Melbourne Benevolent Asylum

1851 – 1970

Details

The Melbourne Benevolent Asylum opened in 1851. Due to a lack of other institutions in the colony at the time it was established, the Benevolent Asylum initially accommodated a wide range of people in need. This included children, until 1857 when children were transferred to the Melbourne Orphan Asylum at its new site in Emerald Hill. As Melbourne established more charitable institutions the Benevolent Asylum focused increasingly on housing the aged poor. It relocated from North Melbourne to Cheltenham in 1911. In 1970 it was renamed the Kingston Centre.

The establishment of a Benevolent Asylum in Melbourne was first proposed in 1848. The foundation stone at the 10 acre site in North Melbourne was laid in 1850. The Benevolent Asylum accepted its first reisdents in November 1851 (Kehoe, 1998).

The Benevolent Asylum was an imposing building on a site "on the summit of a hill overlooking the junction of the Moonee Ponds Creek with the Salt Water swamp immediately behind the old cattle yards of the Melbourne Auction Company" (Kehoe, p.17). Designed by Charles Lang, it was built in a Tudor Gothic style. Kehoe writes that as demand for accommodation grew, the complex was frequently expanded with new wings attached to the original building spreading out across the site (p.12).

From 1851 until 1857, children were accommodated at the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum. A report from 1854 expressed concern about the poor living conditions for children.

> *Many were sleeping three to a bed, with their heads hanging over the iron work of the bedsteads. The boys slept on the floor. There were no pillows, mattresses were thin and often too short and too narrow for the beds, there was an extreme shortage of sheeting and bedding and what did exist was excessively dirty (Report of the Sub Committee on the General Management of the Benevolent Asylum, September 1854, quoted in Kehoe, p.24).*

Without a lying-in hospital in Melbourne, many babies were also born to women living at the Benevolent Asylum – 40 births were recorded between 1854 and 1856.

In January 1857, children at the Benevolent Asylum were moved to the Melbourne Orphan Asylum, at its new site in Emerald Hill (Kehoe, p.28).

Gallery

Benevolent Asylum

Description: Looking across garden and paths towards facade of building, three storeys with gabled roof and attic windows, oriel window over entrance. Men on garden paths in foreground.

Benevolent Asylum (North Melbourne, Vic)

Description: This is a copy of a photograph from State Library Victoria. It shows a sign on the fence of the Benevolent Asylum which reads: "Visiting Days Tuesdays and Fridays from noon until three o'clock".

Melbourne Benevolent Asylum

Description: Photographic print of the Benevolent Asylum, North Melbourne. Shows 3-storey buildings with trees and shrubs in foreground. In centre of buildings is clock face between 2 small spires. People are seated on 2 benches and partially obscured by trees l.r.

More info

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- Melbourne Orphan Asylum (1853 - 1926)

Resources

- Kehoe, Mary, *The Benevolent Asylum*, The Hotham History Project, 1998

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