

# Peel Island Lazaret

31 May 1907 – 5 August 1959

## Details

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The Peel Island Lazaret, in Moreton Bay, was established for the detention and treatment of sufferers from Hansen's Disease, more commonly known as leprosy. Opening in 1907, Peel Island Lazaret was Australia's first purpose-built, multi-racial lazaret in Australia. It was run by the Queensland State government and closed in 1959.

Non-European patients from Friday Island Lazaret and European patients from Stradbroke Island Lazaret were moved to Peel Island when it was established in 1907.

Children were among the patients sent to Peel Island in 1907. Noel (Laddie) Agnew was 11 when transferred to Peel Island from the Stradbroke Island Lazaret. He was diagnosed with Hansen's Disease at the age of eight and died on Peel Island in 1937. While on the island Noel identified 76 species of birds. He published a list of the species in 1913 and 1921.

Charles Hewitt was 12 when he was sent to Peel Island. As the disease progressed, Charles became blind and was barely able to care for himself. He died in 1938 at the age of 29 and was buried on the island in an unmarked grave.

Run by the State government, a lack of funding was a constant problem when it came to the provision of adequate food supplies, medical treatment and weatherproof housing. "Coloured" patients were segregated from "white" patients and housed in sub-standard tin huts. In 1940 the decision was made to move non-European patients to Fantome Island in the Palm Island Group, off Townsville.

It was 20 years before the first purpose-built surgery was erected and the first resident doctor did not arrive until 1947. Electricity was not available until 1948. By the mid-1950s conditions on the island had improved somewhat.

Originally, isolation was considered the only way to contain Hansen's Disease. However from 1947 onwards, patients on Peel Island were successfully treated with Sulphone derivatives and consequently the need for a dedicated lazaret gradually disappeared. The facility closed in 1959 and the remaining patients were transferred to the South Brisbane (now Princess Alexandra) Hospital.

Following the closure of the leprosarium, several proposals were put forward for the development of the island, none of which came to fruition. From 1968 to 1993 the Church of England Grammar School leased some of the Lazaret buildings for use as an outdoor educational camp.

In 1992 the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service took over management of the island. In the same year Peel Island was included in the Queensland Heritage Register and Register of the National Estate. On 18 December 2007 Peel Island was renamed Teerk Roo Ra and was declared a National Park and Conservation Park.

## Gallery



### New leprosy hospital at Peel Island, Queensland

**Description:** This is part of the description that was supplied with the photograph and included in the library catalogue: The kitchens in the centre and dining rooms each side. Bathrooms at back also laundry and stables.

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### Peel Island lazarette huts and kitchen building

**Description:** This description was supplied with the photograph and included in the library catalogue: The new lazarette on Peel Island - men's quarters; kitchen and dining room each side, and three of the men's huts.

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### Newly built huts for patients at the lazaret on Peel Island [altered from original title]

**Description:** This description was supplied with the photograph and included in the library catalogue: There are sixteen of these slab and bark roofed huts and a dining shed and quarters. The buildings were all erected by the boys seen in the photograph who are from Baramba and Myora.

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### Salvation Army brass band visiting Peel Island Lazaret during 1920s

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Health and Home Affairs Department \(5 December 1935 - 26 September 1963\)](#)
- [Home Secretary's Office \(6 August 1896 - 5 December 1935\)](#)

Date: 1907 - 1935

#### Related Legislation

- [Leprosy Act 1892, Queensland \(1892 - 1937\)](#)

The Leprosy Act provided for the treatment of lepers as well as their detention and isolation. It also allowed for the government to appoint any place to be a lazaret for the reception and medical treatment of lepers.

#### Related Organisations

- [Friday Island Lazaret \(27 October 1892 - c. 1907\)](#)  
Patients from Friday Island Lazaret were moved to Peel Island Lazaret in 1907.
- [Fantome Island Lazaret \(1939 - 1973\)](#)  
Non-European patients were moved from Peel Island to Fantome Island in 1940.
- [Stradbroke Island Lazaret \(25 November 1892 - 1907\)](#)  
Patients from Stradbroke Island Lazaret were moved to Peel Island Lazaret in 1907.

## Resources

- Ludlow, P., *Peel Island*, Islands of incarceration : convict and quarantine islands of the Australian coast, 1995
- Ludlow, Peter, *Peel Island : Paradise or Prison?*, 2005
- [Coloured Lepers at Fantome Island](#), Courier Mail, 11 January 1940

- [Leper Escapes, Marries Nurse](#), Sydney Morning Herald, 18 March 1950
- [You'll Have to Go Away: The Leprosarium on Peel Island](#), Radio National Hindsight, 2010

## Records

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

### Records

- [Special Batches \[Correspondence Files of the Colonial Secretary's Office and Health Departments\] \(1852 - 1975\)](#)
  - [Card Index of Leper Patients at Peel and Fantome Islands \(24 September 1923 - 8 August 1939\)](#)
  - [Lazaret Patient Registers \(2 March 1892 - 27 September 1984\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/peel-island-lazaret/>