

Australian Aborigines' Mission

c. 1894 – 1929

Other Names:

- New South Wales Aborigines Mission
- La Perouse Aborigines Committee
- AAM

Details

The Australian Aborigines' Mission dates back to around 1894, in New South Wales. It was originally known as the La Perouse Aborigines' Christian Endeavour Society, established in June 1894. The interdenominational Christian society was active in the Sydney beachside area of La Perouse, establishing a mission to work with the Aboriginal people, and opening its first church there in November 1894. The name of the group changed to the La Perouse Aborigines Mission Committee in July 1895. In September 1899, it became the New South Wales Aborigines Mission, the new name better reflecting its intention to expand across the state of New South Wales. In 1907 the Mission commenced work in other states and changed its name again to the Australian Aborigines' Mission. A state council in Western Australia was formed in 1908. The Mission became active in South Australia from around 1919, starting in Oodnadatta. The AAM established a council in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1924. The AAM established missions and institutions for children in various locations in these 3 states. In 1929, the headquarters of the Mission were transferred from Sydney to Melbourne and its name changed to the United Aborigines Mission (UAM).

Established as the New South Wales Aborigines' Mission in 1902 a decision in 1907 to expand to other States saw the formation of the Australian Aborigines' Mission (AAM). A State Council for Western Australian started in 1908. The AAM ran the Dulhi Gunyah Orphanage (East Perth, then Victoria Park), Gnowangerup Aboriginal Mission, Aboriginal School Mission at Katanning (Preaching Station, Katanning Reserve), the Carrolup Native Settlement, Sunday Island Mission (in partnership with Sydney Hadley until 1923), and Wotjulum Mission (later Presbyterian).

Always an interdenominational Christian basis, the AAM became the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) in 1929.

Mr Ernest J Telfer was sent from NSW to be the 'organiser and superintendent of the work of the Australian Aborigines' Mission in Western Australia' and he was accompanied by Peter Wandy, described as a 'Native Helper' who was originally from the goldfields. The AAM ran along 'faith lines', which meant they relied upon 'financial contributions sent in answer to prayer, not entering into debt and providing no guaranteed income for missionaries'. However, practical considerations such as allowing an overdraft for the Dulhi Gunyah Orphanage bank account were tolerated. It was reported in 1915 that six missionaries were living on faith lines in WA and the other four were 'managers or teachers'.

The AAM were actively involved in receiving children who were removed from their parents under the provisions of the 'Aborigines Act 1905' at Dulhi Gunya and they received government funding for these children. One of the missionaries, Bertha Telfer, later travelled to La Grange and there saw the profound grief of parents who had been separated from their children and vowed that 'no more work like that' would be done under her watch. Telfer, however, was recalled to Perth and did not return to La Grange and when she went to Sunday Island she reported that she had 'managed to get most of the girls back into the dormitory', which meant they were removed from family camps.

In 1910, the AAM began its activities in the north west. A newspaper item reported on the initial venture:

A telegram received in Perth by a private citizen on [17 June 1910] announces the safe arrival of the two missionaries who left Perth on May 4. Mr. Telfer and Mr. Radford travelled on their bicycles from Carnarvon to Port Hedland, thence by boat to Derby. Western Mail 25 June 1910 p.34

There was a lot of movement of missionaries around the various missions in this State. For example, in 1915 the couple who ran the Dulhi Gunyah Orphanage moved from there to the 'Katanning settlement' (Carrolup) and were replaced at the orphanage by a couple who'd come from the Presbyterian Mission in 'the North West'. The Perth secretary had resigned during the year to go and work up at Carnarvon. A missionary from South Australia had come to join the orphanage. The missionary who established the Orphanage had left there to open a school for Aboriginal children at Guildford (Allawah) and had also worked in the north-west.

In March 1912, the AAM had written to the Colonial Secretary to try and get funding to educate the children at Dulhi Gunyah. The request was passed to the Education Department and from there to the Aborigines Department. In July 1912, the AAM wrote to the Chief Protector 'challenging the Government of Western Australia to recognise its responsibility towards the education of Aboriginal children and reminding Gale that the children at Dulhi Gunyah Orphanage, for whom no government maintenance was received, had a rightful claim to state education' (Longworth, p.144).

The AAM had a monthly publication known as *The Australian Aborigines' Advocate*. Reports of their meetings were also published in the Perth papers and *The Missionary Record*.

The AAM became the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) in 1929. The AAM and the UAM were founded on a 'belief in the superiority of western culture' and this belief influenced how the missionaries interacted with Aboriginal people and caused them to comply with oppressive government policies. However, these missionaries shared the 'poverty and marginalisation' experienced by Aboriginal people and resulted in the conversion of some Aboriginal people and the formation of an evangelical Indigenous church.

More info

Chronology

- **Australian Aborigines' Mission (c. 1894 – 1929)**
 - United Aborigines Mission (1929 - 2020)

Related Entries

Ran

- [Mount Margaret Mission \(1921 - 1975\)](#)
- [Dulhi Gunyah \(25 February 1909 - 1918\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Aborigines Inland Mission \(1905 - 1998\)](#)

The Australian Aborigines' Mission and the Aborigines' Inland Mission made an unsuccessful attempt to merge.
- [Australian Aborigines' Evangelical Mission \(1949 - 1980s\)](#)

The Australian Aborigines' Evangelical Mission's inaugural President was EJ Telfer, who had previously established the Australian Aborigines' Mission in Western Australia in 1908.
- [Carrolup \(1915 - 1922\)](#)

Missionaries from the Australian Aborigines' Mission worked at Carrolup. Female missionaries were volunteers, but a male AAM Superintendent had a government salary.

Resources

- United Aborigines Mission, *Challenging the almighty: 100 years of trusting God in the work of the United Aborigines Mission*, 1994
- Kensy, Julia, [La Perouse](#), Dictionary of Sydney, 2008

Records

Records

- [Schenk Family Papers \(1921 - 1999\)](#)
 - [United Aborigines Mission, Records of activities in Western Australia \(1929? - 1977?\)](#)
 - [Files - Department of Aborigines and Fisheries \(1909 - 1920\)](#)
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