

STEPPING STONES

If we pause to look back we'll see that the secure stepping stone on which we stand is just one in a long line of others carefully laid by those who have gone before us. Let us be as careful and prayerful as they were, as we lay each stone that will direct the paths of those who will come after us.



BY LYALL KUPKE

When their girls went to the city to study or work, many Lutheran mothers in country South Australia wanted to see them live in good Christian homes. To make sure that happened, they supported the establishment of a girls' hostel in 1959.

In the 1930s and 1940s few young country people ventured to the cities in search of work. Those who did generally lived with relatives or in boarding houses, such as that of the YWCA. The South Australian Youth Association of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (UELCA) requested that the church investigate setting up youth hostels for them.

Christian discipline and a Christian atmosphere would help mould the character of the youth and ensure they would not be lost to the church, it was said. 'This is just the period in life when careful guidance is needed to keep young persons from going astray,' wrote a senior student at Immanuel Seminary in 1945.

Although a commission was appointed, nothing came of this first attempt.

But the project did not go away. The women and the youth were determined to see it happen. While young men were able to board at Immanuel Seminary in North Adelaide, there was no comparable place for young women.

So, in the mid-1950s, the Lutheran Youth Association and the Lutheran Women's Association each pledged £5000 (\$10,000) towards the establishment of a girls' hostel.

Another commission was then appointed, chaired by the District President, Pastor Carl Pfitzner, who was a keen supporter of this project. A proposal to District Synod in 1959 to purchase a suitable building was adopted, with the South Australian District providing a further £5000.

The Girls' Hostel Committee was set up and it began to search for a suitable property. Several houses were inspected and rejected. Then a property at 9 Trinity Street, College Park, came onto the market, and it seemed to have everything the committee was looking for. But it was to be auctioned!

With the valuation at £10,000, the church set its limit at £11,000. Bidding started at £8000 and jumped rapidly. It was finally knocked down to the church for £13,270.

Formerly the home of the social and political reformer Catherine Helen Spence, it was a solid stone and brick home of eleven rooms, standing on one side of a property of over one acre in size. It boasted spacious grounds, covered with shady trees and natural lawns. It was within three kilometres of the GPO and close to bus services.

The Lutheran Girls' Hostel opened on 6 September 1959, with Miss Gertrude Thiele of Eudunda as the first matron. Three rooms were ready to accommodate 16 girls.

In the first years the demand exceeded the places available, so architect Eric von Schramek drew up plans for a new building on the site. When Bethany House was opened in February 1963,

A home away from home



Lutheran Archives

Left: Matron Thiele overlooks the girls at College Park Hostel
Below: Out of matronly view the College Park Hostel girls relax and socialise



Lutheran Archives

It was to be a Christian home away from home.

House rules were set. Girls ate meals together and evening devotions were held after tea.

the hostel had places for a total of 38 girls, with two girls in each of the new study/bedrooms.

maintenance man. Accommodation was provided for 28 girls at first, to be extended to 38 later.

Meanwhile the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (ELCA) also took the step of starting a youth hostel at Wayville in Adelaide in 1964, but it was short-lived. And in Melbourne they also began investigating the possibilities, eventually opening one in 1970.

The success of this venture inspired the Lutheran women of Queensland to decide to do something similar in Brisbane. The UELCA Lutheran Women of Queensland collected money and found a suitable property. The church bought the spacious residence at 38 Thallon Street, Sherwood. The existing building was moved to the back of the block and then two new buildings were built at the front.

It was dedicated as Katherine House on 12 May 1962, with Matron M Schiefelbein in charge and her husband working as gardener and

1965 mention is made of many girls preferring 'flating' to boarding. The rapid rise in fees in the 1970s saw many more leave to share houses or flats.

Finally, the fall in demand brought financial problems, which led to the closure of all these hostels by the early 1980s.

Although they lasted for only 20 years, the hostels did provide an important service for country girls who were leaving parental or teacher guidance for the first time. However, as society's expectations changed and as we changed from a rural church to an urban church, these institutions were no longer seen as necessary.

Lyall Kupke is LCA archivist.