

Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia

EARLY HISTORY OF RETTA DIXON HOME, DARWIN

Exerpts from 'Our Aim' magazine

- July '40 Farewell for new workers for the NT:
 Miss Ricketts (Katherine)
 Miss Beasley (Darwin)
 Miss D Law (Aboriginal missionary) (Katherine)
 Miss H Brown (' ' ') (Darwin)
 Miss M Shankelton (Darwin)
- Aug '40 Kahlin Compound taken over by the army. 'Half-caste girls and women were moved to Pine Creek by government officials'. Mrs W Long went to help them settle in.

 Miss Shankelton went to Pine Creek and Katherine. (Returned to Darwin Sept 7. Worked on Bagot.)
- Mar '41 Children at Pine Creek described as 'orphaned children'!
- May '41 Inmates of the Half-caste Home at Pine Creek had been moved to places prepared by denominational missions.
- Jul '41 Bagot closed. Some people moved to Delissaville. 'At the request of the Department we are caring for six half-caste girls at the (Darwin) Mission House. Four are school girls.' (MS)

 Miss Shankelton and Miss Beasley spent a week at Delissaville in charge of the Alice Springs half-caste children - at the request of the Native Affairs Branch.(MS)

 Half-caste population (of the NT) about 1000 and increasing year by year. (WAL)
- Aug '41 'We have eight girls staying with us now. They are happy and contented.' (Miss D Law , Native Worker)

 The missionaries ran a school for 5 of these girls and two small full-blood neighbours.
- Sept'41 'We have nine girls with us now. They have settled down well and are very happy. We look forward ... to the time when we may be able to help many more of the other girls who are in great need.'
- Oct '41 'For the past five months the Mission House at Darwin has acted as a hostel for half-caste girls and young women. During this time we have accommodated 15, including babies. Six came in May and four of these are still with us.

 'There are six here at present - two are young women who go to work in town each morning and leave their babies with us ... one whose character has not been the best in the past ... shows marked improvement.

 'There are many young women here like Dolly, and we ask your ... help in this needy, practical Christ-like work, that very speedily we may have a home for such.'

- Dec '41 'Just now we have 10 girls with us. Several of the girls in the town have come out on Sundays to the morning service and they stay for lunch. We had 19 (including the children) one Sunday - we are proud of our large family.' (D Law, Native Missionary)
- Jan '42 'Miss Shankelton and Miss Ricketts left (Darwin) for Pine Creek with the girls from the Mission House, and others, on 18th December.'
- 'The war situation has greatly affected our plans in the Territory...
- 'On the 15th December Mr Morris of the Native Affairs Branch came across to Delissaville to arrange for the half-caste people to return to Darwin, to go on to Pine Creek. I was asked to accompany them. So on the 10th, Miss Brown, myself and 20 of our people left Delissaville.
- 'Miss Ricketts and I escorted the first party, including our Hostel girls, 37 in all, to the Administration Building in Pine Creek on 18th December. We are staying at the (Government) Home with them. Other women and children have arrived since, bringing our number up to 25 adults and 39 children.' (M Shankelton)
- 'I have had another trip to Birdum and Darwin to escort several needy half-caste children.' (F Beasley)
- Feb '42 About 40 persons, including several (older) girls and five children, who were with me at the Mission House, travelled in a cattle truck ... many families were added to us the following week.' (F Ricketts)
- Mar '42 '(The five lady missionaries) journeyed by train to Birdum and thence by road 650 miles to Alice Springs.
- 'News reached us (at Pine Creek) of the bombing of ... Darwin - where their husbands and sons still worked.' (M Shankelton)
- Apr '42 'On advice from the authorities it was decided to evacuate our half-caste people from Pine Creek and Mataranka. It was arranged by the Native Affairs Branch that we lady missionaries accompany them ... making 76 in all.'
- (They stayed at the Alice Springs Half-caste Institute - the old OT station. Three missionaries waited until arrangements were made to take the people further south.)
- Apr '42 (Photocopy of article supplied seperately)
- May '42 'It is just three weeks since Miss Law and I came to Balaklava (Racecourse). Much of our time has been given to the temporal welfare of the 166 half-caste people at the institution (women and children). The oversight of the kitchen, rations, meals and work rosters fell to our lot ... a local doctor visits the Home every day.
- 'A number of families who are at present in our care will rent cottages in the district as soon as suitable ones

are available. We expect the people whom we left at Alice Springs through soon. Dormitories etc. are being prepared for them... present arrangements are temporary.'
(M Shankelton)

- Jul '42 'As it was desired to make room at the racecourse for other people coming from the Territory, the Department secured three large farm-houses at Saints Siding, about 5 miles from Balaklava. We were asked if we would take the oversight of these farms if AIM adherents were placed on them. A central home ... will house the girls, young women and their babies who were in our Hostel in Darwin (There were 14 at first), as well as a few dependent families ... a total of 42.' (M Shankelton)
- Aug '42 'On the 18th July our people arrived at Saints from Alice Springs ... There are now 83 in our care here. The majority are independent families who manage their own household affairs ... We have 12 adults and 19 children at the Home. All seem happy and contented.' (M Shankelton)
- Sep '42 Miss Beasley joined the other two ladies on the staff.
- Nov '42 'The Native Affairs Dept. called upon Miss Shankelton and Miss Law to go to Balaklava and prepare for and receive the evacuees, for whom they cared until the government's own officers took charge.'
(From a review of the year's activities)
- Nov '42 'We commenced morning school classes at the Homestead for the children. They are delighted.'

AFTER THE WAR

- Dec '45 Staff at Balaklava consisted only of Miss Shankelton and Miss Dinham.
- Jan '46 Miss Spohn joined them.
- Mar '46 'Three more families from Saints have returned to Katherine and Pine Creek since the New Year.

'Plans are in hand for the first stage of our journey north.

'We had hoped to return to Darwin and establish the Children's Home there, but as this is impossible, by the courtesy of the Native Affairs Dept. we are accompanying the people to Alice Springs.

'The Railways Dept. has been asked to provide a special train.'
(M Shankelton)
- Apr '46 (From a review printed in November that year.):

'The first four days and nights were spent in the train... to Alice Springs ... then a pause there for a few weeks ... the second 1000 miles was made in a huge lorry and semi-trailer.'

(The accompanying photo showed about 34 children and

(young people.)

'Our aim is to establish a half-caste home in or around Darwin, and investigation of suitable sites has been made.'

- Apr '46 'On 25th March ('51 of our coloured folk') with those who comprised the Government Institute at Balaklava, left by special train for Alice Springs on the first stage of their journey to their home country.'
- Aug '46 'Prayer is still asked for guidance and wisdom in the location of a suitable place for our Half-caste Home.'
- Oct '46 'There is still uncertainty surrounding the location.'
- Jul '47 'A number of children have been added to our Home during the year, nine of them being babies. Seventeen more children at Tennant Creek (Phillip Creek) are waiting.'

HRM AUG '96