

1879.

VICTORIA.

A B O R I G I N E S .

REPORT AND CORRESPONDENCE

RELATIVE TO THE MORTALITY AMONGST THE RESIDENTS OF THE ABORIGINAL
STATIONS OF VICTORIA, ETC.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND.

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THE VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE ABORIGINAL BOARD TO THE HONORABLE
THE CHIEF SECRETARY.

SIR,
Office of the Board for Protection of Aborigines,
69 Temple Court, Melbourne, 12th June 1879.

I have the honor to inform you that the Board for the Protection of Aborigines has recently had under its serious consideration the advisability of concentrating the natives on fewer stations than at present. It is a painful fact that the aborigines throughout Victoria are rapidly decreasing in numbers, the total numbers being now probably not more than 800, including half-castes.

The Board, after much careful and anxious consideration of the whole question, has come to the conclusion that four stations instead of six are now sufficient for the remnant of the native population, and beg to recommend that steps be at once taken for the purpose of giving up Coranderrk, on the Upper Yarra, near Healesville, and Framlingham Station, situated about twelve miles from Warrnambool, in the Western District. Several of the present members of the Board have always held that Coranderrk was originally badly selected as an aboriginal home on account of its climate being too cold and wet, and so far back as August 1875 Messrs. Godfrey, Curr, and Le Souef recommended that it should be abandoned as unfit for its purpose. There are other and grave reasons, namely, its close proximity to the township of Healesville and other surroundings, that make it, in the unanimous opinion of the Board, extremely desirable to break this station up. Framlingham is also now too closely environed by townships and selections; and as the Lake Condah Mission Station is only fifty miles distant from it, the Board considers it would be advisable to relinquish this station.

It is proposed, if you agree with the Board in the advisability of the course which it has now the honor to recommend, that the feelings of the natives resident on the two reserves shall, as far as possible, be consulted in the selection of their future home on any of the other stations.

If this proposal is carried out, it will necessitate an additional expense on the remaining establishments, as more huts will have to be erected on each, and other charges incurred for the increased numbers; but ultimately there will be a considerable saving in the yearly expenditure. It is estimated that at least £2,000 will be required for the above-mentioned purpose.

The reserves of Coranderrk, 4,800 acres, and Framlingham, 3,500 acres, which the Board wish to hand over to the Government, are of great commercial value, and would probably realize by auction an average of £4 per acre, or £33,200.

In the event of this arrangement being carried out, an additional area of about 8,000 acres will be needed at Lake Tyers Mission in South Gippsland; the land is of very inferior description, but is suitable for the purpose required. I may mention that the Board considers this reserve the most valuable under its control; it is isolated, situated in poor country, never likely to be thickly populated, and there are good hunting and fishing grounds in its immediate vicinity; and I may here explain that the more remote an aboriginal station is from a European population the better adapted it is for the natives.

The Ebenezer Station, on the Wimmera, near Lake Hindmarsh, also requires considerable extension, as well on account of a number of natives that have lately been located under the influence of Messrs. Hageman and Kramer as of those that would have to be sent there under this present proposal. This station ought to be increased so as to be able to carry 3,000 sheep.

This is also a very valuable reserve, as it has a suitable climate, and is in the midst of a poor district.

The Board anticipates that ultimately the last of the Victorian natives will be gathered to these two stations, Ebenezer and Lake Tyers.

In conclusion, I may state that the Board has appointed two of its members to wait on you on this subject. Attached is a schedule showing the area of land at Coranderrk and Framlingham, together with a list of improvements, also a plan * showing the extensions required at Lake Tyers and Lake Hindmarsh.

The Honorable the Chief Secretary,
&c., &c., &c.

I have, &c.,
(Signed) HENRY JENNINGS,
Vice-Chairman.

* Not printed.

SCHEDULE OF PRINCIPAL IMPROVEMENTS AT CORANDERRK STATION.

Manager's house.
 Schoolmaster's house.
 Large building used for a dormitory for children.
 Overseer's house.
 Hop kiln, complete.
 20 acres of hop garden.
 Cultivation paddock, 50 acres.

About six miles of fencing.
 Stable and coach house.
 School house.
 Stockyard, &c.
 Six two-roomed cottages (new).
 Gardens, orchards, &c., &c.

SCHEDULE OF PRINCIPAL IMPROVEMENTS AT FRAMLINGHAM.

Manager's house.
 School house.
 Four new cottages.

Cultivation paddock, 10 acres.
 About six miles of fencing, &c., &c.

**THE VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE ABORIGINAL BOARD TO THE HONORABLE
 THE CHIEF SECRETARY.**

Office of the Board for Protection of Aborigines,
 69 Temple Court, Melbourne, 12th June 1879.

SIR,

The Board for the Protection of Aborigines feel themselves under the necessity of urgently directing your attention to the subject of the health of the unfortunate remnant of the tribes under their care. It is with much regret we find that the steps which have been taken to arrest the terrible death rate prevalent for many years on our stations have proved completely futile; that the reduction in the numbers of the tribes under our care is not attributable in the main to intoxication and debauchery, as it has now become clear that the sober and moral fare nearly as ill as the drunkard. It is also important to notice that whilst the individuals of thirty or thirty-five years of age who take up their residence on our stations as a rule preserve their health, are able to work hard, and bid fair in many cases to live to sixty or seventy years of age, but that those who are born on or enter our establishments in childhood on attaining a suitable age are unable to work for any time without inducing spitting of blood, and for the most part die between their twelfth and twenty-fifth years, and seem in few cases likely to reach thirty. From this it happens that instances are daily becoming more frequent of parents who have buried two, four, or six children, and occasionally been left childless.

We have further the honor to bring under your notice the very important fact that death in most cases is the result of a disease of the lungs peculiar to the natives, which ends fatally in every case; that no cure has ever been known, nor, as far as we can judge, does medical attendance seem to have ever retarded the fatal catastrophe.

In view of these facts, it seems to us that there is strong reason for concluding that the cause of death, whatever it may be, is intimately connected with the daily life of these people, and it has been stated at one of our meetings that a similar mortality has prevailed on an establishment in Queensland. In that the case was successfully met by making a great reduction in the clothing used, and keeping the children (there are no adults in the establishment) as much as possible in the open air night and day.

Under all the circumstances of the case, having under our care the lives of several hundred human beings, we have thought it our duty to bring the matter under your notice, and to urge that it should be remitted with the least delay possible for inquiry and report to some one or more medical men who have already manifested a bias towards investigations of the sort.

I have, &c.,
 (Signed) HENRY JENNINGS,
 Vice-Chairman.

The Honorable the Chief Secretary,
 &c., &c., &c.

THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER TO THE HONORABLE THE CHIEF SECRETARY.

SIR,

Medical Department, Melbourne, 26th June 1879.

In obedience to your minute of the 13th instant asking me to suggest what steps should be taken to investigate the nature of the disease which causes the terrible death rate among the aborigines of this colony, and to ascertain some proper remedial course of treatment, I have the honor to inform you that this subject was brought prominently under my notice in 1876, when I proceeded to Coranderrk. I then minutely investigated the conditions under which the aborigines were living, as well as the surrounding locality, and had no difficulty in arriving at a conclusion as to what were the causes of the mortality which at that time decimated the natives. I enclose a printed copy of the report I made on that occasion, in which I pointed out the sanitary defects which, in my opinion, were the cause of the excessive mortality.

In the first paragraph of my report I have alluded to the site as insalubrious. I would now repeat that allusion, and recommend the site to be changed to a more healthy one; with this exception, I see nothing to add to the report of 1876.

Since the date of that report, though two years and three months have elapsed, six only out of the thirty-two new huts have been built, and these have not been drained. Their walls have been lined with boards for six feet of the height only, and the roofs not lined with calico. Drains have been cut in front and behind the old huts, and the floors of these huts have been boarded, but no further improvements have been made in them. Separate rooms for children over eleven years of age have not been built, but female children sleep in the school-room. Skillions have not been built, nor have earth-closets been provided. Neither new kitchen nor hospital has been built.

The Aborigines Board allege as an excuse for these necessary changes not having been carried out that they have not been provided with funds for the purpose. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the health of the aborigines does not improve; but if the recommendations in my report were carried out in their entirety, I have no doubt but that their influence on the health of the natives will be very great and beneficial.

I have, &c.,

(Signed)

W. McCREA,
Chief Medical Officer.

The Honorable the Chief Secretary,
&c., &c., &c.

ENCLOSURE.

SIR,

Melbourne, 24th March 1876.

In obedience to your instructions of 23rd ultimo, I have the honor to inform you that I proceeded to Coranderrk on the 20th instant, and made a careful examination of the condition of the establishment at that place in regard to its sanitary aspect, and beg to report as follows:—

1. The site is on the slope of a slightly elevated piece of ground, surrounded by mountains on three sides, with a fine stream of water on the fourth. Between the mountains and the establishment the ground is mostly low and covered with timber; in the winter season it is frequently flooded, and always damp and cold, the rainfall from the proximity of the neighboring mountains being always abundant. The natives complain greatly of the cold and wet in the winter, and I have no doubt that the situation of the establishment contributes not a little to the development of chest diseases.

2. The slope is gradual, and well adapted for drainage purposes. The huts of the natives are built on a street which runs nearly north and south across the face of the slope, instead of up and down it, the natural advantage of the fall of the ground for drainage being thus lost.

3. There is an abundant supply of water brought in pipes by gravitation from a higher level, and running in an open drain through the street; the water is pure and wholesome.

4. The huts are thirty-two in number, and in their dimensions they range from 24 feet to 12 feet in length, from 18 to 8 feet in width, and from 5 to 8 feet high. There is a sufficient space separating each hut, and some of them have gardens fenced in and containing fruit trees at the back. Most of the huts have fowl-houses rudely constructed of bark, either in contact or in close proximity to them, and one man keeps two pigs, the smells from which are neither pleasant nor salutary.

5. There are a few closets of a common description, covering mere holes in the ground, scattered about irregularly over the establishment, insufficient in number for the wants and decency of the population. Even these are not always used, the Superintendent stating that at night the children and some of the adults pass their excrement in the water channels in the street opposite their huts.

6. The construction of the huts is, in a sanitary point of view, the worst possible; the walls are of slab, paling, or bark, mostly the latter, with openings in them so numerous that they may fitly be compared to bird cages. The roofs are almost always bark, with openings nearly as numerous as in the walls; some of the natives have endeavored by paper and bags to cover the chinks and openings in the walls and roofs, but in most cases with little effect. The floors are of clay, and are damp even at this the driest season of the year, whilst in the winter the natives complain that the water rises to the surface of the floors after every shower of rain.

7. In wretched hovels like these it is no wonder the mortality is excessive. It appears by Mr. Ogilvie's report that in 1875, with a population of about 150 people, 31 deaths took place—one out of every five human beings in one year perishing from disease. This awful mortality was doubtless exceptional, an epidemic of measles having been prevalent in the early part of the year; but this epidemic prevailed all over the colony, causing a considerable increase in the general mortality; yet when the mortality of the whole colony, about 17 per 1,000, is compared with that of Coranderrk, the discrepancy is appalling, the latter amounting to 193 per 1,000, or, in other words, for every person out of the general population who died, 11 deaths occurred at Coranderrk. Two out of the 31 deaths were caused by measles directly, but 4 others from cold caught after measles; and 14 cases of pleuro-pneumonia and chest disease point but too surely to the draughty walls and roofs and to the damp floors of the huts as their cause. Persons attacked by such diseases have scarcely a chance of surviving in such hovels. Were an epidemic of scarlatina to invade the settlement, and they are liable to it at any moment, the remaining natives would be in danger of being swept away altogether. A very erroneous impression is generally prevalent regarding the power of natives to withstand the vicissitudes of weather; it is assumed, because in their aboriginal condition they were able, with little clothing, and under the mere shelter of a mia-mia, to resist the influence of severe cold and wet, that their dwellings should be very open. This is a great mistake; the altered conditions in which a comparative civilization places them render them much more obnoxious to changes of temperature than when they led a savage life; the circumstance of wearing clothing causes them to perspire more freely in exertion, and the exposure to draughts under these conditions renders them unusually liable to diseases consequent on suppressed perspiration, and particularly to diseases of the lungs. They themselves feel and complain bitterly of the effects of cold air, especially in the winter time, rushing through the crevices of their ill-constructed huts. Their sleeping accommodation is defective in space, from four to ten persons in some cases occupying a single hut, when there is barely cubic space sufficient to support the health of two. Their bedsteads are untidy constructions of sticks and bark, likely to engender vermin and to inculcate want of cleanliness and habits of self-respect in the occupants.

8. Two of the natives, inspired by a desire for greater comfort, have built houses for themselves, one of which is a very superior one; and a few others have floored their huts with boards to protect their wives and families from the fatal effects of damp in the winter time.

The kitchen is a wretched hut, and has been used for the double purpose of a kitchen and a dining-room for the twenty-five children under the charge of the matron-schoolmistress; it is utterly inadequate for such purpose.

9. As remedies for the insalubrious state of things at Coranderrk, I beg to submit for your consideration the carrying out of the following suggestions:—

- 1st. That a new street be formed running east and west in the line of the slope, so as to afford the greatest facility for drainage purposes.
- 2nd. That new huts be built on raised blocks of sawn weatherboard, lined and floored with boards, with shingle roofs, lined with calico and thoroughly water-tight, sufficiently ventilated by openings between the roofs and the walls, the walls to be at least 9 feet high. Each hut to have one sitting-room with an open brick chimney, and sufficient bed-room accommodation to afford 400 cubic feet of space for each individual; separate rooms for such of the sexes as are over 11 years of age; both sitting and bed rooms to have double-sash windows, so that they may be partially opened to admit fresh air when required. A small skillion at the back of each hut would be desirable to induce the occupants to keep their sitting-room clean and tidy.
- 3rd. That each hut should have a small garden fenced in for fruit, flowers, and vegetables at the rear; and an earth-closet at the end of the garden most distant from the hut. When they have fowl-houses, these should be erected at the same end of the garden, and no person should be allowed to keep pigs.
- 4th. The huts should be drained by covered drains sufficiently deep to preserve them from damp, and running the whole length of the street both in the front and back of the huts, having outlets on the lowest part of the slope.

- 5th. A new kitchen should be built of brick, and the floor tiled or flagged, with a wash-house and bath-house contiguous to it ; the present school-room might be made a dining-room for the children, and a new school-room built.
- 6th. A hospital should be erected to provide for the isolation and treatment of persons ill of contagious diseases ; it should be made to accommodate ten per cent. of the numbers in the establishment, and should be provided with bedding and furniture necessary for a hospital.
- 7th. The Inspector, Mr. Ogilvie, suggests that the meat and flour elements of the rations should be changed ; they now get 7 lbs. flour and 6 lbs. meat per week. He states the natives would prefer to have less flour and more meat ; the meat, which is issued twice a week, is generally consumed by the end of the day it is issued ; he also thinks the flour would be better if it were not so fine. I have no doubt the flour would be more wholesome if there were more bran in it ; and as the aborigines were entirely a flesh-consuming race, I should imagine more meat and less flour would be more conducive to their health ; and anyhow the meat should in future be issued three times a week instead of twice.
- 8th. The provision for medical attendance is at present expensive and inadequate. There is a medicine chest with very few medicines, and no directions for the treatment of slight cases and emergencies. It appears a medical man who lives at Flemington is employed to visit the station quarterly at a cost of £40 per annum, for what purpose I am at a loss to conceive, for the nearest local medical practitioner is called in when required to treat the sick at a cost of four guineas for each visit. This costly system should be at once abolished, and a contract made for the nearest practitioner to visit the station at certain, say monthly periods, and as often as emergencies require in the intervening time. A stock of simple medicines should be kept at the station, with directions how to treat urgent and ordinary cases in the absence of medical aid. These directions could be furnished by this department to all the aboriginal stations if the suggestion is adopted.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

W. McCREA, Chief Medical Officer.

The Honorable the Chief Secretary,
&c., &c., &c.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE ABORIGINAL BOARD TO THE HONORABLE
THE CHIEF SECRETARY.

Office of the Board for Protection of Aborigines,

69 Temple Court, Melbourne, 7th July 1879.

SIR,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of a report sent to you by Dr. McCrea, dated 26th June 1879, with reference to a request or suggestion lately made by the Board to the then Acting Chief Secretary, the Honorable Sir Bryan O'Loughlen, that a Board of medical men should be appointed to report on (and, if possible, to point out remedial measures) the disease of the lungs which has for many years past proved so fatal to the aboriginal race. The Board would desire to point out that Dr. McCrea's report only refers to the sanitary condition of the Coranderrk Station, and it expresses his regret that the Board has been unable to carry out the whole of his suggestions set forth in a previous report dated 24th March 1876.

Dr. McCrea seems to have overlooked the fact that this fatal lung disease exists on all the other stations, though some of them are under entirely different conditions with regard to climate, drainage, &c. The Board differs with Dr. McCrea in his conclusion as to the cause of the excessive mortality. Experience has led the Board to think that it is not well to make the native cottages so air-tight as he suggests, and it is of opinion that there are causes other than those referred to in his report which occasion the development of the peculiar form of chest disease which carries off so many of the natives, especially among the young.

(Signed)

I have, &c.,
ALBERT A. C. LE SOUEF,
Vice-Chairman.

The Honorable the Chief Secretary.