Coranderrk Children's Asylum and Dormitory

1863 – 1924

Details

The Coranderrk Children's Asylum and Dormitory was established in 1863 as part of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve near Healesville. It housed Aboriginal and "mixed race" children who were orphaned or deemed to be neglected. By 1924 the dormitory had ceased to operate.

The site for the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station was selected when 40 Aboriginal people left Mohica Station, led by Wonga and Barak from the Wurundjeri Clan. In 1863 they chose a site of 2,300 acres between Badger Creek and Watts River near Healesville. It was gazetted as an Aboriginal Reserve within three months.

Under the authority of the Central Board to Watch over the interests of Aborigines (established in 1860), John Green – a Presbyterian lay preacher and the Inspector of Aborigines from 1861-75 – controlled the Coranderrk Reserve. He aimed to 'rescue' young Aboriginal women and girls, particularly those of mixed descent, from the un-Christian usages of both black and white men. Children were often taken from the supposed 'bad influence ' of their families.

The children's asylum, which stood at the heart of Coranderrk Station, consisted of a schoolroom and six dormitories which were described as 'lofty and well-ventilated' to prevent the children from contracting chest ailments and tuberculosis which afflicted Aboriginal children in colonial schools. The aim was to convert these children into modern citizens through a program that combined physical exercise and outdoor labour with classroom instruction.

The boys were taught to be farm labourers and the girls to be domestic servants. The girls were prevented from having social interaction beyond the boundaries of the asylum. Their formal education stopped at grade three level. Once the young people reached the age of 14, they were compelled to leave and find a job away from family and community.

Coranderrk became a successful self-supporting community, but the white occupiers of the colony exerted pressure on the Government to enable them to acquire the valuable land. They wanted the Government to declare all the 'half-castes' white and to expel them from the Reserve. In January 1885 all 'able-bodied half-castes under the age of 35' were instructed to look for employment or seek settlement elsewhere. This was a means of undermining the successful functioning of the Reserve.

By 1924 most Aboriginal people had left Coranderrk and re-located to Lake Tyers.

Gallery

The Aboriginal settlement at Coranderrk [picture]

Description: This is a digital image of a print of Coranderrk Aboriginal settlement, Victoria. It shows houses surrounded by trees on the mission site and a man with a bullock dray.

Coranderrk, 1868 [picture]

Description: This is a digitised image of Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve. Several mission buildings can be seen from a distance.

More info

Related Entries

Run by
- [Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines, Colony of Victoria (1869 - 1900)](#)
  Date: 1869 - 1900
- [Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of Aborigines (1860 - 1869)](#)
  Date: 1863 - 1869
- [Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines, State Government of Victoria (1901 - 1957)](#)
  Date: 1900 - 1924

Related Organisations
- [Chief Secretary's Department (1855 - 1979)](#)

Resources

- Nelson, E., Swain, S. and Grimshaw, P., *Letters from Aboriginal women of Victoria 1867-1926*, 2002
- *Coranderrk*, Mission Voices: Missions and Reserves website, 2004
- Victoria. Public Record Office; National Archives of Australia. Melbourne Office, with an historical overview by Richard Broome., *walata tyamateetja: a guide to government records about Aboriginal people in Victoria.*, 2014
- Public Record Office Victoria, *Aboriginal Victorians (1830s - 1970s)*, 2014
- Public Record Office Victoria, *Koorie Heritage - Koorie Index of Names*, 2014
- Boucher, Leigh and Russell, Lynette, *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, April 2015

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