

Appendix 7 - The Industrial School System

In 1864 the Victorian government introduced a system of Industrial Schools and Reformatories through its Neglected and Criminal Children's Act (1864). Those children who were considered "neglected" were sent to Industrial Schools one of which was established at Geelong. Being considered a "neglected" child covered children begging in the streets, those without a home and without any means of support. Children also living with adults engaged in immoral or illegal practices were also considered to be "neglected" and thus taken into care. Children who had been convicted of "any offence" were sent to "reformatory" schools although, in practice, older children generally were sent to Reformatories and younger children usually ended up being sent to the Industrial Schools.

Industrial School (1864 - 1887)

The following information is from the State Government Archives. Source: 'Agency VA 1466 Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools', in *Public Record Office Victoria Online Catalogue*, Agency details, catalogue entry, Public Record Office Victoria, 2005.

"Victoria first established industrial schools in the 1860s. Technically, an industrial school was to provide training to 'neglected' children, while a reformatory was an institution for 'criminal' children. However, the lines were often blurred, as the name of Victoria's first child welfare legislation, 'The Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864' makes clear. Industrial schools were eventually abolished altogether in the 1880s.

The industrial schools were established in the ideal that they would train 'neglected' children in habits of industry and order. The 'training' in these industrial schools however was far from successful. Problems with overcrowding and disease resulted in a 'merry-go-round' in the late 1860s, with children being transferred between various institutions in Victoria.

The Geelong Industrial School was established in around 1865. In 1869, the School moved from Ryrie Street to Myers Street. It housed children including those who, for health reasons, were moved from Melbourne's industrial schools. In 1879, there were 81 girls at the Industrial School in Geelong, including those who had been transferred from Royal Park Industrial School.

The first Geelong Industrial School was situated in Ryrie Street.

The atmosphere in Geelong was thought to be healthier than Melbourne's, meaning that frail children in the city's industrial schools were often transferred to Geelong. This led to problems with overcrowding at Ryrie Street in the late 1860s.

In 1868, plans were afoot for a second industrial school in Geelong. In November 1869, it was established in the former Gaol in Myers Street.

In 1879 there were 81 girls at the Industrial School in Geelong, including some who were transferred from the industrial school at Royal Park in July 1879.

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Location

c. 1865 - c. 1880

Location - Geelong Industrial School was located at Ryrie St, Geelong. Location: Geelong

1869

Location - A second building was opened at Myers St, Geelong. Location: Geelong

The system was much criticized and in 1872 a Royal Commission on Industrial and Reformatory Schools “condemned the industrial school system for the 'care' of 'neglected' children ...”.

- the deprivation of all the natural domestic associations injuriously affected the health and spirits of the children
- bringing together large numbers of children exposed them to dangers of 'contagion, both physical and moral'
- the number of children in the schools made any individual attention impossible, this being 'the only effectual means of bringing moral and religious influences to bear'
- the trades taught in the schools encouraged children to settle in town and cities 'with their inevitable snares and temptations'
- that children in industrial schools were not able to form any kind of family or domestic ties

The Commission concluded that 'the whole system of congregated charitable schools is based on a wrong principle, which, in its practical development, is injurious alike to the interests of the children brought up in them and to the state'.

It urged that the industrial schools system be replaced with the boarding out system, 'under which the children would be boarded in respectable cottagers' homes, under regular supervision by honorary local Ladies' Visiting Committees'.

Thus, the failure of the industrial schools system led to the introduction of 'boarding out' in Victoria from 1872. Tierney goes so far as to say that the 'disastrous' experiment of industrial schools in Victoria led to a conviction that the state, by its very nature, was unable to provide institutional care for 'neglected' children. Many researchers and writers have identified that Victoria, in contrast with other states, was notably reliant on the 'voluntary institutions' run by the charitable and religious sector to provide homes for children.

(Source: 'Agency VA 1466 Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools', in *Public Record Office Victoria Online Catalogue*, Agency details, catalogue entry, Public Record Office Victoria, 2005,)

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