

The Faith Mission at Mer Ilpereny (Arden's Soak) 1927 – 1928



Image from the State Library of South Australia (B64383/158)

This information was collated by Teresa McCarthy for the Northern Territory Library for the Anmatyerr history Project 2008.

Sister Annie Lock

Sister Annie Lock was born in 1876 at Riverton South Australia. She joined a non-denominational faith mission (known later as the United Aboriginal Mission) in 1903. On the 27th March 1927 she arrived in Central Australia after hearing of the bad conditions Aboriginal people were living in from Mr Sam Nicker and his wife Elizabeth who had taken up the Ryan's Well pastoral lease in 1914. A short time after arriving in Central Australia Sister Annie Lock established the Faith Mission at Mer Ilpereny (Arden's Soak also known as Harden or Hardings Soak). Soon after the mission was established there were up to 100 Anmatyerr people either camped at the mission or visiting on a regular basis. The mission was totally dependant on donations and assisted with providing Anmatyerr people with shelter, food, medical treatment and education (Cartwright, 1995c: 4).

Sister Anne Lock
serving breakfast after
a church service.
Image scanned from
'The Good Fella
Missus'.





Image from the State Library of South Australian (B64383/152)

In September 2006 Paddy Kemarr Wills (Senior Anmateryerr man) identified two men in this photograph which was taken in 1927.. He identified the man sixth from the left with the headband and beard as Jimmy Pengart Yerramparlakwerck (Honeyant Dreaming) and the man with the hat standing next to Jimmy Pengart as a man belonging to the Ngal skin group who was Kwertengerl (inheriting land through his mother) for Ilpereny.



Sister Anne with Besty and Dolly (standing). Image scanned from 'The Good Fella Missus'.

During the short life of the Faith Mission at Mer Ilpereny (Arden's Soak) Sister Anne looked after two little girls who she nursed back to good health. Sister Anne come to know Dolly when she treated her for the yews disease. Dolly's mother allowed Dolly and her younger sister Leach to stay with Sister Anne while Sister Anne treated Dolly for the terrible disease. Dolly and Leach shared the same father who was a white man with the last name Cummings or Cummins. This man shot himself in Alice Springs (Turner, 1938 : 7). Betsy also came to live with Sister Anne and was treated for yaws.



Children crushing berries. Image scanned from 'The Good Fella Missus'.

Adults and children at Mer Ilpereny (Arden's Soak). Image scanned from 'The Good Fella Missus'.



The End of the Mission

From 1924 to 1928 Central Australia was experiencing a severe drought. The water supply at Mer Ilpereny dried up and the mission was forced to move to another water supply close by (Cartwright, 1995c :5). Eventually this water supply also ran out and in 1928 the mission was abandoned. In 1929 Sister Anne Lock appeared before the Board of Enquiry into the Coniston Massacre and was so traumatised by the experience that she decided to leave because she '... couldn't stand seeing the blacks come in hungry and starving any longer...' (Cartwright 1995c: 10). After the mission was closed Sister Anne spent some time doing 'roving mission work', travelling to a number of cattle stations and living off a small inheritance left to her by her father. With the help of Jack and Nelly (an Aboriginal couple) Sister Anne eventually set up a mission at Boxer Creek 35km north of Bonny Well at Yirrarji Rockhole. This site was well watered and Sister Anne was able to establish a school. She stayed at Yirrarji Rockhole until 1931 when she decided that her work was completed in Central Australia. She moved to Maree and in 1937 at the age of 61 married James Johnansen. In 1943 Sister Anne died of pneumonia and is buried in Cleve, South Australia.

The young children who were living with her at the time she decided to end her missionary work in Central Australia were all found homes. Betsy and her sisters Molly and Neta went to live with Amelia and Bill Curtis who leased Greenwood Station and were good friends of Sister Anne. Dolly and Leach Cummings were sent to a home for 'half castes' in Alice Springs. Don Pwerle Ross mentions in his book 'The Versatile Man' that Leach married Wauchope Tilmouth (Ross & Whitebeach, 2007:97).



Image scanned from 'The Good Fella Missus'.

Sister Anne Lock conducting a marriage

Mer Ilpereny (Arden's Soak) Today

Mer Ilpereny today is still an important place to Anmatyerr people. Today the remains of the old Coppock homestead built from antbed can be seen in the area.



Images from the Central Desert Shire Council

Reference

Cartwright, M (c1995) Missionaries, Aborigines and Welfare Settlement Days in the Northern Territory. Flinders Press. Bedford Park South Australia.

Turner, V. 1938. The Good Fella Missus. Hunkin, Ellis and King. Adelaide.

Ross, D & T, Whitebeach, 2007. The Versatile Man. IAD Press. Alice Springs.