

Geelong Industrial School

c. 1865 – c. 1880

Other Names: • Industrial School for Girls

Details

The Geelong Industrial School received its first children in September 1865. The School was located on Ryrie Street, Geelong, in a portion of the immigration barracks at the eastern end of town. In 1869, the school opened a second site in the old Geelong Gaol at Myers Street in order to reduce overcrowding at the Ryrie street site, however Myers St was deemed unsuitable and closed around 1873.

The Geelong Industrial School housed children including those who, for health reasons, were moved from Melbourne's industrial schools. Initially, it was mainly used as a convalescent depot – frail children in the city's industrial schools were often transferred to Geelong, where the atmosphere was thought to be healthier. The Argus described its first residents, who had been transferred from the Princes Bridge Industrial School, as a "deplorable lot of sickly-looking children" (*The Argus*, 25 August 1866).

It housed boys under the age of 6 and girls aged from 2 to 8. There were older girls aged between 12 and 15 who worked at the Industrial School washing, cooking, cleaning and making and mending clothes.

When the Geelong Industrial School opened, a newspaper article described problems with the water supply:

There is a very inadequate supply of water. It is drawn from the river, about a mile distant, but nothing like a sufficiency is available. The children in consequence are never properly washed, and thorough bathing is out of the question ... I did not see a single bath in the institution. There are a few zinc buckets, of the kind used at Sunbury; but the children are not properly washed one day in seven ...

The article also described how older girls at the institution had the job of dressing and washing the children (they were washed after they got dressed). One girl was observed washing "fifty-three children in something less than half an hour" (*The Age*, 9 December 1865).

The institution had 7 wards to accommodate children, and a detached hospital building. The largest, principal dormitory was known as No.1 ward and it was 60 by 30 feet. According to *The Argus*, it was "lighted by ten large windows, and the ventilation is good. Twenty-nine beds are made up, two children sleeping in each. Iron bedsteads are supplied with straw mattresses, and the bedding, and indeed everything in the apartment is particularly clean and well kept. A nurse sleeps in each ward, so that immediate attention may be given to the children at night if required" (*The Argus*, 25 August 1866).

The other dormitories were all in the old immigration buildings. No. 2 ward had 27 children, including the older girls. No. 3 ward was for boys and had 14 beds. Dorms no.4 and 5 each had 12 beds and accommodated 42 children. There was a schoolroom, 60 x 28 feet.

An article from August 1866 described the institution:

It being about the dinner hour I visited the long dining room, which is capable of seating 220 children. There were eight tables laid out with spoons and tin platters, and at each end a large tin bowl, containing what is popularly called "Irish stew", meat and vegetables boiled almost to the consistency of soup. This is the standard meal five days of the week, a real vegetable soup being supplied the other two days. For breakfast they have bread and milk (of the latter each child receives a pint per day), varied occasionally by oatmeal porridge and milk, and the younger children have a bread luncheon an hour before dinner. The whole of the children are bathed by the older girls, morning and evening, in tepid water.

The children have a fine playground, with swings and other appliances for their amusement; and occasionally some philanthropic townsman gives a magic lantern exhibition to the youngsters in their schoolroom (The Argus, 25 August 1866).

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. The north, south and east wings of the gaol were used for the Myers Street Industrial School, to house young girls between 3 and 16 and boys up to the age of 6. Between 1868 and 1873 the Myers Street site housed up to 192 students whilst adult male and female prisoners remained in the west wing (Geelong Gaol Museum).

The Geelong Industrial School operated at both the Ryrie Street and Myers Street sites until around 1873. In 1872 there were a total of 442 girls at the Geelong Industrial School, 259 at the Ryrie Street site and 183 at the Myers Street site.

The Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline handed down a report in 1872 that was highly critical of the industrial school system for children in the colony of Victoria. The report claimed that the state of the institution at Myers St was "worse than any other":

The building forms part of the gaol. Nothing can exceed the dismal and dispiriting aspect of its dungeon cells and corridors, without either sufficient light or proper ventilation. The placing of the children in such a building can only be excused on the ground of imperative necessity. As, however, the abandonment of the building and the transfer of the children to the Ryrie-street school has been resolved upon by the Inspector-General, with the concurrence of the Government, it is not necessary to dwell further on this point. The management of the school, it is fair to add, seems to be as efficient, and the children are fed and cared for, as well as they can be under the circumstances.

The Myers Street site in the old gaol was closed by 1873.

By June 1874, the Geelong Industrial School only housed girls, boys over 7 years of age being sent to Sunbury where they could receive "technical instruction". The *Geelong Advertiser* reported that most children at Geelong were Roman Catholic, "the Protestants having, as a rule, been drafted to Ballarat and elsewhere". This article stated that the institution at Geelong was of "great usefulness as a sanatorium" for children in Victoria's industrial schools. Their health benefited from "sea-bathing, combined with a salubrious atmosphere" (*Geelong Advertiser*, 9 June 1874).

In March 1876, when the [Princes Bridge Industrial School](#) was closed, the girls were transferred to the Geelong Industrial School (*Australasian*, 25 March 1876).

In April 1879, the *Geelong Advertiser* reported that there were plans to move girls to Geelong from the industrial school at Sunbury. It described improvements being made to the institution at Ryrie Street.

The “long play-shed” and “the cottages in the south-west corner” have been removed, “thus leaving the western half of the area occupied by the Industrial Schools clear, with the exception of the storeroom in the extreme north-west corner and the Matron’s late quarters, now intended for storeman’s quarters, on the south-west corner.

The entrance gate has been removed from Ryrie-street to Swanston-street, and a dividing fence will be erected between the half of the area, containing the school buildings and the cleared half, the intention being to cultivate the latter as a garden, a carriage drive leading from the main entrance.

The out-offices have also been removed from their late site to a more distant, and therefore suitable, position. The matron will now occupy the larger of the renovated buildings in the south-east corner of the enclosure (Geelong Advertiser, 10 April 1879).

In 1879 there were 81 girls at the Industrial School in Geelong, including some who had been transferred from the girls’ industrial school at [Royal Park](#) in July 1879. The department’s annual report for 1879 reported that there were 81 children at the Industrial School for Girls in Geelong, under the care of a matron. It described the wooden buildings as “insecure” and “troubled with vermin”. It said that although the buildings were suitable, they “cannot be considered permanent structures”.

In June 1880, it was reported that the industrial school would be closed by the end of the month. The number of children in industrial schools had been decreasing because of the shift towards boarding out. At that time there were 65 girls at Geelong Industrial School, and 2 boys aged under 6. Fifty of the children were in the dormitories, and the remainder were in the hospital. This article contained some more details about daily life at Geelong Industrial School. Children received the same tuition that they would in state schools, and the hours of instruction were from 9 to 11.30 and from 1.30 to 3.30.

The free use of a large yard is allowed them in which to exercise their limbs, and at dark they proceed to a ward and schoolroom, where they have the advantages of fire and gas, and are allowed to indulge in indoor amusements, such as draughts, lotto, solitaire, or reading, according as their tastes dictate. This continues until 8 o’clock, when they are supposed to retire to their dormitories, and at nine they are in bed and the gas is turned off (Geelong Advertiser, 7 June 1880).

In August 1880, it was reported that the committee was “very sanguine that they will be able to board out all the children on hand during the next month”. An article invited people interested in becoming foster parents to make an application. Should they wish to see the children “not yet sent out” they could go to Geelong to see the girls, or to Royal Park to see the boys.

The exact closing date of Geelong Industrial School is not known, but it would seem that it ceased housing children around the end of 1880.

In September 1880, the committee of the [Geelong Refuge](#) asked the Victorian Premier if an unoccupied portion of the industrial school building might be placed at their disposal, “their premises being quite inadequate”. The Premier’s response was that he was in favour of removing the buildings and selling the land (*The Argus*, 4 September 1880). In October 1881, it was reported that some buildings from the Ryrie Street site had been granted to the ladies committee of the Refuge. The buildings had been removed, re-erected and repaired. There was still work to be done, including asphaltting the verandah, and dividing the large room, 133 ft long into six sleeping apartments (*Geelong Advertiser*, 14 October 1881).

Some allotments of crown land on the old Industrial School reserve were sold in March 1882.

Gallery



Industrial School, Geelong

Description: This is a picture of a watercolour of the Geelong Industrial School.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Colony of Victoria \(1864 - 1887\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Princes Bridge Industrial School \(1853 - 1876\)](#)
Children were frequently transferred from the Princes Bridge Industrial School to the Geelong Industrial School
- [Royal Park Industrial School \[Girls\] \(1875 - c.1879\)](#)

Resources

- Swain, Shurlee, *A refuge at Kildare: the history of the Geelong Female Refuge and Bethany Babies' Home*, 1985
- Kranjc, Elaine & Jennings, Pam, *The Geelong industrial schools*, 2008
- Care Leavers Australia Network, [Geelong and District Orphanages](#), No date
- [The Ryrie-Street Industrial School: Deputation to the Chief Secretary](#), Geelong Advertiser, 12 February 1872

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
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