

# Mount Margaret Mission

1921 – 1975

**Other Names:**

- Graham Home
- Mt Margaret Mission
- Morgan's Gospel Mission

## Details

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Mount Margaret Mission, south of Laverton, was established in 1921 by R. Schenk, with assistance from the Australian Aborigines Mission (which became the United Aborigines Mission in 1929). Around 1928, the Schenks established a dormitory system at the Mission, where Aboriginal children were housed separately from their parents. It was called the Graham Homes. By 1942 several hundred Aboriginal families, including children, lived at the Mission. The head of the government departments responsible for Aboriginal welfare was the guardian of these children until 1963. Mount Margaret Mission closed in 1975 and the lands were transferred to the Aboriginal Movement for Outback Survival.

There was a dormitory at Mount Margaret Mission, established around 1928, where children were housed separately to their parents. It was called Graham Homes.

Mount Margaret Mission accommodated children as part of family groups but these children, even when living with their families were under the guardianship of the authorities responsible for Aboriginal welfare in Western Australia.

The 'Bringing them home' report (1997) describes how missions like Mount Margaret attracted families whose children would otherwise be taken from them.

According to the State Solicitor's Office in Western Australia (*Guide to Institutions Attended by Aboriginal People in Western Australia* 2005, pp.93-94), R. Schenk, the manager of Mount Margaret Mission, established in 1933 'an outpost at Warburton Ranges Mission, which became an entirely separate mission in 1937' (p.93).

Sadie Canning told her story about being taken to Mount Margaret Mission in the 1930s as a four year old:

*My mother ... lived a traditional lifestyle. She could not read, write, nor could she speak English. They tried to hide us from the authorities, but when my sister ... was taken during a raid, I was told to stay under a blanket. Of course, I didn't, and they took me, too.*

*I was taken at the age of four years and placed in Mt Margaret Mission, which was in the area my parents traversed. I still had contact with them during my time at Mt Margaret and they were welcome to visit.*

*I was placed in the Graham Home for girls with about 59 others. I entered the home speaking and hearing Wongatha, as English was completely unknown to me. We were allowed to speak our language anytime*

*other than in the classroom. We were not treated cruelly, but we were disciplined ...*

*We grew up as sisters, with the older girls looking after the little ones. My mother visited me on occasions when she returned to the mission after going on their traditional and cultural practices (Goold & Liddle, p.2).*

By 1942, there were 'several hundred' Aboriginal people living at the mission in 'cottage residences' and 70 children went to the mission primary school. Schenk took an active role in the 'vocational education' of children at the Mission (p.93) '.

Young people were educated generally along practical lines, with what could be considered to be relatively high aspirations for the pre-World War II period. Boys were trained in carpentry, shearing, mechanics and mining skills so that they could get jobs in industries common to the Goldfields area. Girls were trained not only in domestic work but also as typists and nurses.

In 1933, Mrs Mary Montgomerie Bennett, teacher and advocate for Aboriginal people's rights, joined the staff at Mount Margaret, and emphasised 'learning', teaching classes in 'personal hygiene, money transactions, arithmetic and bible history'. She taught at the school until 1942 (Taffe, 2018).

Bennett's entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography states that at Mount Margaret:

*... she devoted herself principally to unorthodox but highly successful primary teaching of Aboriginal children and the promotion of handicrafts among Aboriginal women. Her teaching was supplemented by tireless agitation for Aboriginal rights, which made her anathema to State officials and politicians.*

Bennett sent copies of schoolwork by students at Mount Margaret Mission to individuals and groups around Australia who shared her interest in Aboriginal education and justice. In a collection held by University of Melbourne Archives, there are copies of students' work from the 1930s and 1940s sent to a philanthropic assimilationist organisation called the Victorian Aboriginal Group (Leeper Family Papers, University of Melbourne Archives, reference number 1987.0162).

In 1949, the mission school received the services of a government teacher.

In 1947, superintendent Schenk took a party of children from the Mission on a 7,000 mile tour by truck to Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. Along the way, they raised funds for the Mission and the children performed musical concerts, singing and playing instruments including the banjo and the gum leaf (Kalgoorlie Miner, 1947).

According to the *Guide to Institutions* (2005, p.94) there were only a 'number of families' living at the mission by the end of the 1960s, with 18 children being taught in a one-teacher school.

By 1971 (Wilson and Robinson, quoted in *Signposts* 2004, p.359) there were 39 children enrolled at the mission school. Wilson and Robinson also stated that Mount Margaret Mission was run by the Department of Native Welfare but other reliable sources report that the UAM ran the mission until 1975.

In 1972, responsibility for child welfare at Mount Margaret Mission was transferred from the Department of Native Welfare to the Department for Community Welfare (DCW) in accordance with government policy at that time.

Mount Margaret Mission closed in 1975 (*Guide*, p.94), and the lands were transferred to the Aboriginal Movement for Outback Survival.

Some young people may have been placed with adults resident at Mount Margaret Mission after the lands were transferred in 1975.

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

## National Redress Scheme for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse

The Western Australian government has agreed to be a funder of last resort for this institution. This means that although the institution is now defunct, it is participating in the National Redress Scheme, and the government has agreed to pay the institution's share of costs of providing redress to a person (as long as the government is found to be equally responsible for the abuse a person experienced).

### Gallery



**The girls' dormitory of the Graham Home at Mt Margaret Mission**

**Description:** This is an image of the girls' dormitory at Mt Margaret Mission. It shows several girls inside the dormitory; some sitting on beds holding dolls and others sitting on the floor playing with a tea set. The beds in the room are arranged in three rows and are placed close together. There are several pictures hanging on the dormitory walls.



**Girls with Marian Sandland and Elsie Bicker outside the girls' dormitory of the Graham Home at Mt Margaret Mission.**

**Description:** This is a photograph taken at the Mt Margaret Mission in 1931. It shows girls lined up outside of the girls' dormitory, with two women (possibly staff members) standing behind them.



**Building the new boys' dormitory of the Graham Home at Mt Margaret Mission**

**Description:** This is a photograph taken at the Mount Margaret Mission around 1935. It shows boys at the mission standing in front of, and sitting and standing in the windows of, the boys' dormitory, which is under construction.



**Boys dormitory of the Graham Home at Mt Margaret Mission**



**Mt Margaret Mission, 1958-1961**

**Description:** This is a digitised copy of a slide and is part of the group of 40 images titled 'Warburton Range missions, missionaries and Aboriginal people : part three [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows facilities at Mount Margaret Mission in the distance.



**Mr A O Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, opening the Graham Home for girls at Mt Margaret in 1931 (it used to be the Morgans school).**

**Description:** This is a copy of a photograph from 1931. The image is part of the Schenk Family Collection [BA1340] at the State Library of Western Australia. It is one of many images of Mount Margaret Mission, made available through the State Library of Western Australia's Storylines website.

## More info

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [United Aborigines Mission \(1929 - 2020\)](#)
- [Australian Aborigines' Mission \(c. 1894 - 1929\)](#)

#### Related Glossary Terms

- [Commissioner for Native Affairs \(WA\) \(1936 - 1954\)](#)

The Commissioner of Native Affairs was the legal guardian of children at Mount Margaret Mission.

- [Commissioner of Native Welfare \(WA\) \(1954 - 1972\)](#)

The Commissioner of Native Welfare was the legal guardian of children at Mount Margaret Mission until 1963 when he could regulate the 'care' of those Aboriginal children.

Date: 1954 - 1972

#### Related Organisations

- [Cosmo Newbery Mission \(1953 - 1973?\)](#)

Children at Cosmo Newbery Mission were sent by the United Aborigines Mission to Mount Margaret Mission for their schooling until a government school was opened at Cosmo Newberry.

Date: 1954 - 1960s

- [Wongutha Mission Training Farm \(1954 - 1993\)](#)

Wongutha Mission Training Farm was established by RW (Ron) Schenk, the son of RM Schenk, who founded Mount Margaret Mission.

Date: 1955 - 1975

- [Department for Community Welfare, State of Western Australia \(1972 - 1985\)](#)

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department for Community Welfare, was the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children at Mount Margaret Mission.

- [Chief Protector of Aborigines \(1898 - 1936\)](#)

The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Mount Margaret Mission.

- [Warburton Mission \(1933 - 1977\)](#)

Warburton Mission was established it as an outstation of Mount Margaret Mission until it became governed as a separate facility in 1937.

Date: 1933 - 1937

## Resources

- Nash, Roy, Nash, Mel and Mann, Pamela, [Days of small things](#), 2012
- Telfer, EJ, [Amongst Australian Aborigines: forty years of missionary work](#), 1939
- [Allan Rees interviewed by Colleen Hattersley in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2000\)](#), 25 August 2000
- [Kathleen Mack interviewed by John Bannister in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 16 January 2001 - 18 January 2001
- [Robert Capp interviewed by John Bannister in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2000\)](#), 12 December 2000

- Wilson, Katrin and Michael V. Robinson., *Aboriginal Hostels in Perth : A Comparative Survey*, 1971
- State Records Taskforce, Government of Western Australia, [Looking West: A Guide to Aboriginal Sources in Western Australia](#), 2004
- United Aborigines Mission, [The United Aborigines messenger](#), 1929 - 1987
- Morgan, Margaret R, *Mt Margaret: a drop in a bucket*, 2007

## Records

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

### Records

- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs \[predecessors\], Records \(1886 - 2004\)](#)
- [Schenk Family Papers \(1921 - 1999\)](#)
- [Warburton Mission \(1958 - 1961\)](#)
- [Leeper Family Papers \(1890 - 1980\)](#)
- [United Aborigines Mission records known to have existed \(1920s - 1980s\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
- [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
- [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
- [Administration Files - Eastern District Office \[E.D.G. Sequence\] \(1945 - 1975\)](#)

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