

ENTER THE SALVATION ARMY

Lest there should be any misunderstandings about the philosophy of the Salvation Army on this subject, the following quotations have been transcribed from Salvation Army literature.

‘The treatment of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Commonwealth especially in the early days of white settlement provides a record that fills us with shame ...’

‘There are those who tell of the fearful atrocities perpetrated by the blacks as an excuse for the violence with which they were treated but the fact remains that black man’s atrocities were in the nature of reprisal for some dastardly action on the part of the whites ...’

‘One fact is universally admitted: the pastoral industry of the territories is absolutely dependent on the blacks for field labour. If they were removed most of the holdings especially the smaller ones would have to be abandoned.’

‘Although recognizing their absolute dependence on the natives no attempt has been made by the people on these holding to educating them. It seems to be a conveniently accepted notation that he is beyond redemption ...’

‘So there is no encouragement for ambition ... and the black fellow has a hopeless outlook.’

‘Since they have been deprived of their hunting grounds the Aborigines have no choice but to work for the white man on whatever terms the white man cares to grant ...’

‘This applies to those situated in remote inland districts while those who are living in the area occupied by whites are, thanks to keen government oversight, almost in danger of being pampered.’

‘There have been those among us who have regarded the Aborigines as so low on the human scale as to be classed as animals, and there are others who judge them by the degenerate specimens to be seen hanging around pubs of back country towns.’

‘The old story, white man vices, and a heritage of suffering disease into degeneration and the blacks are fast disappearing (sic).’

‘The Salvation Army has had contact with the natives ... and has seen some of them develop into absolutely Blood and Fire Salvationists.’

‘The task of protecting these people has not been the easiest for there are, even today (1930), whites who look upon them as fair game.’

‘... our officers have been able to see some of the fine young girls ... develop into useful womanhood and, thoroughly domesticated, render most acceptable service in carefully selected homes. The boys, who, with the girls are educated on the colony are qualifying as farm workers and station employees.’

‘... there are skeptical folk who think it is impossible for the black natives to be lifted out of a lethargic indifference to all influence of a spiritual and moral character. In truth he is as susceptible to spiritual things as his white brother’.

‘... many people expect too much of the Aborigines. In this they are mistaken. The standards of the black fellow are different from those of white people. The blacks are lacking in many qualities; but they do respond to those who are teaching them the things of God. So this difference is born in mind and more loving care and patience has been given them.’

‘God ... is the father of the black as well as the white.’

The official opening was in January of 1921 and there was much fanfare and celebration. The Chief Protector of Aborigines was there. The head of the Salvation Army church was there and everybody who was anybody connected with Aboriginal issues.

The Salvation Army souvenir issue published in 1921 stated that when the church took over the mission there were 100 adult colonists and 40 boys and girls. One wonders if this was something of an exaggeration. Presumably if the number quoted is correct then many of the adults would have been away working and not living at the mission. On the information available there simply would not have been sufficient space to accommodate so many people comfortably.

After the Salvation Army became involved, immediate improvements were made including the construction of a large school hall, a dining hall for the orphans, repairs to the girls' dormitory and conversion of the old school into a boys' dormitory. For the first year the funding provided by the Salvation Army was twice that of the Queensland Government.

The mission continued throughout the 1920's. There was occasional disharmony between some of the families living on the mission. This was only to be expected given the fact that there was so many people living in such close proximity to each other. The mission life was very regimented. All school age boys arose at 6 o'clock to feed the pigs and work in the dairy. A bell would go at 7 o'clock when the children returned to change in readiness for breakfast. The menu didn't change much, every day of the year everybody got rolled oats and one piece of bread and syrup and one cup of watery tea for breakfast. For lunch on most days they received corned meat, sweet potato, pumpkin and some carrot now and then. Lunchtime dessert was rice pudding, sago or tapioca. For dinner they received a plate of bacon bone soup and a piece of bread and syrup. All school-aged children attended school from Monday to Friday inclusive. The girls were expected to carry out housework in the Manager's residence.

All children residing on the Mission attended the Mission School. There was minimal contact with the outside world. There was only one day per year when there was interaction with non-Aboriginal children, a sports day, and also very occasional Salvation Army outings. The Aboriginal children excelled at sporting activities.

The teacher at the school for many years was a Ms Woolley who was much loved and respected and dedicated much of her working life in service of the Aboriginal children. By all accounts she was a 'good old stick' who had commenced her involvement with the Mission back at Deebing Creek. So dedicated was she to the Aboriginal children that she was prepared to forsake promotion within the education system to enable her to continue working with the Aboriginal children.

On Saturday the chore was to clean up the yards and pig sties. Saturday afternoon was free time for sport and Sunday was the day of rest devoted to religious services and family activity. The church service was from 10am to 11am and then everybody went to lunch. Sunday school was from 2pm to 3pm and there was another service on Sunday night from 6pm to 7pm.

While the children were involved in the daily chores the men not working on outside jobs worked the mission farm. Those working on outside jobs were often away during the weeks and only returned on weekends. Those working at a greater distance had their families stay with them at the job locations.

'The property at Deebing Creek was retained and used for the beef herd. The property at Hampstead was used as agistment for the dairy herd. It would appear that the 1600 acre reserve at Mt Flinders might well have been forfeited prior to this time. There is only very passing reference to it in the research material that was available and, as stated there was the suggestion that it may have been forfeited in exchange for funding for the building construction when the mission was relocated from Deebing Creek to Purga.'



The Davidson family with members of the Salvation Army taken in the late 1920's