

# Gustavus Birch diary

**Accession number** M 779

**Date** 1873-1874

**Author / Creator**

**Birch, Gustavus John 1820-1883**

**Abstract** Original diary written by Gustavus Birch 1873-1874, with a transcript and several photographs.

**Scope and content** Gustavus Birch lived on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) for 30 years and kept this diary for the year 1873, the earliest known existing personal account of life on the island. In the diary he mentions traditional methods of fishing and food gathering, living conditions on the island, relations between non-Indigenous settlers and the Traditional Owners of the island, the Quandamooka people.

**Description** 1 diary, 3 letters, 4 photographs

**Additional format** Digital copies available for selected items

**Administrative / Biographical history** Gustavus was a brother to Charles Weldon Birch (1821-1894) a surveyor, explorer and avid plant collector, who later became a pastoralist in the Warrego area, Queensland. Many of his collections are held at the Herbarium and Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

**Access restrictions** Unrestricted access.

**Copyright status** Out of copyright.

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**Preferred citation**

M 779, Gustavus Birch diary, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

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# Series 1: Diary (1873-1874)

**Series number** 1

**Series title** Diary

**Date** 1873-1874

## Scope and content

Gustavus John Birch 1820-1883 Gustavus Birch was one of six children born to Augustus Birch and Rosa Manuela Zelling. The family moved to Australia in 1829 and the three sons Gustavus, Charles and John were educated at Sydney College and Kings School, Parramatta. Gustavus Birch was first employed by the Sydney Banking Company and later the NSW Supreme Court before coming to Queensland where he was appointed Registrar of the Supreme Court in Brisbane. He returned to NSW briefly before returning to take up the position of Registrar of the District Court at Ipswich in 1856 (Limestone). After retiring he moved to Pulan (Amity Point) on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island). This sole surviving diary contains entries from January 1873 to February 1874, and is the earliest known existing personal account of life on the island. In the diary Birch describes traditional methods of fishing and food gathering, living conditions on the island, relations between non-Indigenous settlers and the traditional owners of the island, the Quandamooka people. Birch later returned to his family home in Sydney and died of cancer of the jaw in 1883.

## Author / Creator

Birch, Gustavus John, 1820-1883

## Description

**Description** 1 diary (& transcript)

**Locate** OMBOX Box 5137

## Access

**Access restrictions** Unrestricted access

**Copyright status** Out of copyright

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## Items in this series:

## Diary (1873-1874)



**Unit ID** M779/1

**Date** 1873-1874

### Scope and content

This diary contains entries from January 1873 to February 1874, and is the earliest known existing personal account of life on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke island). In the diary Birch describes traditional methods of fishing and food gathering, living conditions on the island, relations between non-Indigenous settlers and the traditional owners of the island, the Quandamooka people. Birch was known as an educated and polite man, who spoke enthusiastically on his passion for local natural history and botany. He kept a menagerie of pets, including birds and reptiles and his entries contain many Aboriginal words that have been faithfully recorded. This diary has been cited in several significant works, including

- [Quandamooka Native Title Determination](#) 4th of July 2011
- Folkmanova, Veronica (2016). *The oil of the Dugong : towards a cross-cultural history of an Indigenous medicine* (Doctoral dissertation, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia)

Note: Many entries contain notes which have been taken from '[A Dictionary of arts, manufacturing & mines](#)' by Andrew Ure, 1840

### Author / Creator

Birch, Gustavus John, 1820-1883

### Description

**Description** 1 diary

**Additional format** Digital copy available

[View the items](#)

[View the item](#)

## Transcript (1981)

**Unit ID** M779/2

**Date** 1981

### Scope and content

Transcript and covering letter by Janet Finch, nee Gibbs, Birch's grand-niece. Finch has added explanatory foot notes at the end of the transcript.

### Author / Creator

Birch, Gustavus John, 1820-1883

Description

**Description** 1 transcript (123 pages)

(1 digital)

## Series 2: Correspondence (1981-1985)

**Series number** 2

**Series title** Correspondence

**Date** 1981-1985

### Scope and content

Two items of correspondence that relate to the transcription and loan of Gustavus Birch's diary.

Description

**Description** 2 letters

**Locate** OMBOX 5137

Items in this series:

## Note (26 January 1981)

**Unit ID** M779/3

**Date** 26 January 1981

### Scope and content

Biographical note signed by Birch's grand-niece Janet Finch describing her great-uncle.

### Author / Creator

Finch, Janet Edith Rosa, 1905-1982

## Description

**Description** 1 covering note

## Letter (28 May 1985)

**Unit ID** M779/4

**Date** 28 May 1985

### Scope and content

Letter from Jeanette Covacevich, Queensland Museum to Ian Finch thanking him for the loan of the diary which has been photocopied, and enclosing an enlargement of a photograph [Gustavus Birch].

### Author / Creator

Queensland Museum

## Description

**Description** 1 letter

## Series 3: Photographs (1830-1860)

**Series number** 3

**Series title** Photographs

**Date** 1830-1860

**Scope and content**

Photographs of Gustavus Birch and his mother Rosa Manuella Birch nee Zelling.

Description

**Description** 4 photographs

**Locate** OMBOX 5137

Items in this series:

**Gustavus Birch (1850-1860)**



**Unit ID** M779/5

**Date** 1850-1860

**Scope and content**

Daguerreotype image of Gustavus Birch, as a young man, taken by his brother-in-law William Gibbes, solicitor and amateur photographer. It is mounted in a hinged leather case, which has been lined with red velvet, and the outer case has been delicately tooled.

**Author / Creator**

Gibbes, William, 1828-1877

Description

**Description** 1 photograph

**Additional format** Digital copy available

[View the items](#)

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## Gustavus Birch (1850-1860)

**Unit ID** M779/6

**Date** 1850-1860

### Scope and content

Black and white copy print, an enlargement of the daguerreotype image.

### Author / Creator

Gibbes, William, 1828-1877

## Description

**Description** 1 photograph (black and white)

## Gustavus Birch (1870-1883)



**Unit ID** M779/7

**Date** 1870-1883

### Scope and content

Carte de viste studio portrait of an elderly Gustavus Birch. Captioned on rear: Brother of John Anthony Birch, Rosa Pownall, Charlotte Lumsdaine, Dorothy Gibbes, Charles Weldon Birch. The latter & Gustavus did not marry. John died young but left issue.

## Description

**Description** 1 photograph

**Additional format** Digital copy available

[View the items](#)

[View the item](#)

## Rosa Birch (1830-1850)

**Unit ID** M779/8

**Date** 1830-1850

### Scope and content

Colour photocopy of an image of Rosa Manuella Birch, nee Zelling 1787-1854, mother to Gustavus Birch.

Description

**Description** 1 photocopy

(2 digital)