

Cundeelee

1949 – 1985

Other Names: • Cunderlee

Details

Cundeelee mission and school, located approximately 40km north of Zanthus on the Nullabor, was established by the Australian Aborigines' Evangelical Mission in 1949. It was run by interdenominational churches until 1982, when it became an Aboriginal Community. Cundeelee accommodated children up to primary school age as well as families.

Cundeelee was established by the Australian Aborigines' Evangelical Mission (AAEM) in 1949. From around 1939 to 1948 there had been a government 'feeding depot' for Aboriginal people on the site. When the AAEM offered to establish a mission, they were actively encouraged by the Department of Native Affairs. Cundeelee was reportedly established to discourage Aboriginal people from 'begging' on the trans-Australian railway line. However, many Anangu people, from Spinifex Country in the Central Western Desert, were also relocated to Cundeelee when their lands become uninhabitable due to radioactive fallout from nuclear testing in the area.

In 1952, a sandalwood licence was issued to Cundeelee, and youth and men from the mission worked on the 'Sandalwood Project' as it was known in the Department of Native Affairs. A photograph taken in 1957 has a caption that states Aboriginal youth were being paid for collecting sandalwood, although whether this was actually the case is not known.

By the early 1980s, the Cundeelee property was vested in the Aboriginal Lands Trust and was later leased to Upurl Upurlia Ngurratja. In 1985 Cundeelee was closed due to a lack of fresh water. Many from Cundeelee relocated to Coonana, to the south-west of Cundeelee, whilst others established a community called Tjuntjuntjara, to the north-east.

In 2019, a collection of approximately 1000 historical photographs taken at Cundeelee by former missionary Robert Mckeich between 1954 and 2000 were handed back to the Tjuntjuntjara community.

Gallery



Getting ready for bed at Cundeelee, 1956

Description: This is a digitised copy of a negative and is part of the group of nine images titled 'Getting ready for bed at Cundeelee [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows boys praying with an adult.



David Smith paying Aborigines for collecting sandalwood at Cundeelee, May 1957

Description: This is a digitised copy of a slide and is part of the group of four images titled 'Collecting sandalwood at Cundeelee, May 1957 [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows David Smith paying Aborigines for collecting sandalwood at Cundeelee.



Cundeelee children dressed ready for the Trans Line Sports, November 1957

Description: This is a digitised copy of a slide and is part of the Robert McKeich collection of photographs held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows children from Cundeelee dressed ready for the Trans Line Sports holding a flag.



Cundeelee Mission dining hall, 1965

Description: This is a digitised copy of a slide and is part of the Robert McKeich collection of photographs held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows the outside of the building the dining hall was in.



A puppet show at Cundeelee, 1955

Description: This is a digitised copy of a negative and is part of the Robert McKeich collection of photographs held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows a group of children with a couple of adults watching a puppet show at Cundeelee.



Robert McKeich and school children at Cundeelee, 1978

Description: This is a digitised copy of a slide and is part of the Robert McKeich collection of photographs held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows a group of children waiting to have their photo taken by Robert McKeich.



Cundeelee, 1974. The dining hall

Description: This is a digitised copy of a slide and is part of the group of four images titled 'Cundeelee [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows the outside of the building where the dining hall was at Cundeelee.



Group of twelve children, Cundeelee

Description: This is a digitised copy of a photographic print and is part of the group of seven images titled 'Cundeelee Mission [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows a group of children standing on a tree log at Cundeelee.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Australian Aborigines' Evangelical Mission \(1949 - 1980s\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Katukutu Employment Hostel \(1958 - 1982?\)](#)

Robert McKeich, who had established Katukutu Employment Hostel, had also been involved in establishing Cundeelee.

Date: 1958 - 1964

- [Fairhaven Hostel \(1965 - 1987\)](#)

Teenage girls from Cundeelee were able to live at Fairhaven Hostel in Esperance while going to high school or work.

Date: 1965 - 1982

Resources

- [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
- [Robert McKeich papers, 1950-2010 \[manuscript\]](#), State Library of Western Australia website, No date
- [Missionary to Natives](#), Barrier Miner, 6 May 1949
- [Items of news: New Native Mission](#), Kalgoorlie Miner, 26 May 1949
- [Appointment of Woman for Native Welfare](#), The West Australian, 21 June 1951
- Stewart, Marilyn, *Footprints and fragrance in the outback*, 2004

Other Resources



Title: Churches of Christ 'Fairhaven' Hostel, Esperance'

Type: Image

Date: 17 April 2014

[Details](#)

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Records of Cundeelee Mission School \(1954 - 1984\)](#)
- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs \[predecessors\], Records \(1886 - 2004\)](#)
- [Files - Departmental \[Education Department\] \(1 January 1885 - 31 December 2000\)](#)
- [Administration Files - Eastern District Office \[E.D.G. Sequence\] \(1945 - 1975\)](#)
- [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
- [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/cundeelee/>