

Umbakumba Mission

1958 – 1966

Details

Umbakumba Mission was the new name given to the Umbakumba Settlement on Groote Eylandt when it was taken over by the Church Missionary Society in 1958. Many residents of the Settlement were temporarily moved to the Groote Eylandt Mission at Angurugu during the changeover. Dormitories for Aboriginal girls and boys were run at the Mission into the late 1950s. In 1966 control of Umbakumba township was passed to the government and it ceased to operate as a Mission.

On 17 February 1958 the Church Missionary Society took over administrative control of the Umbakumba Settlement and it was renamed Umbakumba Mission. Keith Hart became the new Superintendent and remained in charge for the entire operation of the Mission. During the change over from Fred Gray, who previously ran the Settlement, to the CMS many of the residents of Umbakumba were temporarily moved to the Groote Eylandt Mission at Angurugu. When the CMS reopened the Settlement as the Umbakumba Mission the former residents returned. By mid 1959 there were 175 Aboriginal inhabitants at the Mission. These included 95 children, 43 boys and 53 girls.

The girls' and boys' dormitories and school which had been operating at the Settlement continued to operate at the new Mission. The school building, however, was converted into a Chapel and workshop. During the 8 years Umbakumba was under CMS control a new school building, a new hospital and dispensary, plus some new housing for staff and Aboriginal residents of the Mission were built.

In his book *We wish we'd done more: Ninety years of CMS and Aboriginal issues in north Australia*, CMS historian, John Harris suggests that after World War II the dormitory system at each of the CMS missions focused primarily on girls. He also states that the dormitories were phased out completely by the late 1950s. However, research shows that there were both boys and girls dormitories operating at Umbakumba Mission.

A 1958/59 NT Administration Welfare Branch Annual Report mentions that the Aboriginal people at the Umbakumba Mission were having difficulty with the change to Mission routine 18 months after the changeover to CMS control. In 1959 a saw-mill was established at the Mission to supply wood for construction at the Mission as well as for sale. Another commercial enterprise attempted by the Mission was the manufacture and shipping to Sydney for sale of 'bark paintings, carved objects, spearheads and shells' made by residents at Umbakumba Mission.

In 1966 the Welfare Branch of the NT Administration took over control of the township of Umbakumba from the CMS. The Aboriginal population at the time was 214, with 84 adults and 130 children. Some CMS missionaries remained at the township in charge of the church. The Welfare Branch later handed administrative control of the township to a self-governing Aboriginal Community Council in 1973.

In 2008 Umbakumba became part of the East Arnhem Shire Council. The traditional owners of the land are the Anindilyakwa [Wanindilyakwa] people.

Gallery



Hospital at Umbakumba, Groote Eylandt

Description: The description of this image provided by Territory Stories reads: "Man and four women standing on a makeshift verandah shaded by corrugated iron roof and some cloth. Behind them doors lead to the interior and louvred shutters or window closings can be seen. The building is on stumps. The caption reads: "This building at Umbakumba was used as a hospital for several years. Sister Brooker slept there when there were inpatients."" This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate



Umbakumba

Description: The description reads: Umbakumba, Groote Eylandt.

More info

Chronology

- Umbakumba Settlement (1938 - 1958)
 - **Umbakumba Mission (1958 – 1966)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Church Missionary Society of Australia \(1916 - current\)](#)

Other Resources



Title: Groote Eylandt Native Settlement "Umba Cumba" conducted by FH Gray. Part 1 (1940 - 1952)

Type: Image

Date: 1940 - 1952

[Details](#)



Title: Umbakumba. Native Settlement, Groote Eylandt (F H Grey) - Northern Territory [3cm] (1952 - 1958)

Type: Image

Date: 1952 - 1958

[Details](#)

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Groote Eylandt Native Settlement "Umba Cumba" conducted by FH Gray. Part 1 \(1940 - 1952\)](#)
 - [Umbakumba. Native Settlement, Groote Eylandt \(F H Grey\) - Northern Territory \[3cm\] \(1952 - 1958\)](#)
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