

CLOSE OF THE SECOND CHAPTER

During the course of 28 years service Rev. Strehlow left Hermannsburg only twice on furlough. In May, 1922, he took ill and developed pleurisy; his condition steadily deteriorated but despite urging from the Mission Board he refused to quit his post unless a replacement was found. In October, 1922, his physical condition was so poor that he was evacuated by buggy, together with his wife and son, but survived only as far as Horseshoe Bend, a spot some 100 miles down the Finke River. Here he was buried, and with his passing the second chapter in the development of Hermannsburg closed.

For the next few years work at the Mission Station was maintained as far as was possible by the School Teacher and his wife. In 1926, Rev. F. W. Albrecht (now based at Alice Springs) took over control of Hermannsburg's fortunes.

THE GREAT DROUGHT: 1926-1929

Periods of extended drought are by no means uncommon in Central Australia but the four severe years experienced from 1926 to 1929 had such far-reaching effects on the conduct of Hermannsburg Mission that they merit special attention.

This drought was first and foremost a social calamity in its effect on both the resident population and (as was discovered later), on the bush dwellers also. No fewer than 85 per cent. of the infants born at Hermannsburg over the period died, and the death toll amongst the aged was also far in excess of that normally to be expected.

It is true that the high mortality rate amongst both infants and, to a less degree, adults had been a constant source of worry since the earliest days of the Mission's work, for epidemics, (particularly of European diseases) had from time to time taken heavy toll of the people.

Furthermore, the aboriginal mothers in those days almost without exception belonged to a generation brought up on and accustomed to bush foods; their children were not, and during time of walkabout the little ones, in particular, suffered terribly from hunger and the necessity to eat food which they detested. Upon their re-appearance at Hermannsburg many were in so emaciated a state that little if anything could be done to save them.

However, the severity of the sickness which struck in the course of the terrible years of the "Great Drought" (as it was later referred to), far surpassed any of the outbreaks which had been experienced hitherto. Indeed the cause of death was not recognised for some time and it was only upon the arrival at Hermannsburg in August, 1929 of an anthropological party, that the complaint was diagnosed as scurvy.



Action was immediately taken to bring in large quantities of citrus fruits, the consumption of which

by the patients was followed in most cases by marked improvement. Unfortunately, the matter did not rest there as the weakened state of health of the residents left them exposed to pulmonary infection and a serious outbreak of tuberculosis had also to be combated. On the medical side the effects of this drought were felt for years afterwards.

On the material side, the Mission was required by 1929 to face up to a serious financial position owing to the loss of all but 280 head of cattle from a herd which in 1925 had numbered 3,000. Further, not only was the Station seriously in debt owing to four unprofitable seasons in a row, but it was faced also with a large lump-sum outlay for re-stocking. Without cattle there would be neither meat for food nor income from trading.

This financial embarrassment was eventually relieved by donations from Lutheran communities in South Australia, but the catastrophe itself had made abundantly clear that the Mission could not hope to function successfully unless adequate food supplies, particularly of green vegetables, were assured. Purchase of such items from the south was impracticable, even had it been financially feasible; consequently the discovery of new sources of water became both urgent and imperative.



Who wants to go for a ride with Barbara Egan, of Robinsvale, Victoria?