

# JACK PATTEN

## Biography

Jack Patten was an Aboriginal civil rights leader in the 20th century. He used his public speaking skills, writing, and organisation to advocate for Aboriginal rights and freedoms. Over his lifetime, Jack had many achievements that paved the way for Aboriginal Australians and inspired future generations.

## Early life

John (Jack) Pattern was a Norta Norta man, born on the 27th of March 1905 at Mamoa, New South Wales. Known as Jack, he was the eldest of six children. His parents, John and Christina Patten, made sure that Jack and his siblings grew up understanding the importance of education. Jack was educated at the mission school at Cummeragunja, and later, at state schools in Tumbarumba and West Wyalong.



Jack wanted to join the Australian Navy; however, he was denied entry because of his Aboriginal heritage. At the time, Aboriginal Australians were not allowed to serve in the armed forces. So instead, Jack went on to become a professional boxer. By 1927, he was fighting under the name 'Ironbark' with a troupe of travelling fighters.

While touring in Casino, Jack met a Bundjalung woman named Selina Avery. They married in 1931 and went on to have seven children together.



Jack and Selina Patten from the Patten Family Archives

## Political career

During the 1930s, Jack and his family relocated to La Perouse, a suburb in Sydney. Each Sunday, Jack delivered speeches at the Sydney Domain. He was a persuasive speaker who drew public attention to key issues regarding Aboriginal rights.

During this time, Jack met William Ferguson, another prominent Aboriginal leader. In 1937, Jack and William launched the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA). One of the association's key objectives was to secure full citizen rights for Aboriginal Australians.



First Aboriginal Day of Mourning Protest 1938



APA Executive Committee 1938

On the 26th of January 1938, Jack and William organised the first Aboriginal Day of Mourning. Many people and community leaders gathered on this day to protest the treatment of Aboriginal people across the country. In his protest speech, Jack highlighted “the frightful conditions” that Aboriginal people were experiencing. He asked that his people were “not left behind in Australia’s march to progress”. Some of the key changes that he appealed for were “full citizen rights including old-age pensions, maternity bonus, relief work when unemployed, and the right to

a full Australian education for our children". Jack also drafted a 10 point plan for citizen rights for Aboriginal people. It was presented to Joseph Lyons, who was the 10th Prime Minister of Australia.

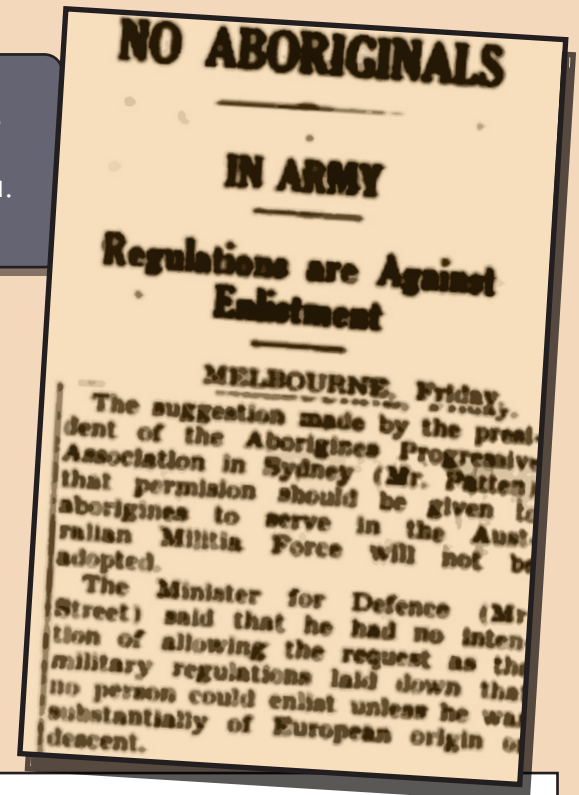
### Later Life

In 1939, Jack successfully campaigned for Aboriginal Australians to serve in the armed forces. In 1940, he enlisted and travelled to the Middle East. While serving, Jack was injured and returned home in 1942. He settled in Melbourne, where he established the Australian Aboriginal Elders Council of Victoria. Jack died at the age of 52 on the 12th of October 1957.



Jack Patten portrait  
from the Patten Family Archives

President Jack Patten reads the resolution,  
1938.



Newspaper article from The Argus 1939

### Legacy

Jack created a strong legacy that led to many Aboriginal rights and freedoms. His ongoing activism inspired a new generation of leaders, who continued his fight throughout the 20th century. Jack is notably remembered as the founding father of modern Aboriginal political actions.