



Showcasing SA Heritage Places

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of the former Koonibba Lutheran Mission

Mickey Free Lawrie Drive, Koonibba via Ceduna

SAHR 20759 – confirmed as a State Heritage Place on 19 July 2007

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, at the former Koonibba Aboriginal Mission, represents an important aspect of South Australia's settlement history involving relationships between Europeans and Aboriginal people during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, the building is a reminder of the missions established in South Australia and the Northern Territory by the Lutheran Church, as part of their undertaking to educate and Christianise indigenous people.

This church, erected in 1910, replaced an earlier 1903 building and is one of only two structures on site from the early days of the Koonibba Mission. It has served as a focus for regular worship and important communal celebrations over most of its history, and is still attended by a small congregation.

As Koonibba's spiritual and cultural centre for almost a century, the church has significant associations for current and former members of the Koonibba Community, including many who were raised and educated by Lutheran missionaries before moving away from the mission to pursue employment in the wider South Australian community.



Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, 2006

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH:



Interior, 2006

The church occupies a central position on the main road into the Koonibba township. It is a modest, rectangular building of one large main room, constructed of local freestone with brick quoins and dressings around arched windows and door openings. The side and front windows have simple glass coloured panels in green and orange. The roof is steeply pitched, with a rustic wrought iron cross, of 'rococo' design and bearing the word 'Redeemer', mounted on the ridge. The interior includes a high timber-lined ceiling, timber floors and rendered walls.

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, which replaced a smaller combined church and school building, was built to accommodate 250 people and was lit by acetylene gas. A foundation stone located near the base of the front wall carries the date 17 February 1910. The church was completed some three months later and dedicated on 5 June 1910.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS:

German Lutherans were amongst the earliest settlers attracted to South Australia by the promise of land ownership and religious tolerance. They brought with them a high regard for education, hard work and Christian values, and were one of the first groups to undertake missionary work amongst Aboriginal people.

The Lutherans established mission schools at Adelaide, Port Lincoln and Encounter Bay within the first decade of colonisation. Bethesda Mission, at Killalpaninna/Kopperamanna in the Far North, was settled in 1866 and Hermannsburg Mission on the Finkle River (now in the Northern Territory) followed in 1877.

Koonibba was established in 1898, by which time settlement of the West Coast had profoundly impacted on traditional Aboriginal life and customs.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KOONIBBA MISSION:

Koonibba Mission was established in 1898 by the South Australian Synod of the Ecumenical Lutheran Church of Australia, and for many years was one of the group's major projects in this State.

It was established after control of the Hermannsburg Mission at Finke River passed to another branch of the Church. South Australian Lutherans then concentrated their evangelising efforts on the Aboriginal people of the West Coast. Members of the Lutheran Congregation in South Australia and in Germany contributed money and clothing to support the Koonibba Mission, in what was viewed as its essential work with the indigenous people of the region.

From its earliest days Koonibba was the base for an extensive outreach program, with missionaries making regular trips to visit and conduct religious services in the outlying camps. The purchase of a motor vehicle in 1921 facilitated this outreach work and enabled the missionaries to travel as far as Port Lincoln in the south and Port Augusta in the east.

In 1898 Koonibba Mission Station became the West Coast depot for the distribution of Government rations to the area's indigenous people, and this had the desired effect of attracting more Aboriginal families to the Mission. As more land was taken up for farming and settlement over the years, the influx of potential new converts continued and, by the 1950s, Koonibba Mission was 'home' to one of Australia's largest Lutheran congregations, comprising about 600 Aboriginal Christians scattered over Eyre Peninsula.

The Koonibba Lutheran Mission was also associated with the official twentieth century policy of separating children of mixed race from their Aboriginal mothers. Following the introduction of the *Aborigines Act 1911*, the Lutheran Synod responded by building a large, well-equipped children's home at Koonibba. At the time it was considered to be a model of such institutions. The home, which opened in 1913 with 28 children under the care of a matron and assistants, was later extended to accommodate up to 70 children. At the Koonibba Children's home the children were not entirely segregated from their Aboriginal families and thus many of them were able to maintain some contact with their Aboriginal language and culture. This facility operated for 50 years, during which time hundreds of children spent their formative years there.

In 1963 the South Australian Government acquired the Mission through the Aboriginal Lands Trust, with the goal of equipping its residents for assimilation into the broader community. The Children's Home was closed and the school was taken over by the Education Department. During this time, most of the older settlement buildings were demolished.

From 1972 management of the Community was taken over by the elected Council of Koonibba Residents and in 1989 the land title was formally transferred to the [Koonibba Aboriginal Community Council Incorporated](#).

STATE HERITAGE PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH ABORIGINAL MISSIONS:

Twelve additional State Heritage Places are associated with Aboriginal Missions in South Australia:

- former Hospital, Church and Manse of the former **Ernabella** Mission (SAHR 18723);
- **Killalpaninna** Lutheran Mission Site (SAHR 12618);
- Point McLeay (Raukkan) Settlement (SAHR 12752) and the dwelling 'The Needles', an outstation of the **Point McLeay** Mission (SAHR 12749);
- Ooldea Soak and former United Aborigines Mission Site (SAHR 14446) and Daisy Bates' Campsite near **Ooldea** (SAHR 14265);
- former **Point Pearce** Mission (SAHR 12723);
- St Matthew's Anglican Church (SAHR 12591), former Superintendent's Residence (SAHR 12593), former Bakehouse Complex and Well (SAHR 12595) and former Schoolhouse (SAHR 12596) of the former **Poonindie** Mission; and
- former CW Schuermann's Lutheran Mission Site (SAHR 12703) at **Port Lincoln**.

The information included in this information sheet has been adapted from the Assessment Report compiled by the Heritage Branch of the Department for Environment and Heritage