

Elim Maternity Hospital

1897 – c. 1973

Other Names:

- Salvation Army Maternity Hospital
- Salvation Army Rescue Home
- Elim Maternity Home
- The Delight
- Elam
- Elim Salvation Army Home

Details

Elim Maternity Hospital, run by the Salvation Army, opened in West Hobart in 1897. It was a rescue Home for young women, including teenagers, and a maternity hospital for single mothers. Many adoptions took place from Elim. It closed in about 1973.

Elim occupied a two storey Victorian weatherboard building in Lansdowne Crescent, West Hobart. Its original name was 'The Delight', possibly derived from its good view of the River Derwent. Later it became Elam and then Elim.

Elim opened as a rescue Home, that is, it accommodated young women and girls sent there because they did not conform to the sexual morality of the day. Since some of them were pregnant, it soon became a maternity hospital for single mothers. It had 18 beds. However, Elim also retained its original purpose. Parents, the police, courts, and the Mental Deficiency Board all placed young women and girls there for short or long term periods of time. Some of them remained at Elim for the rest of their lives. The Matron became the guardian of residents placed there by the Mental Deficiency Board.

In early November 1928, the Salvation Army Headquarters in Melbourne decided to close Elim so that they could open a Home for elderly women in the same building. It caused an outcry from women's groups in Hobart and the Salvation Army in Tasmania. The outcry appears to have worked. Shortly afterwards, the Matron received notification that the Elim would be retained as a rescue Home and maternity hospital.

In 1934, according to the *Mercury*, Elim accommodated 30 girls or young women and 12 babies. There were five members of staff, the Matron, the Sub-Matron, two Captains and a Sergeant. It was financed by revenue from the residents' laundry and fancy work as well as nursing fees for the babies taken out of their mothers' baby bonus. The Home also received a state grant of £80 year. According to Naomi Parry's PhD thesis, this funding arrangement, introduced in the late 1920s, meant that private institutions such as Elim 'became an arm of government services'.

Parry discussed the procedures by which many babies born at Elim were adopted: 'Salvation Army matrons were entitled to sign documents on behalf of the women in their care, including consent to the surrender or adoption of babies. In this way many babies were signed over to the Department'.

The Matrons were given this power under the 1920 *Mental Deficiency Act*, which specified that women using lying-in services were under the care of the Matron, who was acting in loco parentis. The women could be assessed and supervised by the Mental Deficiency Board. These procedures sometimes resulted in mothers in

Homes such as Elim being 'moved on to indefinite – and sometimes permanent – institutionalisation at St John's Park, or the Mental Diseases Hospital in New Norfolk'. Some young women at Elim Maternity Hospital received a diagnosis of 'moral imbecility' as defined by the Mental Deficiency Act.

Elim is mentioned in the Tasmanian government's 1999 *Joint Select Committee on Adoption and Related Services 1950-1988*, the Tasmanian Ombudsman's June 2006 *Review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children – Final Report – Phase 2*, and the 2012 Senate report, *Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices*.

The report of the Joint Select Committee said that: 'A number of respondents, both through personal or written submissions were highly critical of their treatment at Elim, which they presented as bleak and fairly austere'. They heard testimony from women who had been at Elim as single mothers. Some spoke of the sense of shame and the secrecy surrounding the pregnancies of single women, and the sense of 'impropriety' about their situation which affected the way they were treated by staff. The report spoke of a 'conspiracy of silence' at Elim prior to 1971. 'The sense of isolation, from family, friends or significant others was enhanced by the discouragement of visitors and excursions outside the Hostel'.

The circumstances under which babies were adopted from Elim caused mental suffering to many of the mothers. The report of the Joint Select Committee's described some of the effects of losing a baby to adoption, including:

personality damage associated with the isolation of the birth experience and loss of the baby where this is a secret and there is no significant other who is there to share the feelings and unresolved issues associated with the loss.

After 1971, according to the Joint Select Committee, Elim changed, largely as a result of Matron Archer's appointment:

The rigidity of thinking which had been manifested in the "cloistering" of its residents and the strict discipline imposed gave way to a warmer, more compassionate approach'. Under Archer, staff were told to treat the young women "like one's own family". The women were given pre-natal classes, encouraged to discuss at length and openly their situations and most importantly, bring in as visitors, their boyfriends.

The Ombudsman mentioned two claims of abuse related to Elim in the lead up to his final report of 2006.

In 2012, the Senate report, *Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices* cited incidences of forced adoption at Elim. In addition, according to one submission, women often worked in the laundry or as cleaners, including in the labour ward, without receiving any wages. The woman who made the submission had been afraid to tell the Joint Select Committee everything. She said: 'If only people knew what happened in there. These people are right: it was a terrible place. It was a house of horrors'.

Elim had opened a new custom built two-storey brick hostel and maternity wing with modern equipment in 1963. It was out of date almost at once. By the 1970s, the introduction of the Commonwealth Government's Supporting Mothers' Benefit and new attitudes to women's rights, meant that fewer pregnant women had to go to Elim. The number of births there declined with the last one taking place in 1973. Five years later, it became Elim Salvation Army Home and offered temporary accommodation to women and children.

Elim Maternity Hospital was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

In 2013, the Victorian house that accommodated the original Elim was a private residence. The brick hostel and maternity wing had been converted into apartments being marketed as 'The Lansdowne Residences'. The advertising describes them as 'luxurious'. The foundation stone laid by the Premier, WA Bethune, has been

preserved in its original place, in what is now the back foyer.

Gallery



Elim

Description: This is an image of Elim, the Salvation Army Maternity Hospital in West Hobart. It shows a large two-storey weatherboard house, in front of which is a sign that reads "The Salvation Army 'Elim'".

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory \(1921 - 2018\)](#)
- [The Salvation Army, Australian Territory \(1880 - 1921\)](#)

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)
The report, *Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices*, includes submissions about Elim.

Related Organisations

- [Anchorage Home \(1889 - 1920\)](#)
When the Anchorage Home closed, its Committee donated its trust money to Elim Maternity Hospital.
- [Mental Deficiency Board \(1922 - 1964\)](#)
The Mental Deficiency Board assessed some of the mothers at Elim Maternity Hospital.
- [St John's Park \(1936 - 1994\)](#)
Some mothers at Elim Maternity Hospital were sent to St John's Park.
- [Mental Diseases Hospital, New Norfolk \(1915 - 1937\)](#)
Some mothers from Elim Maternity Hospital were sent to the Mental Diseases Hospital, New Norfolk.

Related Legislation

- [Mental Deficiency Act 1920, Tasmania \(1920 - 1963\)](#)

Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012
- Elise, [Submission No 388 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2004
- [Salvation Army peace fair](#), The Mercury, 10 September 1946
- National Archives of Australia, [Forced Adoptions History Project](#), 2013
- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Official Committee Hansard. Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices. Friday 16 December 2011. Hobart](#), 16 December 2011

Records

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

Records

- [Salvation Army Australia, Records of Homes in the former Southern Territory \(c. 1889 - c. 1988\)](#)
 - [Elim Maternity Hospital List of Babies Adopted \(1971 - 1973\)](#)
 - [Elim Maternity Hospital Register of Babies \(1927 - 1970\)](#)
 - [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
 - [General Correspondence-Hospital and Health Administration \(1932 - 1987\)](#)
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