

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra. And today I'm joined by Dr. Rebecca Fleming, Senior Advisor of Digitisation Projects in the Collections Branch at the National Library of Australia to talk about the phenomenal aviator Maude "Lores" Bonney. So first, could you give us an introduction to what she's known for?

RF: Lores is known as one of our pioneer aviators, and I'm so excited to tell you her story. Her first flight ever was in 1928, and it was her first time in an aircraft and she flew with the aviator and First World War pilot, Bert Hinkler. And Bert actually was the first person to fly from England to Australia, and he was a relative of Lores's husband. She ended up at a social gathering with him and he offered to take her up in the air. And from that moment on, she fell in love with flying and her first flying lesson was in 1930 in August. She was age 33 and by November she was going solo. And from that moment on, she started setting records. So in 1931 on Christmas day, she wanted to spend the day with her husband, but she also wanted to spend Boxing Day lunch with her father. And she lived in Brisbane and her father lived in Wangaratta. And the only way she could do that was by flying to Wangaratta. And in the process of doing that, she held the record for the longest one-day flight by an airwoman. So that was the start of her long-distance flying career. And she just kept setting records from there. So in 1932, she went 'round Australia. She was the first woman to circumnavigate the Australian mainland by air. And even while she was doing that, she had in mind another record. So Amy Johnson had flown from England to Australia and she was the first woman to do that. And Lores had in mind that she wanted to be the first woman to fly from Australia to England. And there were other female aviators out there. She knew were thinking about that. So in 1933, she did just that. She flew from Australia to England. And I think we'll get into that story a little bit later. And not satisfied with that journey in 1937, she flew from Brisbane to Capetown, to South Africa. And in doing that, she became the first person to fly from Australia to South Africa. And another interesting story, if people know aviation history, 1937 was a particularly significant year as it was also the year that Amelia Earhart disappeared. So Lores was flying in the same period of that. And there's evidence that she wrote to Amelia. So she knew her, and there was a big community of women pilots.

AT: Now I'd like to circle back to your job title that I mentioned earlier and how this relates to why you're here talking about this particular person, because it's actually come up on previous episodes, how important digitization is in making resources more available to more people. So can you tell us why you're here?

RF: Well, I love my job, can I just say. I'm a curator and a historian, and my job is at the very start of the digitization process in selecting material for recommendation for digitization. And can I say that the team that is involved in digitization in the National Library, it's a lot of different people. So we have people in collection care, collection management, and their job is to make sure things are findable. So they do the amazing finding aids and resources so that people can search and find for the items we digitize. There's also a big team of people, photographers, people that work the scanners that make the digitization happen, our rights management team, make sure that all the rights are okay for them to go up online. So it's a big whole-of-library effort, and I'm just so pleased and proud to be a part of it. So Trove is this amazing platform, and it's a partnership between the National Library and many, many other partner organizations. So state libraries, museums, and it's one place. It's a one-stop shop where you can find digitized records, like diaries and manuscripts, and also many, many digitized newspapers. And a lot of people use Trove for the digitized newspapers. But it's essentially a website that you can get in and search records from lots of different institutions.

And I like to think of Trove as being collections in conversation with each other. So where before you might have to go, for example, to look at some of Lores's material, you might need to go to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney and the National Library in Canberra. Well, now you can find a lot of that material online through Trove. Trove started in 2009. I was doing my PhD just before 2009 and Trove would have been amazing. And I'll tell you why. Digitization is just incredibly exciting, and it's exciting for historians. Any historian you speak to will probably tell you how much they love Trove, but I love it because it gets primary sources out to everyone.

Everybody can access it through Trove. And a lot of people know Trove for the newspaper collections, but more and more we're putting up manuscript collections like Lores's diaries and other letters. And it's very exciting for me, particularly the primary source material can sometimes feel like you're in conversation with people from the past because you're reading their diary. It's very personal. It's very immediate. And that really special experience that in the past, you had to be a researcher or a historian and you'd get the reader's card and you'd go into the process of going to the library and order the material up. And it was a bit of a big process, but you'd get that really special moment when you are reading the words from the people in the diaries. And it was quite limited to those who could travel, but now Trove gives everybody that special experience. And, and all you have to do is just get on the website and start searching.

AT: So one of the things that is really cool about Trove, like you said, is it's bringing these disparate pieces together in the sense of, if some of Lores's papers are held by one institution and some of them are held by another institution, you can't really get the whole picture, whereas something like Trove gives you that. And something that you've been working on, as I understand it, is her diaries. So what do her diaries tell us about her life and her views and her story?

RF: They tell us so much. And yeah, as you say, they're digitized online. There's also many other collections of Lores's stuff. So you can see photographs of her with her plane. You can see, the Powerhouse Museum has a compass that she borrowed from another aviator, Freda Thompson. And you can see that online. You can see so much of Lores's life and her aviation career just by getting on Trove. And her diaries tell us a lot about, first of all, the adventures she had, but also who she was as a person. And the thing about research is we all bring something to it. So what I'm encouraging people to do is get on there and read her diaries yourself. They're really readable. Sometimes people's handwriting can be a bit hard to work out. Lores had beautiful handwriting, even though often, I think she was writing in the cockpit and she still had this amazingly new handwriting. So get in there and discover things for yourself, is my big recommendation, but what I found reading her diaries, she's a determined and incredibly resilient person. She was curious. She loved exploring. And you see lots in both her diary of her trip to South Africa and her trip to England, she stops. It's not just, obviously she had to stop the plane, stops along the way to refuel and for mechanical repairs. And in doing that, she explores, she writes of landing and going to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. And it's funny people still sometimes, when women travel on their own, there's sometimes a little bit of hesitation. "Oh, you're going solo" or "you're not traveling with anyone." Well, Lores was out there literally flying herself, landing the plane and just exploring the Valley of the Kings in the 1930s. It's incredible.

She was quite fashion-conscious. So she would write about what she bought, buy some silk or other clothing. She often wrote about what dress she was wearing, if she went out at night with people she met wherever she was staying. She was quite a fashion-conscious as well. And yeah, she had a lot of late nights and she'd say, "Oh, I got home at 3 AM. It was a bit too late." And she was very social, but sometimes she writes about being lonely. And you do see that on the trip to South Africa, she got a little bit frustrated with her plane and she missed her husband and she writes that too. So what I feel like in reading her diary is, you get the sense of her as a whole person. And she's more than a first, she's more than a name on a page. You can really see her personality and her range of feelings in these incredible adventures that she had. And she could be really hard on herself. So I was reading a section where she talked about on her flight to South Africa in 1937. She wrote, and I might quote her here, "I'm very worried about the plane. I feel I have let my beloved down badly, which gets me down in turn, first for buying the plane and second for not putting on a better show." And to think that she thought it wasn't a good enough show. She was the first person to fly from Australia to South Africa, but she had these really challenging thoughts as well. And you see that in the diary. And that's some of the really special things about reading manuscripts and manuscript collections. And if we look at it from the key themes that emerged for me when reading her diary, how detailed her preparations were. So the diary start before the journey even begins. And we see her talking about trying to raise money for promotions and she talks to the

Ovaltine people trying to get sponsorship deals and she gets frustrated as well when she feels that people, she's not getting enough media attention. And she was doing a lot of work in promotion. She underwent training and to being an aircraft mechanic at Qantas before she undertook her Australia to England journey, so she could be better prepared to repair her own aircraft or to oversee other people that might be helping her repair an aircraft. She learned how to navigate blind, and that means using your instruments. So if you're flying in cloud, I've spoken to other pilots in the past and they call it the leans. You feel like the plane is leaning when you can't see the horizon. So that's why, particularly for long-distance flying, you really need to be able to read your instruments and trust your instruments to know that the plane is level because your body might lie to you. So Lores knew that and she did the training so that she was well prepared.

She wasn't a perfect aviator. Nobody is, but she did do a lot of preparation and you can see that in her diary. Her diary, as I said, it's very readable. It's very immediate and you feel like you're in the cockpit with her sometimes. She mentions when she's afraid and when she's worried about certain flying situations. So in 1937, she's talking about an airfield that's surrounded by mountains. And she says, "it's situated in a sort of saucer, very high mountains all round. And I'm not at all happy about the morning's takeoff." It's like a hook. You just want to keep reading on. That's the immediacy of her diary where you're thinking, what will happen the next day? And you keep reading it to find out. I think the contrast of her experiences as well were fascinating to me, the long haul flights from extreme danger. She's flying through storms. Sometimes the landmarks aren't visible. So she gets lost on occasion. And these are very anxious moments. You only have a finite amount of fuel. And if you can't find land or a suitable runway, it's extremely dangerous. So there's these moments where she flies for hours and hours at a time, and then she lands. And for example, she lands in Singapore and later that day, she's going shopping and she goes on these adventures to well-known clubs and to bars and dinner. So there's this extreme life of danger, but also tourism. And it's a really fascinating experience that she's having. And she writes about in such detail.

There's extreme weather events as well. Her first plane was a Tiger Moth. It was exposed. She called her plane My Little Ship. And so she was suffering from extreme cold, particularly I think in her first flight around Australia, she realised how cold the aircraft could get, but also flying in India, she talks about the heat. She had to land a plane essentially because it was too hot for her and then pour water on her wrist and neck to try and recover from the extreme heat in the aircraft. As I said, there were plenty of dangers and she writes about those in her diary. There was the potential to get lost, to hit mountains, to run into bad weather, to run out of fuel, mechanical failure. There are a few moments in her diary where, she lands the plane and the mechanics look at it and she realises that there were some really tenuous mechanical faults and they could have been quite bad. And she is often a bit relieved, but then she repairs the aircraft, and helps to get it repaired and moves on. A lot of the time she was flying through storms. And there was one particular moment in April, in 1933, where she was flying around an island near Thailand. And I might just quote Lores here because it's such a beautiful diary. It's worth quoting her at length.

So I'll just tell you this little story quoting Lores about this moment she had on the flight from Australia to England. She wrote, "Bad weather ahead. The weather grew steadily worse. I kept out to sea, then I was enveloped in it and as I was now flying very low I was afraid of barging into the many small islands that dot the sea. I flew round and round trying to get back to land and went through terrific weather. As it was lightening very badly ahead and as black as ink and it was now 5.30 and the light bad, thought it was best to land near a native village. I circled several times and decided the beach was best as there was too many bushes on the land there was several bunch of buffalo on the beach and I side slipped down between the herds and was just flattening out when I noticed the herds of buffalo walking right into the path of the plane. It was not possible to use the engine again as there was not enough room as I landed I tried to swing a little to the left but unfortunately the beach sloped away, as I landed the wing caught the water and swung her round, the next thing I felt was the wheels dragging and big spray came up I felt a terrific bang on my forehead and my face was under water, I tried frantically to get the pin out of my harness but for several jerks it would not release, then at last it came away, fortunately I was only under water as the waves broke so that I was able to breathe

between times. I scrambled out and when I looked at the machine I thought my heart would break. I just sat on the beach my clothes soaked and looked at my little ship.”

So what happened after that is that some people on the island that she landed on came and although neither of them could speak each other's language, Lores managed to ask the people with a lot of hand gestures, I think, to help her move the plane. So they actually pull the plane out of the water, flip it the right way around. And then all of these people really helped Lores and they invited her back to their homes. They offered her food and then they found somebody who spoke English. And I believe based on what she'd written in her diary, somebody from the village actually walked through the jungle through the night to a different location to find somebody who spoke English. And they came back and Lores was able to tell them what had happened to the plane. And at one point she'd actually set up a lot of wood and she was going to create a smoke signal. But as I say, they found somebody for her. And then this other dramatic thing happened where the person that came to help her said that there was a ship coming. So the ship could take her aircraft somewhere else to get repaired, but it was coming the next day and they didn't know how long until another ship would come. So they loaded the aircraft up onto a little boat and they basically sent it down the river and Lores raced ahead to meet the captain of the ship. And the captain said they were leaving in an hour and her aircraft wasn't there yet. So she had to negotiate with the captain to hold the ship so they could get her aircraft on board, which they ultimately did. And the aircraft was repaired elsewhere and she carried on her journey. That little stop where she essentially crashed the aircraft. It was quite badly damaged. So it took a lot of money and time to repair, but she was able

to continue the journey to England. But that little asterisk is why sometimes she's not noted as the first to fly solo from Australia to England because she just had a little stopping point where the aircraft was taken by ship somewhere else for a part of the journey.

But that was probably one of the most dramatic moments in her diary. There's another one where she's talking about leaving Constantinople and she's circling for five hours to try and get over these mountains. And then again, she's enveloped in a storm and she flies around and then she eventually fails to land and has to go back. And that happens a few times where she's worried about the weather or she can't get around the weather. But yeah, as I say, it's worth just reading the diary yourself because there are so many moments in there where you feel that anxiety and then relief and the immediacy of her diary is very clear. Also the support and hospitality she received on the way. And there's one particular story I'll tell you where the people where she landed really went out of their way to help her. And that was quite amazing. And also the engagement with the aviation community. She often meets pilots on the ground and sometimes they help her and say, “Oh, you know, this is the best, best way to get ‘round” or give her tips on how to get over particularly difficult, difficult areas. Both with women and men. You can see that in her diary, in the photographs, there's many photographic records on on Trove and in the Australian Women Pilots Association diaries, there's scrapbooks, but also it's important to remember that class and wealth and privilege are an element of this story. Her husband bought her two planes. They were a wealthy family. So she was able to undertake these journeys because of her wealth and her privilege. And that's, I think something important to remember when you're reading the diaries, she came from a particular context. And it's also, as I said earlier, she's flying at the same time as Amelia Earhart. And I was surprised that I didn't know her name. A lot of people know Amelia Earhart's name, perhaps because she disappeared. But there was a whole community of women flyers out there. And I think it's worth knowing their stories too.

AT: And so when we're talking about other women aviators like Freda Thompson, she is far from the only one whose papers you can find in not just the National Library's collections, but also on Trove more broadly.

RF: That's right. So one of the other amazing collections we have is the records of the Australian Women Pilots Association. And here I have to acknowledge the generous support of the Dick and Pip Smith Foundation. They donated funds so we could digitize this collection and what a special collection it is. Much of

it is press clippings. But through it, you see articles of so many different women who were flying, women from Lores's period, but also beyond in the 1950s and '60s. And you see this developing community of women pilots. One of the articles is written by Nancy Bird Walton. And some of you might know of Nancy Bird Walton. I think many people will soon know her name because it will be the name of the new Western Sydney airport in New South Wales in Australia. So it's great to see one of these women pilots acknowledged in that way. So Nancy Bird Walton writes an article about women in the industry at the time. And she says, "women in wartime as ferry pilots prove they have the courage and capacity to master the air, but women in peacetime have a constant uphill battle to make a success of a flying career." And I think that's a really interesting point. We often tell the story of women in wartime and then sometimes it just slips off after that, but these women were making aviation careers. There's a story to be told after 1945.

And you can see that story in these scrapbooks, people like Hazel Roberts, who flew her plane from her 55,000-acre property. And at the time of the newspaper clipping, she had done 700 hours flying time. Or Evelyn Follett who saved her money as a secretary. And this would be to pay for flying lessons and that might be a week's salary and she saved it up, and in 1930, opened a flying school with her brother, which she ran as director for more than 40 years. And it became Adstra Airways. And the curated press clippings not only tell us the story of so many different women, and again, I encourage people to get on Trove and have a look and find some women's stories for yourself. So the curated press clippings also show us what the members of the association were interested in, which included news of women pilots overseas, as well as Australia. We learn what was important to them as they were developing careers as women pilots in the aviation industry, Australia. So curated press clippings can be really important from that point of view, but there's also of course, images and one of the scrapbooks in particular, somebody has deliberately got images and summaries of women pilots for people like us, for the future. So we can understand who they were and why they were important in the industry. And Lores is one of those people mentioned in that collection.

Now, there's another wonderful collection on Trove, which is the photographic collection. And as I said earlier, you can see photographs of Lori with her aircraft. There's a collection called the E.A. Crome collection, which has so many photos of the aviation industry in Australia. Photographs of people that you'd expect like Charles Kingsford Smith, but also people like Bert Hinkler, who was the first person to fly from England to Australia, as I said, and who took Lores on her first flight. Well, Bert unfortunately died. He died in an aircraft crash in 1933. And there are actually photos of his funeral and sadly the aircraft that crashed in this collection. So it's amazing the kind of spider webs you can find in Trove where once you start the research, you can start to see how people interacted with each other through all of the different collections that are connected in Trove. And the E.A. Crome collection is really beautiful one for people who are interested in aviation. And it does have a photograph of Lores in it too, as well as many other women pilots of the era. So it's definitely worth exploring if you have time.

AT: Now, apart from exploring Trove, and keep in mind, if you're searching for her, her legal name is Maude Bonney, so that is how it is tagged. I'm sure if you look for Lores, you will find it as well, as well as these other amazing women that we've mentioned. Trove is also always looking for volunteer text correctors, because even our amazing digitization teams need a bit of support sometimes. But apart from Trove, there are also some books that have been published about her, including through the National Library. So I can't have a conversation with somebody who works at a library and not ask for book recommendations.

RF: Yes, good point. There is a beautiful book written by Kristen Alexander, and it's called *Taking Flight: Lores Bonney's Extraordinary Flying Career*. And it was published by the National Library Publishing. And there's another book called written by Terry Gwynn-Jones called *Pioneer Aviator*. And that was written some years before, but it's also a very interesting book. And it has, for example, reproduced Lori's log book. So you can see the exact details of where and when she flew. And if you do happen to be in the library, we have more items from Lores's collection, which aren't digitized. So the diaries are digitized, but there's always more work

to do. So there are other elements of her collection, which can be viewed at the library itself. So if you do happen to come to the National Library, you can look at her other records as well. And yes, I should say the volunteers, I believe they call themselves, do an incredible job. So we have handwritten text correction, which is the computer generated text, which can read the handwritten writing and then give you a transcript essentially. Now that's particularly exciting because it means it makes it searchable. So there's even more of that connecting the collections with each other once you can search for things. But it's not perfect. Of course. So people go in and they correct. And you can sign up and as you're reading through something, you can just go to the side and correct the text for future readers. And a lot of people on Trove love doing that. And I think I saw something like, "Oh, the volunteer Trove text directors have corrected over 513 million lines of text." So I think it's quite addictive if you like doing it. I think people do a lot of it. So that's something you can do if you want to contribute to Trove, but also I just encourage people to go on and explore. And if you're looking up Lores's diary, as you say, good point, her name was Maude. That she didn't like the name Maude, so she changed it to Dolores. And that's why she called herself Lores, but you can search for Maude Bonney and then just click on the tab that says diaries, letters, archives, and it should pop up for you. And then just explore, you can explore Trove by the different categories. There's lots of stories on there as well, which tell you more about the collections. There's sections that tell you what's new on Trove. We're always digitizing. So there's always something new, either digitized by us or by our partner collections. There's always something new to explore on Trove. You have a lot of fun.

AT: Join us next time on the infinite women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.