

# Mowanjum

1956 – 1972

**Other Names:** • Presbyterian Aborigines Mission, Mowanjum

## Details

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Mowanjum was established near Derby in 1956 when the Presbyterian church moved residents of Wotjulum mission to a new site in Yampi Sound near Derby. Until 1963, children at Mowanjum were under the guardianship of the Commissioner of Native Welfare. In 1971 it housed 65 school-age children. Mowanjum became a self-governing community in 1972, and in 1979 they moved to the Gibb River Road near Derby.

On 25 September 1956 the Presbyterian Church began transferring people from Wotjulum to a new site called Mowanjum, at the head of the Coppermine Creek in Yampi Sound near Derby. The name, 'Mowanjum' means 'settled at last' and reflects the fact that the Worrorra, Wunambal and Ngarinyin peoples had been shifted around from place to place in response to changing government policies.

Until 1963, children at Mowanjum were under the guardianship of the Commissioner of Native Welfare.

In 1971, it was reported that 65 school-age children lived at Mowanjum, with 45 children going to the Primary School and 20 to the High School in Derby.

The Mowanjum Community Inc was established on 5 October 1972. From 1972 onwards children at Mowanjum were sometimes placed under the 'care' of the departments responsible for child welfare, and the government worked with the community to address issues such as truancy and youth drinking.

The community lived at the Mowanjum mission site until 1979, when they moved to a new site 10 kilometres from Derby along the Gibb River Road.

In government records, Mowanjum is spelled in various ways including Mowajum; Mowjum; Mawanjin; Mowanjup.

## Gallery

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**Mowanjum picnic 1969**

**Description:** 'Mowanjum picnic 1969' is an image published in *Mowanjum: 50 years community history* (p.106). The caption reads, 'Going for a picnic from Old Site in 1969 on the trailer pulled by the old Massey Ferguson tractor known to the children as *Bug Bug* because of the slow putt putt of the engine'. The image shows approximately 15 people, mostly children and teenagers, sitting on the bed of a ute driving along a sand track. One of the passengers is playing a guitar.

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## Map West Kimberleys

**Description:** 'Map West Kimberleys' is an image published in *Mowanjum: 50 years community history* (p.23). It shows a map of the West Kimberley region, with names of communities and landmarks along the coast from Bigge Island to King Sound identified.



## Mowanjum community gate 1970s

**Description:** 'Mowanjum community gate 1970s' is an image published in *Mowanjum: 50 years community history* (p.115). The caption reads, 'Mowanjum front gate, 1973-74'. It shows a tall metal gate with a left-hand and right-hand entrance/exit over a red sandy road, with 'Mowanjum Community' written in red letters on white signage. A few buildings are just visible through the trees behind the gate.

## More info

### Chronology

- Port George IV Mission (1912 - 1951)
  - Wotjulum (1951 - 1956)
- **Mowanjum (1956 – 1972)**

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Presbyterian Church \(1879 - 1977\)](#)  
Date: 1956 - 1972

#### Related Glossary Terms

- [Commissioner of Native Welfare \(WA\) \(1954 - 1972\)](#)

The Commissioner of Native Welfare was the legal guardian of children at Mowanjum until 1963 when he could regulate the 'care' of those Aboriginal children.

Date: 1954 - 1972

### Resources

- Aborigines Welfare Board of New South Wales, [Dawn and New Dawn 1952-1975: A magazine for the Aboriginal people of New South Wales](#), 2004. *Relevance:* 'Dawn' December 1958 p.15
- Wilson, Katrin and Michael V. Robinson., *Aboriginal Hostels in Perth : A Comparative Survey*, 1971
- State Records Taskforce, Government of Western Australia, [Looking West: A Guide to Aboriginal Sources in Western Australia](#), 2004

## Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

## Records

- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs \[predecessors\], Records \(1886 - 2004\)](#)
  - [Mowanjum Collection: Barunga Bequest \(1947 - 1975\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
  - [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
  - [Administration Files - Northern District Office \[N.D.G Sequence\] \(1950 - 1974\)](#)
  - [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/mowanjum/>