

## **FACTSHEET**

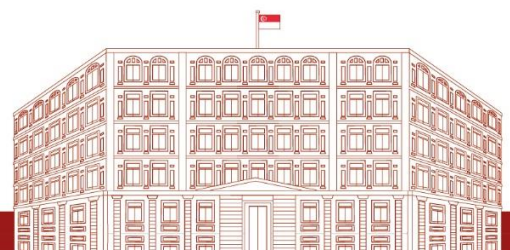
### **NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD: PRESERVING SINGAPORE'S HERITAGE AND HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

The National Library and the National Archives are two arms of the National Library Board (NLB) that promote an appreciation of Singapore's history and heritage. The National Library is Singapore's knowledge institution, responsible for the preservation of our cultural and literary heritage as well as the provision of trusted reference services. The National Archives of Singapore (NAS) is the keeper of archival materials of national and historical significance.

#### **Community-driven digital projects**

2 The National Library has been working closely with various communities on digital projects in vernacular languages. Together with the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations and the National University of Singapore's Department of Chinese Studies, we launched the Singapore Biographical Database of Chinese Personalities ([sbdb.nus.edu.sg](http://sbdb.nus.edu.sg)) website on 1 February 2019. It is a digital humanities website that maps out the relationships of 200 Chinese men and women who had made significant contributions to Singapore from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. 200 personalities were selected, in conjunction with the commemoration of Singapore's Bicentennial, to look back at 200 years of the founding of modern Singapore. These include Eu Tong Sen, Chew Joo Chiat and Lim Bo Seng. In line with NLB's aim to encourage awareness and appreciation of Singapore's history and heritage, the website provides digitised historical content for further research on Singapore's social history.

3 The Digital Archive of Singapore Tamil Theatre is a collaboration between NLB and the Tamil Digital Heritage Group (TDHG), and was launched in November 2017. Theatre-related materials such as photos, posters, scripts and recordings were digitised as part of this project and are now available on our online portal, National Online Repository of the Arts ([eresources.nlb.gov.sg/arts/website/Common/Homepage.aspx](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/arts/website/Common/Homepage.aspx)). Continuing this collaboration, the TDHG will launch the Digital Archive of Singapore Tamil Dance project in November 2019. It aims to create a repository of materials on Indian dance in Singapore to preserve and promote Tamil arts and cultural heritage. We have received strong support from dance practitioners and arts groups, and are in the midst of collecting materials such as audio and video recordings, programme booklets



and photographs on Indian dance in Singapore. For a start, the focus will be on classical Indian dance, not limited to the Tamil language.

4 Inspired by the collaboration between NLB and the Tamil Digital Heritage Group, theatre practitioners within the Malay community also welcomed a similar initiative to document the rich and varied Malay theatre heritage in Singapore. Work is underway to gather materials from key Malay theatre groups and practitioners. The Digital Archive of Singapore Malay Theatre is slated to be launched in late 2019. These digital archives will serve as an educational resource for practitioners, a reference source for scholars, a teaching tool in the classroom, as well as a historical account for posterity and a contribution to Singapore's national arts resources.

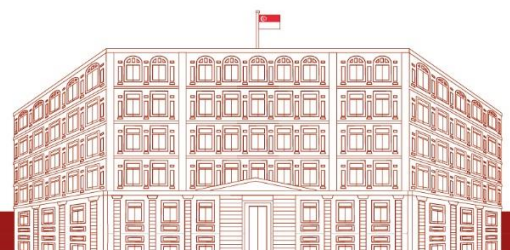
### **Igniting interest in the history of early Singapore**

5 Of the many collections in the National Library, the Rare Materials collection, which comprises over 15,000 items, is a source of valuable research materials on Singapore and Southeast Asia. To enable the public to learn more about this collection, the National Library will be releasing 25 videos showcasing the rare materials. In the videos, librarians from the National Library will highlight significant rare materials such as *Munajathu Thirattu*, the oldest Tamil book on Islamic religious poetry held by the National Library. Other precious materials such as the *Hikayat Abdullah*, which was printed in 1849 and is one of the most important records of the socio-political landscape in Singapore and the region at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, will also be showcased. These videos will be released fortnightly from April 2019 on the National Library's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/NationalLibrarySG>) and YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/nationallibrarysg>).

6 As part of Singapore's Bicentennial celebration, The National Library and National Archives of Singapore will jointly launch an exhibition titled *On Paper: Singapore before 1867* in August this year. The exhibition, which will be housed at the level 10 Gallery of the National Library Building, traces the history of Singapore from its earliest records on maps and sea-charts, to its establishment as a British Crown Colony on 1 April 1867. On display will be paintings, maps, archival records, and manuscripts from the National Library and Archives' collections, as well as from overseas institutions. These exhibits offer a glimpse into the daily life of various communities on the island. Through the exhibition, we hope that visitors will be able to engage with Singapore's early history and discover NLB's collection.

### **Crowd-sourcing efforts**

7 As part of its on-going efforts to make archival materials more accessible and discoverable, NAS launched the Citizen Archivist website (<http://www.nas.gov.sg/citizenarchivist>) in



2015 to enable the public to contribute to the description of photographs and transcription of documents, oral history recordings and old record labels. As of February 2019, over 28,000 pages of the archives have been transcribed, and more than 1,800 old photographs have been captioned by about 450 volunteers. Through this initiative, NAS hopes to promote greater interest in Singapore's history and encourage more Singaporeans to connect with our heritage.

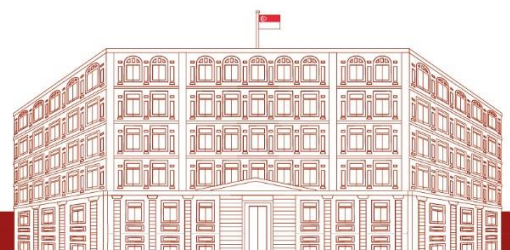
8 Riding on this success to further our crowd-sourcing efforts, we will launch a '#LibraryArchivesSG' Instagram campaign in October 2019 to encourage Singaporeans to share their personal collections. These can include historical materials related to Singapore's past, such as old documents, maps, photographs, diaries and letters. The aim of this campaign is to encourage Singaporeans to contribute to the collective memory of Singapore, as well as to enrich NLB's collection on Singapore's history and heritage.

### **Stories of Yesteryear**

9 Part of NAS' rich collection of archival materials are oral history recordings. We aim to build a comprehensive oral history collection that will serve as the social memory of the people. In line with this, NAS had started a community-driven initiative in 2017 to form four Community Oral History Committees (COHCs). The Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian COHCs aim to build up and preserve Singapore's collective memories by working closely with community stakeholders to further develop the national oral history collection, ensuring that it is comprehensive, multi-focal in scope, and representative of Singapore's society.

10 Since June 2017, oral histories have been collected across the communities and there are plans for more, as the committees engage the help of more volunteers. As of 31 December 2018, 74 volunteers have been trained to conduct oral history interviews and 67 interviews have been conducted by them, totaling over 160 hours. Some examples of the oral history volunteers include:

- Sushma Somasekharan is an auditor and classical Indian vocalist who is a volunteer with the Indian COHC. She interviewed Dr Bhagya Murthy, who had taught her classical music when she was four years old. During the interview, they reminisced the music lessons they had.
- Nanette Westerhout is a retiree who is a volunteer with the Eurasian COHC. In one of her interviews, she interviewed Mrs Eleanor Ballard, who had saved her European friend from danger during the Maria Hertogh riots.
- Julina Khusaini is the General Manager of the Malay Heritage Foundation who volunteers with the Malay COHC. She interviewed Hj Fadzillah Fadzil, a veteran technical producer in Singapore's broadcast industry. He shared many memories of the evolution of the TV industry, and also of meeting key personalities in Singapore's history in the course of his career.



- Grace Chan, a former teacher, conducted an interview with Mr Chow Li Liang, former Managing Director of Union Books Co. Mr Chow spoke about his career and how he had first landed a job in the company's Hong Kong branch, before moving to the branches in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. He was responsible for distributing books from Taiwan and China, and had organised book fairs in Singapore. He also published Chinese textbooks at the Education Publication Bureau for seven years.

## **Bringing our archives into the future**

11 The new NAS building at Canning Rise will reopen in April 2019 after being closed for a year and a half for renovation. The revamped building will also now meet the Buildings Control Authority's Green Mark standards. The spaces in the refreshed building will be made more accessible to persons with disabilities, with a new lift and levelled floors. To provide insights into the handling of historical materials, NAS also plans to conduct group tours of its conservation laboratories. There will be regular talks conducted by staff such as archivists and conservators in the Archives Unlocked series, where they will share what they do at work. In the Archives Invites series, guest speakers will be invited to share the importance of archival materials in their work. There will also be new microfilm readers, which will enable researchers to obtain digitised copies of the content viewed. On top of the Archives Reading Room, members of the public will also be able to access the Oldham Theatre at level 3.

12 Our subsidiary, the Asian Film Archive, will hold regular screenings of interesting Asian films at the 134-seat theatre, equipped with state-of-the-art film and 4K digital projection. There will be a mix of old and contemporary films, as well as curated programmes that bring together different genres, from the classics to rare and less accessible films. There will also be three new oral history recording studios situated in the refreshed NAS building to facilitate the recording of these important oral accounts.

13 To improve access to NAS' records, we will be launching a new e-Request system. The e-Request system allows users to place requests to view or ask for reproduction of copies online. It will replace the manual request forms that used to be in the Archives Reading Room. Users can search for archival materials on the Archives Online portal and add them into their online cart. The e-Request system will enable self-service, and minimise the waiting time for the retrieval of records.

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