



Image from the Central Desert Shire Council

# The Mission Truck Story



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

In the 1950s the Finke River Mission (FRM) began regular 'patrols' to approximately 23 stations in Central Australia, preaching the gospel to Aboriginal people in the area. These 'patrols' were started by Pastor Friedrich Wilhelm (F.W) Albrecht and continued until the end of the 1970's. In the early days of the mission patrols Pastor F.W Albrecht travelled with fellow pastors Petrick, Scherer and many evangelists from Hermannsburg. The mission patrols were later taken over by FW Albrecht son Pastor Paul Albrecht. In 1958 Pastor Paul Albrecht moved to Alice Springs from Hermannsburg to continue the work of his father on the cattle stations to the north of Alice Springs. The six-weekly visiting schedule was maintained and as time went on more stations were included. Included on the visiting circuit were stations such as McDonald Downs, Alcoota, Neutral Junction, Anningie, Napperby, Stirling, Willowra, Mt Allan and Pmara Jutunta (Albrecht, 2002:31). This service was enhanced by Arrernte evangelists from Hermannsburg who volunteered to live on the cattle stations.



***An example of the difficulties faced reaching communities.  
Garry Stoll and Emmanuel Rutjinama digging out the Mission Truck near Utopia 1960c.***

Image from the Central Desert Shire Council

The Mission Truck provided more than just religious instruction, it was a store supplying goods, it provided medical attention and acted as a means of communication and transport for community members. Anmatyerr people also sold dingo scalps to the Mission Truck.

### ***Movie Nights, Communication and Transport***

The arrival of the mission truck in a community was an important social occasion. The Pastors travelled with a portable two-forty volt power plant, sixteen millimetre movie projector and slide projector which enabled the screening of religious, popular films of the time and documentaries. Ti Tree community members recall enjoying John Wayne films, war movies, religious movies and comedies. The Mission Truck was also of social importance because the Anmatyerr and Arrernte people were able to keep in regular contact with family and friends in other communities through the missionaries who pass on messages and transported people between communities (Schrapel, 1969: 12).

***Pastor Paul Albrecht administers eye drops at Utopia 1960c***



Image from the Central Desert Shire Council

## The Travelling Shop

The mission truck was a travelling shop and carried a variety of goods from clothing, material, dried fruit, lollies, boots, soap, hats and hardware (such as billycans, knives, axes, blankets and bullets). The mission truck 'store' consisted of specially built racks to house its variety of products (Henson, 1992: 221). The Finke River Mission also distributed second hand clothes (Schrapel, 1969:12).

In his article 'Station Patrol' Schrapel mentions the sewing skills of the Aboriginal women who brought material from the mission truck. Schrapel states:

*[a] large number of the women buy dress lengths. These are then cut up with a butcher knife, tomahawk or sometimes scissors, and hand sewn into dresses without the use of patterns. The finished article in most cases is as well finished as a factory-made dress' (Schrapel, 1969 'Station Patrol' in The Lutheran, October 6th).*

### ***Shopping at the Mission Truck 1960c***



Image from the Central Desert Shire Council

## Shopping at the Mission Truck



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### *Cultural Sensitivities and Shopping*

In some communities women did not shop at the mission truck because it was culturally inappropriate for them to mix with male strangers, which is initially how the travelling pastors and evangelists were viewed.

## ***Church Services***

The Mission Truck would generally arrive in the afternoon, that night films would be shown and the church service would be conducted the following morning. The services varied in format and location, some were conducted inside the community church and others were held outdoors. Church services were conducted in Arrernte and hymns were also were also sung in Arrernte (Schrapel, 1969:12). After the service people sometimes attended baptism and confirmation classes (Henson, 1992: 225).



***People outside the church on Napperby Station. Photograph taken 1960c.***

***Pastor Paul Albrech gives the service inside the Napperby Station church 1960c.***



Image from the Central Desert Shire Council



***Photograph taken at Napperby Station church 1960c.***

***Left – Right  
Beryl Bulla, Peter Bulla, Gustav Malbunka,  
Eileen Malbunka, Evangelist Joses Kentaltja  
And Pastor Paul Albrecht.***

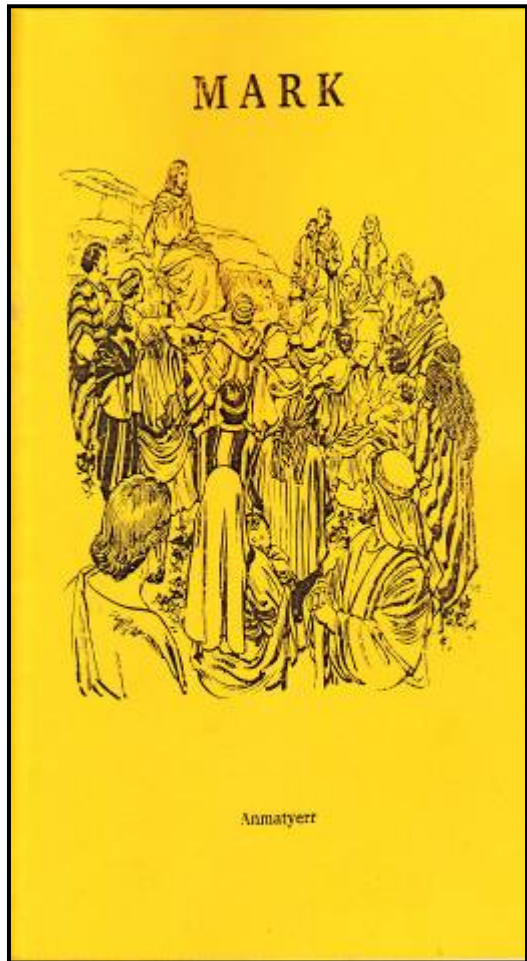
Image from the Central Desert Shire Council



## *An outdoor service at Utopia*



Image from the Central Desert Shire Council



## ***The Mission Truck work continues***

The work of the FRM continues today. There are numerous Anmatyerr pastors (such as Pastors Don Presley and Jimmy Haines) who continue the work started by those who travelled with the Mission Truck. There are also many Anmatyerr evangelists, such as Paddy Kemerr Willis living throughout the region. The Anmatyerr Bible Translation Project has been working towards producing an Anmatyerr Bible and has translated the Gospel of Mark into Anmatyerr.

**The Gospel of Mark has been translated to Anmatyerr by the Anmatyerr Bible Project.**



The Mission Truck was apart of many Anmatyerr peoples lives. Betsy Mpetyan Presley was inspired to produce this painting from her memories of the tin church on Anningie Station.

Photograph of painting from Batchelor Institute Indigenous Tertiary Education

## Reference

Albrecht, P. 2002. From Mission to Church 1877 – 2002 Finke River Mission. Finke River Mission. Openbook Publishers.

Henson, B. 1992. A Straight – Out Man. FW Albrecht and Central Australian Aborigines. Melbourne University Press: Melbourne.

Interview with Paddy Kemarr Willis conducted Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

Schrapel, 1969 'Station Patrol' in 'the Lurtheran', October 6<sup>th</sup>.

