



AIATSIS

Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Frederick McCarthy

This page commemorates the life work of Frederick David McCarthy, the foundation Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now AIATSIS).

Fred McCarthy (1905-1997) began work in 1920 at the Australian Museum, Sydney. In 1933 he enrolled at Sydney University in Anthropology under Professor A.P. Elkin. His thesis was accepted in 1935. Fred and his late wife, Elsie Bramell, were the first professionally trained anthropologists/archaeologists in an Australian Museum.

In 1937-38 he attended the 3rd Congress of Prehistorians of the Far East, in Singapore and visited Indonesia. His diaries of this visit are held in the AIATSIS Library. In 1938 the first of eight editions of *Australian Aboriginal decorative art* was published. In 1946 he co-authored with Bramell and Noone *The stone implements of Australia*. In 1948 he joined the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land led by C.P Mountford. In 1957 *Australia's Aborigines their life and culture* was published, this monograph was the first general account of the complexity of Aboriginal societies. In 1958 he studied Aboriginal art of north-western Australia and the rock art of central western NSW and published the first of four editions of *Australian Aboriginal Rock art*. In 1961 he visited Aurukun, described 43 dance grammas and collected and documented sculpture which is now in the collection of the National Museum of Australia.

In 1964 he was appointed Foundation Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, a position he held until his retirement in 1971. In his retirement he worked on the major manuscript *Artists of the Sandstone* which describes the contact ethnography of the Sydney region. The notes and drafts of this work are held in the AIATSIS Library. The final manuscript is at MS 3495. His contribution to scholarship was acknowledged in 1980 by the award of an honorary Doctor of Science degree by the Australian National University.

McCarthy's letters are deposited in the Mitchell library, Sydney. His library of books has gone to the National Library of Australia. His reprint collection is in the Division of Anthropology of the Australian Museum, Sydney.

Fred McCarthy published more than 300 papers, articles and monographs. A bibliography of his published works to 1988 has been compiled by Kate Kahn (1993) *Frederick David McCarthy: a bibliography*. Records of the Australian Museum, Supplement 17: 1-5. See also D.J Mulvaney *Sesqui-centenary to Bicentenary: reflections on a museologist*. Records of the Australian Museum, Supplement 17-24.

Drawings and diagrams are held in the AIATSIS Pictorial collection.