

Killalpaninna Mission

1867 – 1915

Other Names: • Bethesda Mission Station

Details

The Killalpaninna Mission was opened in the far-north of South Australia by the Lutheran Church in 1867. A school was opened in 1868 and by 1879 the Mission was operating dormitories for Aboriginal girls and boys. Financial problems, drought and the outbreak of World War I all contributed to the Church's decision to sell the Mission in 1914. At the time there were 70 Aboriginal children at the Mission. Killalpaninna Mission closed in 1915 and became an ordinary station.

The Killalpaninna Mission was first established at Lake Killalpaninna in the far-north of South Australia by Lutheran missionaries from the Hermannsburg Mission Institute in Germany in 1867. Within three months of their arrival poor relations with the local Aboriginal population forced the missionaries to retreat to Bucaltaninna Station, 28 miles to the south east. With the establishment of a Police Depot at Kopperamanna, just 15 miles from Killalpaninna, the missionaries returned to the Mission site, this time with Government-supplied rations for the Aboriginal population. A school was established in 1868. Drought in 1868 and 1869 delayed construction of Mission buildings. In late 1871 due to the drought, harsh conditions and the unexpected death of one of their number the missionaries again abandoned the Mission for several months. Upon returning to Killalpaninna the missionaries renamed the Mission, Bethesda.

More missionaries arrived during the early 1870s and by 1879 a major building program had seen the construction of a church, a school, four houses, two store rooms and two dormitories for Aboriginal children, one for girls and one for boys. Out stations of the Mission were established at Kopperamanna and Etadunna.

The missionaries, when meeting groups of Aboriginal people in the area, attempted to convince families to allow them to take their children to the Mission to attend the school and learn Christian ways. In the early 1880s some of the Aboriginal children who had been converted to Christianity were taken to the Barossa Valley to garner support for the Mission amongst the German Community of South Australia.

Financial problems plagued the Mission. Droughts and intermittent flooding hampered attempts to grow crops. Sheep and cattle were the mainstay of the Mission but these two were affected by droughts as well as rabbit plagues and dingos. The population of the Mission by 1910 had shrunk to approximately 130.

Due to continued financial problems the Lutheran Synod sold the Mission Station to two Lutheran pastoralists in 1914 on the proviso that they continue to teach and care for the Aboriginal population. A lay missionary remained at the Station to run the school. Seventy Aboriginal children remained at the Mission Station.

After the outbreak of World War I the Killalpaninna Mission was closed in 1915 and became an ordinary cattle station. The Aboriginal population returned to more traditional lifestyles at local camps. A small number stayed on to work at the station. The school continued to operate until 1917 when the government closed all Lutheran schools.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [The Lutheran Church of Australia \(1838 - current\)](#)

Related Events

- [Royal Commission on the Aborigines, State of South Australia \(1913 - 1916\)](#)

Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

Resources

- [Aboriginal Missions in South Australia](#), State Library of South Australia - Library Guides, 2013

Records

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

Records

- [Records of the Aborigines' Office and Successor Agencies \(1866? - 1971?\)](#)
- [Records of Aboriginal Missions in South Australia \(1850s - 1970s\)](#)
- [Records of the Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Synod in Australia \(1863 - 1966\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/killalpaninna-mission/>