

Swan Native and Half Caste Mission

c. 1880 – 1920

- Other Names:**
- Swan Anglican Mission
 - Swan Native Mission
 - Swan Native and Half Caste Homes
 - Anglican Native Mission (on the Swan River)

Details

The Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission was run by the Anglican Church in Guildford (Middle Swan) from 1888 to 1920. It continued Bishop Hale's Institution for Native and Half-Caste Children. Aboriginal boys and girls were accommodated at the mission, in separate 'branches'. The boys' branch included non-Aboriginal boys by 1899, possibly earlier. The mission closed in 1920.

The institution that became known as the 'Swan Native and Half Caste Mission' was established in Perth around 1870 as Bishop Hale's Institution for Native and Half-Caste Children. On 21 February 1888, the Anglican Orphanage Committee decided to relocate the institution to Guildford, in Middle Swan. The institution moved to its new location on 3 October 1888.

WA historians Neville Green and Gail Barrow (p.16-17) have remarked that the 'three goals of nineteenth-century education were to civilize, Christianise and make children useful as farm labourers and domestic servants.' While there was no barrier to Aboriginal children attending government schools, this was 'not encouraged' and the Education Department used the fact that Aboriginal children were under the care of the Chief Protector to exclude them. Thus, a number of mission schools sprung up around Western Australia.

In May 1884, the Anglican Bishop of Perth reported that 12 children had died in the institution's Perth and Vasse Homes in the fourteen years of operation.

The 1899 report to the Protector of Aborigines showed that there were 16 boys and 30 girls at the mission, including 7 children 'supported by the Church'. Girls and boys under six were housed together, with a separate institution for the older boys. The manager's report for that year gives an insight into the children's daily activities:

The girls are trained in domestic work, attend school for three hours daily, do their own baking and a good deal of their own sewing. They have large grounds to play in, and out of doors are occupied attending to poultry, a little dairy work, and considerable gardening.

The boys' branch is in connection with the orphanage for white boys, where the native boys are treated in all respects as whites; receiving the same school instruction and practical instruction in handicrafts, gardening, and farming. In school the native boys hold their own with the white boys, while, in sports, the former in many cases excel. Report of Swan Mission in Aborigines Department Report for financial year ending 30th June, 1899, p.10

Not all children were placed by the state:

Fred Mead was one of the many Aborigines who worked on projects of vital importance to the state. In 1901 he obtained employment on the Paddy Hannan Pipe trench. This was a major engineering enterprise to pump water 600 kilometres from Perth to Kalgoorlie and the Eastern Goldfields. Because this job meant living in makeshift accommodation for an extended period, the Mead children were placed in the Swan Native and Half Caste Mission where they would be looked after and be educated. On hearing nothing about the children for some time, Mrs Mead began to fret, and so Mead took matters into his own hands by writing to Prinsep to enquire after them and to request that they write to their parents. Nyungar Tradition 1983, p.104

According to Tilbrook's research, the Mead family were together again by 1906. The Harris family also made a voluntary placement:

William Harris was born in 1867 and died in 1931. His father was Welsh, and his mother was said to be of American and Aboriginal descent. William Harris's father placed him in the Swan Native and Half Caste Mission as a paying student, to receive an education. His brother Edward was sent to 'Annesfield', the school run by Bishop Hale and Mrs Camfield in Albany. The educational standard of these schools was comparable to other schools of the day, and pupils sat for public examinations and passed them with credit. Nyungar Tradition 1983, p.119

The government paid a subsidy to the mission, but these were apparently influenced by 'caste':

Herbert William Dyson...was a strong-willed lad, and after his mother died in 1901 he was determined to look after himself. Plans were made for him to go to the Swan Native and Half Caste Mission in Perth, apparently initiated by his half-brother Arthur Julbert Harris. However, the mission was unable to accept him at first because his mother was part-American, making the boy of less than one-quarter Aboriginal descent. The mission received a government subsidy for the children in their care from the Aborigines Department, but this amount was only paid for children reckoned to be more than one-quarter Aboriginal descent. Nyungar Tradition 1983, p.205

In 1915, *The West Australian* reported that a young girl of around nine years of age was killed and seven others injured at the Swan Native and Half Caste Mission when a relatively new building 'collapsed like a pack of cards' during a 'sensational storm' that caused 'extensive damage to property' throughout the metropolitan area. An inquest was held the day after the storm and returned a finding of accidental death.

The Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission closed in 1920.

Gallery



Swan Native and Half Caste Mission 1

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph held by the grandson of Mr James Jones and his wife Letitia. Mr Jones was a manager of the Swan Native and Half Caste Mission in the early 1900s. The photograph is printed as a postcard and on the back is written, 'Middle Swan Aboriginal Mission run by James Jones. 1916'.



Swan Native and Half Caste Mission after cyclone

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph held by the grandson of Mr James Jones and his wife Letitia. Mr Jones was a manager of the Swan Native and Half Caste Mission in the early 1900s. The photograph is printed as a postcard and on the back is written, 'Old Aboriginal Mission, Middle Swan, after Cyclone had destroyed Dormitory'.



Swan Native and Half Caste Mission Group

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph held by the grandson of Mr James Jones and his wife Letitia. Mr Jones was a manager of the Swan Native and Half Caste Mission in the early 1900s. The photograph is printed as a postcard and on the back is written, 'Annie Clark with Aboriginal Children at Middle Swan Mission. 1916'. It is believed that the donor's mother, Annie Irene Margaret Clark (nee Jones) is at the rear, with a fair-haired baby in her arms.

More info

Chronology

- Annesfield (1852 - 1871)
 - Bishop Hale's Institution for Native and Half-Caste Children (1871 - 1888)
- **Swan Native and Half Caste Mission (c. 1880 – 1920)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Orphanages' Committee \(1889 - 1939\)](#)
- [The Committee \(1868 - 1888\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Safe Ministry and Professional Standards, Anglican Diocese of Perth \(2004 - current\)](#)
Professional Standards has been set up by the Anglican church as a service for people who have suffered abuse in out of home care run by the Anglican church or its agencies.

Resources

- [The Aborigines Question. Evidence Taken by Dr. Roth](#), Western Mail, 25 February 1905
- Battye, JS, [The Cyclopedia of Western Australia \(1912\)](#), 1912. *Relevance:* p.62
- Peterkin, A. Roy, *The Noisy Mansions : the story of Swanleigh 1868-1971*, 1986
- Aborigines Department, Western Australia, [Collection of typed copies of annual and other reports by and to the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia dated 1910 and 1911](#), 1910 - 1911
- [News of the Day](#), The Daily News, 9 October 1888

Records

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

Records

- [Anglican Diocese of Perth, Western Australia, Records \(1880s - 2010\)](#)
 - [Perth Protestant Orphanage / Perth Anglican Orphanages, State Library of Western Australia \(1872 - 1955\)](#)
 - [Department of Aboriginal Affairs \[predecessors\], Records \(1886 - 2004\)](#)
 - [Correspondence Files, Colonial Secretary's Office, Chief Secretary's Department \(1883 - 1983\)](#)
 - [Files - Department of Aborigines and Fisheries \(1909 - 1920\)](#)
 - [Files \(Aboriginal matters\) - Chief Secretary's Department \(1916 - 1927\)](#)
 - [Files - General \(1899 - 1987\)](#)
 - [Files - Chief Protector of Aborigines \(1898 - 1908\)](#)
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