

# Marella Mission Farm

1948 – c. 1986

**Other Names:**

- Marella Farm for Aborigine Children
- Marella Farm

## Details

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Marella Mission Farm originated in 1948 with Gwen and Keith Langford-Smith accommodating Aboriginal foster children on their farm property at Kellyville. By 1949 Langford Smith had set up the Sky Pilot Foundation to run the farm, with the stated goal of caring for Aboriginal children who had been born in New South Wales to mothers who had been evacuated from the Northern Territory in World War II. Marella Mission Farm closed around 1986.

Marella Mission originated with Gwen and Keith Langford-Smith accommodating Aboriginal foster children on their farm property at Kellyville. Keith Langford-Smith then formed the Sky Pilot Fellowship which made evangelical Christian radio broadcasts, and Marella became part of the Fellowship's activities.

The general administration of Marella from 1950-1986 was conducted by Norma Warwick, who was secretary-treasurer of the Fellowship. Between October 1954 and October 1955, Sky Pilot Foundation became incorporated as a not-for-profit organisation.

According to the May 1963 issue of *Dawn*, Keith Langford-Smith was an author and missionary airman who came from an illustrious Anglican family. His mother was descended from the first woman to cross the Blue Mountains and was the daughter of politician FW Webb, while his father was Canon SE Langford-Smith, rector of St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral and Anglican Archdeacon of Cumberland.

Langford-Smith had lived in the Northern Territory since the 1930s, and had run the Roper River Mission. During World War II, children aged from one to 14 were sent to the Church Missionary Society Home for Half-Castes at Mulgoa. This evacuation would, indirectly, lead to the creation of Marella.

The *Nepean Times* of 18 February 1960 reported that Langford-Smith addressed the St Marys Rotary Club to seek funds for his mission. He told the Rotary members that he cared for 18 to 20 'selected or deserted children, of aboriginal descent, coming from the Sydney area'. He said the need for the home arose when girls who had been evacuated from the Northern Territory during World War II had not adjusted to being returned to the Territory:

*... they missed the pleasures of the towns, and some gradually returned to associate with the worst elements of the metropolis. As a result most of their children are unwanted and neglected. These are the children that are cared for at Marella.*

Marella was, therefore, an institution created to deal with a second generation of Aboriginal children removed from their families. However, Marella Mission Farm did not just take in children whose mothers were from the Northern Territory. Children from other Aboriginal communities were sent there, including Rita Wright, who was born at Brewarrina in 1953 to parents from Angledool in New South Wales and Cherbourg in Queensland. As

Rita says in *Stolen Generations' Testimonies*, she was removed from her family in 1955 'by the welfare' and taken to Marella.

Jonathan Cannon, who went to Castle Hill Public School in the 1960s with children from Marella Mission Farm described the dislocation of the Aboriginal children:

*With the Aboriginal kids in the class it was very difficult for them. In hindsight I can remember them being placed in the seats near the windows. They were never really educated like we were and they would just sit there looking out the window with a vacant stare as if there was somewhere else they belonged. They were I believe cared for by the headmaster in a very generous way. The headmaster had gardening clubs and he got these children involved in those clubs. They really enjoyed doing that work.*

In April 1978 Marella Mission Farm Ltd was formed to take over the assets and liabilities of the Sky Pilot Foundation, so that the land at Kellyville could be donated. At this time Marella ceased operating as a foster home and children were transferred to Church of England group homes.

Marella was mentioned in a 1979 Commonwealth Government report called *Why are they in children's homes: report of the ACOSS children's home intake survey*. It is thought to have closed some time in the early 1980s. Its involvement with Aboriginal children continued, as it sponsored the Church of England Homes Marella Project.

Marella Mission Farm was later subdivided. It is bounded by present day York Road, Presidents Avenue, Green Road and Marella Avenue. It contains the Bernie Mullane Sporting Complex and YMCA, Kellyville High School and housing.

In 2009 Marella Mission Farm was the subject of a touring art exhibition that was curated by Zona Wilkinson for the Penrith Regional Gallery and Lewers Bequest. The exhibition was called 'Marella: the Hidden Mission' because so few residents of western Sydney knew it was there.

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

In 2021, the New South Wales 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

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**The mission farm entrance in 1962**

**Description:** This image shows the entrance to Marella Mission Farm.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

Run by

- [Sky Pilot Fellowship \(23 May 1949 - c. 1986\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Roper River Mission \(1908 - 1988\)](#)
- [Marella Aboriginal Temporary Care \(1979 - 1990s\)](#)

## Resources

- Wilkinson, Zona, *Marella : the hidden mission*, 2009
- Marella Mission Farm Ltd, *Sky pilot news*, 1978 - 1986

## Records

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

### Records held by other organisations

- [Records of Marella Mission Farm \(1948 - 1986\)](#)

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You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/marella-mission-farm/>