

Cosmo Newbery Native Settlement

1951 – 1953

- Other Names:**
- Cosmo Newbery Native Depot
 - Cosmo Newbery Native Station
 - Cosmo Newberry

Details

Cosmo Newbery Native Settlement, north-east of Laverton, was a government-run reformatory for Aboriginal youth from 1951. In December 1953, the settlement was transferred to the control of the United Aborigines Mission and became known as Cosmo Newbery Mission. The Commissioner for Native Affairs was the guardian of any child placed at Cosmo Newbery.

Cosmo Newbery was a reformatory for Aboriginal youth from 1951, but the site had been used by the Department of Native Affairs for some years prior. It had opened as a government-run “ration outpost for the nomadic natives who inhabited the desert areas as far east as the South Australian border” (Annual Report Commissioner for Native Affairs 1951, p.20). The State Solicitors’s Office *Guide to Institutions* (2005, p.33) reports that by late 1948 Cosmo Newbery was also being used as a detention centre for the “criminally minded” and for “Aboriginal people who had been sentenced to gaol terms and released into the custody of the Commissioner for Native Affairs”.

The Annual Report of the Commission of Native Affairs in 1949 (p.12) described the new role of Cosmo Newbery:

“The nature of this institution was changed during the year from that of being primarily a feeding station to that of a delinquent institution whilst retaining the aspects of the feeding of indigents. The pastoral activities of this depot are retained as a self-supporting interest as well as a vocational work for the inmates.”

There was only one person in detention at Cosmo Newbery on 30 June 1949, but several more’ were committed later in that year.

The annual report of the Commissioner for Native Affairs in 1950 (pp.21-22) gave some insight into the working life of people detained at Cosmo Newbery. People described as “detention natives” were required to work at roadbuilding, fencing, constructing wells, yard work, handling stock, building, horticulture and shearing. Cosmo Newbery also continued (p.46) as a ration depot.

By 1951, Cosmo Newbery had become a reformatory for young Aboriginal people. The annual report of the Commissioner for Native Affairs in 1951 (pp.7-8) gave some background to this transition at Cosmo Newbery:

“At the beginning of the year it attempted to serve the dual purpose of being a centre of contact for tribal natives and a holding centre for criminal or intractable adult natives. Offences of violence, a series of abscondences and lack of adequate staff and facilities demonstrated the utter futility of using the institution

in the role of an ill-equipped semi-prison which, in any case, is foreign to the proper function of this Department. Latterly it has served as a reformatory institution for juveniles who, having been found incorrigible or unmanageable in other institutions, have been committed thereto by Children's Courts. Its success or otherwise in this role is yet to be proved."

The 'rehabilitation' of these young people was an aim expressed (p.20) in the report by the Officer-in-Charge of Cosmo Newbery, who was a United Aborigines Mission missionary (p.22). By June 1951 (p.20), there were 9 'inmates' in the reformatory (all male) and Cosmo Newbery continued to distribute rations to another 28 Aboriginal people.

In his annual report in 1952 (p.10), the Commissioner remarked that the 'Cosmo Newbery Native Station' served the 'dual role of feeding centre for bush natives and reformatory for delinquent native children'. Girls and boys had at first been sent to Cosmo Newbery but it had been 'found not advisable to retain girls' at the institution. He reported that as a result of the boys being detained, there had been no Aboriginal boys committed to the courts for offences in the district for the year. During that year, the Commissioner reported (p.23) that the 'inmates' had cleared land for two airstrips. There were 'six juvenile and one adult male native under detention at the Settlement' in June 1952, and a further '150 tribal natives camped on the property', including children, and '130 were receiving rations'.

In 1954, the Commissioner for Native Affairs (Annual Report 1954, p.5) wrote that the 'Cosmo Newbery Native Station' closed 'as a delinquent boys' detention centre' and was 'handed over to the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) as from 18th December, 1953'. In his report (p.15), the Commissioner also confirmed that the 'Native Settlement' had continued to function as a 'depot for the issue of rations and clothing to indigent natives' and that two Aboriginal youth were detained at Cosmo Newbery at the time of the handover to the UAM.

Gallery



Cosmo huts, ie Cosmo Newbery Mission, 1958-1961

Description: This is a digitised copy of a slide and is part of the group of 40 images titled 'Warburton Range missions, missionaries and Aboriginal people : part three [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows huts at Cosmo Newbery Mission.



Cosmo Newbery Mission, 1956?

Description: This is a digitised copy of a negative and is part of the group of 29 images titled 'A Christmas visit to Cosmo Newbery Mission [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows some of the buildings at the Cosmo Newbery Mission.

More info

Chronology

- **Cosmo Newbery Native Settlement (1951 – 1953)**
 - Cosmo Newbery Mission (1953 - 1973?)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Department of Native Affairs, State of Western Australia \(1936 - 1954\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Commissioner for Native Affairs \(WA\) \(1936 - 1954\)](#)

The Commissioner of Native Affairs was the guardian of children placed at Cosmo Newbery Native Settlement.

Related Organisations

- [United Aborigines Mission \(1929 - 2020\)](#)

The United Aborigines Mission lent one of its missionaries to the Western Australian Department of Native Affairs to act as Officer-in-Charge of Cosmo Newbery Native Settlement.

Records

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

Records

- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs \[predecessors\], Records \(1886 - 2004\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
- [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)

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