

Balaklava Aboriginal Welfare Institution

1942 – 1946

Other Names:

- Balaklava Half-caste Welfare Institution
- Balaklava Racecourse Settlement

Details

The Balaklava Aboriginal Welfare Institution was established by the Commonwealth Government in 1942 at the Balaklava Racecourse as a temporary accommodation facility for Aboriginal people evacuated from the Northern Territory during World War II. It accommodated women and children and a small number of men. Several farms in the surrounding area were also used to billet women and children. Children attended Saints Commonwealth School and the local Convent School. The Balaklava Aboriginal Welfare Institution closed in 1946 after the evacuees were returned to the Northern Territory.

The Balaklava Aboriginal Welfare Institution was established at the Balaklava Racecourse in 1942 by the Commonwealth Government Department of the Interior as a temporary accommodation facility for Aboriginal people evacuated from the Northern Territory after the bombing of Darwin by the Japanese in World War II. The first evacuees, approximately 100 mostly women and children, arrived on 2 April 1942 and the Racecourse buildings and services were offered to house them at short notice. Local Balaklava residents and the Red Cross supplied food, clothing and bedding and members of the local billeting organisation initially supplied the staff. Later in April 1942 Sisters from the Aborigines Inland Mission, including Miss Shankelton who was evacuated with 72 children from the Bagot Compound in Darwin, took over running the colony at the Institution. A trained nurse from Pine Creek ran a dispensary and there was an honorary medical officer. Mr Chinnery, then Director of Native Affairs, stated the need for the construction of buildings and facilities at the racecourse to accommodate between 200 and 300 people including:

Women's Ablution Block

Men's Ablutions Block

Women's Laundry

Staff Laundry

New Store Building

Boiler House

Sundry minor Additions, Alterations and Renovations, Blackouting etc. to existing buildings

By May 1942 the Director of Works reported that 200 beds had been purchased and that quotes were being taken for the required building works.

By August 1942 papers were reporting that there were 200 Aboriginal people from the Northern Territory in Balaklava and that the 'colony' had been partly decentralised. Approximately 50 of the evacuees were billeted at farms in the area overseen by AIM and Miss Shankelton. These farms included Vogt Farm, Erambie Farm, Cottles Farm and Saints Homestead where the largest number of children resided outside of the Institution .

While the majority of Aboriginal children evacuated from Northern Territory Missions were taken to the eastern states – many to Mulgoa in New South Wales for example – others were taken to other parts of South Australia including the town of Hawker and the Convent of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Carrieton. From records of the time it appears that the majority of the children accommodated at the Balaklava Aboriginal Welfare Institution , and the surrounding farms, were accompanied by a relative. However, a small number of children and young people without an adult relative also appear to have been evacuated to Balaklava.

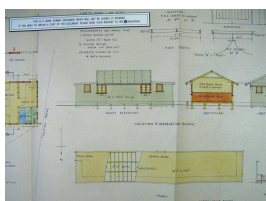
In 1943 a school, Saints Commonwealth School, was established in Balaklava by the government for the evacuees. Some children also attended the Balaklava Convent School.

A 1943 letter to the NT Administrator stated that the former Superintendent of the government run Half-Caste Institution at Alice Springs, Mr McCoy, and his wife had been transferred SA to run the 'Half-caste Welfare Institution at Balaklava'. McCoy remained as the superintendent until the end of the War. The same letter stated that the majority of the evacuees at Balaklava were the dependants of men working in the NT in war related work or of members of the Armed forces. The balance was made up of single young women who had been working in the Northern Territory but living at the 'half-caste' institutions in Alice Springs and Darwin.

Nominal rolls from late 1943 show that there were 22 adults and 41 children at the Institution , 8 adults and 23 children at Saints Homestead, 4 adults and 14 children at Vogts Farm, 2 adults and 4 children at Erambie Farm and 2 adults and 10 children at Cottles Farm.

In March 1946 all the refugees from the Institution and surrounding farms left Balaklava to return to Darwin via Alice Springs. The Balaklava Aboriginal Welfare Institution ceased to operate as an institution for evacuees on the 3 April 1946.

Gallery



Balaklava Aboriginal Welfare Institution 01

Description: Copy of part of the work plan for construction work at the Balaklava Racecourse for the Aboriginal Welfare Institution from a digitised National Archives of Australia file titled 'Transfer of half-castes from the Northern Territory to the racecourse at Balaklava, South Australia - Part 1: pages 1 to 72 1942 - 1943'.

More info

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