

St Mary's Hostel

1947 – 1972

Other Names:

- St Mary's Home for Children
- St Mary's Church of England Home

Details

St Mary's Hostel was the new name given to the Mount Blatherskite Hostel near Alice Springs in 1947. Run by the Australian Board of Missions it provided accommodation and schooling for Aboriginal children placed by their parents or committed to the Hostel by the Director of Native Affairs. A number of Aboriginal children returning from Mulgoa in New South Wales after World War II were also placed at the Hostel. St Mary's Hostel operated until the mid-1970s when it was renamed St Mary's Children's Village.

St Mary's Hostel was the name given to the Mount Blatherskite Hostel in 1947. However, in government correspondence about the Hostel it was often still referred to as the Mount Blatherskite Hostel as late as 1948. The Hostel was situated in the town of Mount Blatherskite approximately 6 kilometres south of Alice Springs. Run by the Australian Board of Missions it provided accommodation and schooling for Aboriginal children who were studying or doing apprenticeships in Alice Springs. Sister Eileen Heath continued as the Superintendent of the Hostel after its change of name. Aboriginal children were placed in the Hostel by their parents or were committed to the Hostel by the Director of Native Affairs.

In 1948 the Australian Board of Missions reported to the government that the Hostel usually provided care for an average of 27 children. At that time a further dormitory was being built so that the Hostel could accommodate up to 50 children at one time.

In 1948, after lengthy negotiations, the Commonwealth government agreed to provide financial assistance to the Hostel. As part of these negotiations, the government outlined some of its wishes for the 'objects of the Institution'. These, listed in a 1948 report, included the following:

- 1. To provide a home for the care and upbringing of all half-caste children committed to the institution. These will be for the most part unsupported half-castes from aboriginal camps.*
- 2. To provide accommodation for half-caste children from rural areas, whose parents are in a position to send them to school in Alice Springs.*
- 3. To accommodate girls and boys after school leaving age during training or apprenticeship, and whilst in employment in Alice Springs.*

The report also specified that the staff for the Hostel should include a Superintendent, a nurse trained in child welfare, a married couple, a cook and a farm supervisor. The government also 'considered that the institution should be controlled on the dormitory system' with 4 dormitories – nursery, infant, primary and senior.

In January 1949, St Mary's took in a number of Aboriginal children returning from Mulgoa in New South Wales. These children had been evacuated from Church Missionary Society missions during World War II.

During the mid to late 1950s it became church policy to replace the dormitory system with group homes to provide for smaller group care. Cottages were purpose built during the late 1960s in the grounds at St Mary's Hostel.

A church news report from 1968, stated that by that year, St Mary's Hostel had become a village with four cottage homes, located around a central Church. The village was set in a 480 acre property on the outskirts of Alice Springs and provided accommodation for 49 children aged between 3 and 17.

A further report dated 1969 stated that:

The children come to the village at any age and are of any race. They might be aboriginal, part-aboriginal, part-European or European, and having in some cases, a slight Chinese mixture. Some come from remote station areas, having parents who want the child to be educated, but most come from broken and neglected homes, being brought in by welfare Department when they think that a child is in need of care.

When children first arrived at St Mary's, they were housed in the 'transit block'. This was an ex-army hut which was divided into cubicles. The report noted that due to staff shortages, there was no resident staff member to supervise the children placed in this block. Once the children were regarded as having adapted to life at St Mary's they would be moved into one of the cottages. Each cottage had a dining room, lounge, kitchen, laundry and bathroom. Two children shared each bedroom. They were supervised by a total staff of 12 adults. Most children stayed at St Mary's until they had finished their schooling.

In the 1970s, St Mary's built three more cottages in the town ship of Alice Springs. In 1972 St Mary's Hostel was renamed St Mary's Children's Village as a reflection of the new layout and the fact that the Village had come under the management of the newly formed Anglican organisation, St Mary's Child and Family Welfare Service.

Gallery



St Mary's Hostel - Matron in charge and children [altered from original title]



St Mary's Hostel, Alice Springs

Description: This is a photograph of children playing cricket at St Mary's Hostel, Alice Springs. It shows approximately 10 children playing cricket on a dirt playing ground, with hostel buildings and trees visible in the background. This photo is one of six photos of children at St Mary's Hostel taken by John K. Ewers in 1950 and held by the State Library of Western Australia.

More info

Chronology

- Mount Blatherskite Hostel (1946 - 1947)
 - **St Mary's Hostel (1947 – 1972)**
 - St Mary's Children's Village (1972 - 1980s)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Australian Board of Mission \(1850 - 1995\)](#)

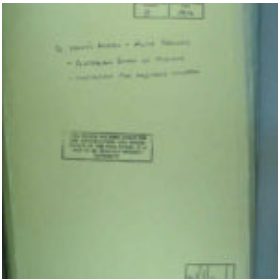
Related Organisations

- [Anglicare NT, Northern Territory \(2002 - current\)](#)

Resources

- Stolen Generations' Testimonies Foundation, [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#), 2009. *Relevance:* See testimony of Eileen Moseley
- Boyce, James, *For the record : background information on the work of the Anglican Church with Aboriginal children and directory of Anglican agencies providing residential care to children from 1830 to 1980*, 2003
- Sherwood, Matthew & Weeks, Jonny, ['You're Not Given Any Love': The Stories of Australia's Stolen Generations - Photo Essay](#), The Guardian, 2016
- Indrasafitri, Dina, [Making Joy Point Despite Painful Past](#), The Centralian Advocate, 22 July 2016
- [Eileen Heath interviewed by John Bannister in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2000\)](#), 30 November 2000 - 8 December 2000
- Coaldrake, Frank W., [Acceptance: the next step forward](#), 1967
- Commonwealth of Australia, [The Northern Territory Report for 1959-60](#), 1961
- Commonwealth of Australia, [The Northern Territory Report for 1960-61](#), 1962
- Briscoe, Gordon, [Racial Folly - a twentieth century Aboriginal family](#), 2010
- Maloney, Nadine, [Reunion bittersweet for former St Marys residents](#), 15 July 2010
- Finnane, Kieran, [Looking after children was her life's chosen job](#), Alice Springs News online, 2 November 2011

Other Resources



Title: St. Mary's Hostel - Alice Springs - Australian Board of Missions - Institution for children [altered from original title]

Type: Image

Date: 1946 - 1954

[Details](#)



Title: Welfare Branch - St Mary's Hostel - Policy and development (1956 - 1958)

Type: Image

Date: 1956 - 1958

[Details](#)

Records

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

Records

- [Records of the St Mary's Home for Children \(1957 - current\)](#)
 - [Registration of births after lapse of nine months \[Croker Island, Garden Point, Retta Dixon Home and other areas\] \(1954 - 1955\)](#)
 - [Welfare Branch - St Mary's Hostel - Policy and development \(1956 - 1958\)](#)
 - [St Mary's Hostel - Alice Springs - Australian Board of Missions - Institution for half-caste children \(1946 - 1954\)](#)
 - [Anglican Board of Mission \(Australia\) - further records \(1887 - 1996\)](#)
 - [Records of the Parish of the Ascension, Alice Springs, Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of Northern Territory \(1933 - 1986\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/st-marys-hostel/>