

The Bungalow

1914 – 1942

Other Names:

- Half-caste Home
- Half-caste Institution

Details

The Bungalow was established in 1914 in an iron shed by the local Protector of the town of Stuart, now Alice Springs, to provide shelter for Topsy Smith, an Aboriginal woman and her children. It became an official institution in 1915 when a matron was appointed. The Bungalow moved to Jay Creek, west of Alice Springs, in 1928 and then to the Old Telegraph Station, near Alice Springs in 1932. The Bungalow was often referred to as the Alice Springs Half-caste Institution or Half-caste Home. It closed in 1942 when children were evacuated south in response to World War II.

The Bungalow began in early 1914 when Sergeant Stott, the local Policeman and Protector of Aborigines for the town of Stuart asked the Administrator for permission to erect a temporary shelter for an Aboriginal woman, Topsy Smith. Recently widowed, Topsy had come to Stuart, now Alice Springs, with her seven children and could find no accommodation. Stott suggested to the administration that two town allotments near the police station should be reserved for Aboriginal people, at the time referred to a half-caste. The Administrator agreed to the request and an iron shed was erected across the road from the police station, behind the hotel. Not long after, more children arrived and the shelter was named The Bungalow.

By November 1914, The Bungalow provided accommodation for 9 more children and another woman. Topsy Smith ran the Home under the supervision of Sergeant Stott. At the end of 1914, a white Matron was appointed, Ida Standley. She took charge of The Bungalow and also provided lessons for the children in a makeshift classroom in one of the cells of the police station. She remained in charge of the institution for 15 years, with Topsy Smith as her assistant.

Conditions in the Bungalow were extremely poor. By 1924 the institution was described by witnesses as 'a scandal' and 'a place of squalid horror'. There was concern about the overcrowding of the institution which at that time accommodated 50 children of all ages, from babies to teenagers. The boys and girls were housed in two separate galvanised iron shelters, one 30 x 15 feet and the other 24 x 15. At night, each girl was described as having a portion of the floor, six feet by two feet in which to rest. The Bungalow had no water, one toilet and no bathroom. Water had to be carted by the children from 100 yards away.

A number of complaints from visitors to the Home resulted in the government exploring ways to close the Bungalow and relocate its residents, including the suggestion that the children all be transferred to South Australia.

On 25 December 1928 the residents of the Bungalow including 45 children, 37 of whom were under the age of 12, were moved to a new location at Jay Creek, 47 kilometres west of Alice Springs. This new site for The Bungalow was also regarded as completely inadequate.

The writer of a history of The Bungalow created by the ABC as part of a Centenary of Federation website, unearthed the following description of the institution from a National Archives of Australia (NAA) file. The letter

was penned by a visitor to the Home in 1929 and sent to the Minister responsible for the Northern Territory at that time:

The accommodation provided for them exhausts my power to paint adequately. A rough floor of burnt lime and sand to make a form of cement has been laid down. A very rough framework of wood was put up, and some dilapidated sheets of corrugated iron roughly thrown over it. There are no doors or windows. A more draughty, ugly, dilapidated place one could hardly imagine. I think the children would be less liable to colds in the open than in the disgraceful accommodation provided for them. And that is not the worst. Boys and girls of all ages from one year old to sixteen are herded in this so-called room whose dimensions are about 24 feet by 50 feet. At present there are 48 children in the institution. The girls and boys are mixed indiscriminately. The children are issued with two blankets and lie on the floor. One small stove has to cook bread for over fifty people. They apparently have never had fruit or vegetables. The ration scale has been deplorable...the scale is meagre in the extreme. The only lighting is two hurricane lamps. The children have no games or amusements of any description. Cooking utensils are practically nil. There are six bowls and twenty towels to serve everybody.

That same year a married couple were appointed as Superintendent and Matron of The Bungalow. They remained in charge when the institution moved again from Jay Creek to the Old Telegraph station, several kilometres from Alice Springs, in an area that was proclaimed as the Alice Springs Aboriginal Reserve. By 1935 the institution accommodated 130 children. The Superintendent was convicted of the sexual assault of a number of girls in the Home. While he was gaoled, his wife continued to act as matron with the assistance of a local police officer.

In 1939 the new Native Affairs Branch, on a recommendation from the then Chief Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines, Dr Cecil Cook, began negotiations with various religious organisations to have each denomination take charge of Aboriginal children of their particular faith. When the agreement was reached many children from The Bungalow were moved out to the Missions, some via Pine Creek Home, approximately 200 kilometres south east of Darwin.

The Bungalow continued to operate at the Old Telegraph Station until 1942. That year the remaining children were evacuated from the institution as a result of the World War II and it closed as an institution for children. The majority of the children from the institution were sent south to Mulgoa in New South Wales and to Balaklava in South Australia.

The Bungalow reopened from 1945 to 1960 but was used instead as a reserve for Aboriginal workers, rather than an institution for children.

The publication *Tracking family: a guide to Aboriginal records relating to the Northern Territory* (2006) states that records relating to the Commonwealth government's administration of The Bungalow are held at the National Archives of Australia (NAA). The publication contains photographs of The Bungalow from the NAA's collection.

The Bungalow was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families.

Gallery



Another view of the 'Bungalow'

Description: This image shows The Bungalow in Alice Springs during an inspection by Jim Baker and H.G. Nelson (Northern Territory administrative staff member).



The "Bungalow"

Description: Original Caption: The "Bungalow", original Alice Springs Post Office.



Band of The Bungalow, Alice Springs [altered from original title]



Aboriginal children outside The Bungalow, Alice Springs [altered from original title]



Children at The Bungalow, Alice Springs [altered from original title]

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Northern Territory Aboriginals Department, South Australian Government \(1910 - 1928\)](#)
Date: 1914 - 1928
- [Native Affairs Branch, Australian Government \(1939 - 1955\)](#)
Date: 1939 - 1942
- [Health and Aboriginals Branch, Northern Territory Administration, Australian Government \(1928 - 1930\)](#)
Date: 1928 - 1930
- [Medical Services, Health and Aboriginals Branch, Australian Government \(1931 - 1939\)](#)
Date: 1931 - 1939

Related Events

- [Interstate movement of Northern Territory children \(1930s - 1970s\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Garden Point Mission \(1940 - 1969\)](#)
Catholic children from The Bungalow in Alice Springs were transferred to the Garden Point Mission.
- [Croker Island Mission \(1940 - 1968\)](#)
In 1940, some children were moved from The Bungalow to Croker Island Mission.
- [St John's Hostel \(1941 - 1970s\)](#)
The Reverend Smith opened St John's Hostel as a response to poor conditions at The Bungalow.
- [Pine Creek Home \(1940 - 1941\)](#)
Children from The Bungalow were transferred to Pine Creek Home before being moved to various Missions in

the Northern Territory

- [Pine Creek Home \(1931 - 1933\)](#)

The children at Pine Creek Home were sent to The Bungalow in 1933 when the Home was closed.

Resources

- Stolen Generations' Testimonies Foundation, [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#), 2009. *Relevance: See testimony of Herbie Laughton*
- Henty-Gebert, Claire, [Paint me black: memories of Croker Island and other journeys](#), 2011
- Sherwood, Matthew & Weeks, Jonny, ['You're Not Given Any Love': The Stories of Australia's Stolen Generations - Photo Essay](#), The Guardian, 2016
- Briscoe, Gordon, [Racial Folly - a twentieth century Aboriginal family](#), 2010
- [Minister in outback sees new gaol](#), The Argus, 27 June 1951
- [Bungalow Song, the living past](#), Alice Springs News online, 2013

Records

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

Records

- [Alice Springs Bungalow Central Australia File No 1 \(1914 - 1929\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files, class 1 \(general, passports\) \(1892 - 1970\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/the-bungalow-2/>