education. - Transcript of the Charles Joseph La Trobe Memorial Lecture for 1983-, Walker, Kath [Oodgeroo Nunuccal], 1984

A showpiece for what?: the Commonwealth Games, Tweedie, Penny, 1982

A look at the seventies, Walker, Kath [Oodgeroo Nunuccal], 1979

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Outsiders: Aboriginal women, Barwick, Diane, 1969

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Oodgeroo, a tribute, Adam Shoemaker, 1994

Resource

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Reports and resolutions, Conference on Aboriginal Affairs (8th : 1965 : Canberra, A.C.T.), 1965

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The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,
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The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
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Fryer Library, The University of Queensland
Papers related to the publishing of The Spirit of Australia, [1988?]-1989

Papers relating to Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Poems, [manuscript]

Oodgeroo Noonuccal Papers

Kath Walker interviewed

Special Collections, Academy Library, UNSW@ADFA
Craig Powell manuscript collection

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Frank Hardy, 1931-1988 [manuscript]

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Kath Walker interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection [sound recording]

The University of Melbourne, Special Collections
Aboriginal charter of rights / by Kath Walker

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[Biographical cuttings on Oodgeroo Noonuccal, poet, conservationist and Aboriginal community worker, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
Aboriginal National Theatre Trust Limited - files, 1902-1991

AIATSIS Books and Printed Material Collection
The Aussie image : the language of the image makers

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