

St Mary's Mission, New Norcia

1848 – 1974

Other Names: • St Mary's College

Details

St Mary's Mission was a boarding school managed by the Benedictine Community of New Norcia for Aboriginal boys. From at least the early 1960s state wards were placed at St Mary's. A report from 1971 stated that the school catered for "160-170 primary and secondary school children". St Mary's Mission was closed in 1974.

In 1943 there were 40 boys at the mission. A child endowment officer visiting in this year stated that the payment of child endowment had created issues between the mission and the parents of the children there, who desired to have their children returned to them. The missionaries resisted these requests as they believed they were better able to provide for the education of the children following a Christian, European system, and thus "better the conditions of the native race" (NAA, A885 B202) .

Departmental records show that Wards of the state were placed at St Mary's Mission by the Department from at least the early 1960's but the Department of Native Welfare Department may have had some earlier connection with the facility.

Wilson and Robinson noted in 1971 that St Mary's was "one of the first mission stations established in Western Australia and [is] governed by the Benedictine Order, which also controls Kalumburu in the Northern Division [of the Department of Native Welfare]. It caters for 160-170 primary and secondary school children." (Wilson and Robinson (1971) Aboriginal Hostels in Perth: A Comparative Survey, cited in *Signposts*, 2004).

The Annual Report of the Department of Community Services in 1974 notes that St Mary's received a Mission Grant in Aid for camping equipment. A limited chronology of admissions and discharges is included in Table 43.

Changing Names

In terms of trying to trace family origins now, the institutionalization of children made this even more difficult because of the practice of 'renaming' or not being able to correctly record the Aboriginal name. Tilbrook comments that Aboriginal children's names were 'Latinized' at New Norcia:

When Salvado first brought an orphaned Aboriginal girl to Perth to be cared for by the Sisters of Mercy, he retained her Aboriginal name, Kookina, as a surname and gave her the personal names of Mary Christian...

The monks of New Norcia made a conscious effort to retain some semblance of the Aboriginal name, and the same may have happened in other places...one girl brought up at New Norcia Mission and called Rosie, was nicknamed 'Rossi'. The names Indich and Narrier were recorded at New Norcia as 'Yndich' and 'Narrea', although it is possible to establish that they are the same names by tracing their descendants. Moreover, Narrier was originally recorded as Tagliol, but was later changed to Narrier. To add confusion,

the spellings Wallo and Wally seem to be the same name, but both spellings occur on the same New Norcia lists. Moreover, Wally was originally recorded as Wale, the same as that of an English colonist. (p.77)

Voluntary placement of children at New Norcia

Tilbrook says that:

In traditional Aboriginal society it was customary for young boys in their early or mid-teens to be sent away to neighbouring groups to be instructed in religious matters, and to develop their sense of independence, before returning to their own group to take on adult responsibilities. Hence, at times boys were permitted to live with missionaries or settlers, but the older men and women always expected that they would return to their own group at the appropriate times. (p.225)

Gallery



New Norcia, October 1986

Description: This is an image taken at New Norcia Mission in October, 1986. It shows the building known as St Mary's, which housed Aboriginal boys who had been placed at the Mission. The photo shows St Mary's as a long, single-storey stone and brick building, painted red with white windows, doors, and foundations. The building looks to have been built in several phases, with different roof-lines in different sections. This photo is part of a collection of 14 photographs taken by Betty Smith at New Norcia in October 1986.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Benedictines, New Norcia \(c. 1846 - current\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Commissioner for Native Affairs \(WA\) \(1936 - 1954\)](#)
The Commissioner of Native Affairs was the legal guardian of children at St Mary's Mission, New Norcia.
- [Commissioner of Native Welfare \(WA\) \(1954 - 1972\)](#)
The Commissioner of Native Welfare was the legal guardian of children at St Mary's Mission, New Norcia until 1963 when he could regulate the 'care' of those Aboriginal children.

Related Organisations

- [Department of Native Welfare, State of Western Australia \(1955 - 1972\)](#)
The Department of Native Welfare placed wards of the state at St Mary's Mission from at least the early 1960's
Date: 1960s - 1972
- [Child Welfare Department, State of Western Australia \(22 December 1927 - 15 June 1972\)](#)
The Chief Executive Officer of the Department for Community Welfare was the guardian of children at St Mary's Mission, New Norcia who were deemed to be 'native wards' or 'wards of the State'.
- [Aborigines Department, State of Western Australia \(1 April 1898 - 31 December 1908\)](#)
The Aborigines Department had responsibility for the Aboriginal children in St Mary's Mission, New Norcia.
Date: 1898 - 1905

- [Chief Protector of Aborigines \(1898 - 1936\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at St Mary's Mission, New Norcia.
Date: 1905 - 1936
- [St Joseph's Native School and Orphanage, New Norcia \(1861 - 1974\)](#)
St Joseph's (which housed girls) and St Mary's Mission (which housed boys) were both located at New Norcia Mission
- [Aborigines Protection Board, Colony of Western Australia \(1890 - 1898\)](#)
The Aborigines Protection Board had responsibility for the welfare Aboriginal children housed in Beagle Bay Mission.
- [New Norcia Mission \(1848 - 1974\)](#)
St Mary's Mission and St Joseph's Native School and Orphanage (which housed girls) were both part of the New Norcia Mission.

Resources

- [Celine Kickett interviewed by Marnie Richardson in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 27 November 2001
- [Catholic Church schools and homes with the most child abuse claims revealed](#), ABC News, 17 February 2017
- Wilson, Katrin and Michael V. Robinson., *Aboriginal Hostels in Perth : A Comparative Survey*, 1971
- Western Australia. Department of Native Welfare, *Annual Report: Department of Native Welfare, 1955 - 1972*
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, *A piece of the story : national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families*, November 1999
- [The Aborigines Question. Evidence Taken by Dr. Roth](#), Western Mail, 25 February 1905

Records

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

Records

- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs \[predecessors\], Records \(1886 - 2004\)](#)
- [New Norcia Archives \(1846 - current\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
- [Files - Department of Aborigines and Fisheries \(1909 - 1920\)](#)
- [Files - General \[Health Department\] \(1899 - 1987\)](#)
- [Files \(Aboriginal Matters\) - Department of the North West \[1\] \(1915 - 1949\)](#)
- [Files - Chief Protector of Aborigines \(1898 - 1908\)](#)
- [Files - Departmental \[Education Department\] \(1 January 1885 - 31 December 2000\)](#)
- [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
- [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
- [Correspondence Files, Colonial Secretary's Office, Chief Secretary's Department \(1883 - 1983\)](#)

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