

Immigrants' Aid Society

1853 – c.1902

Details

The Immigrants' Aid Society came into being in May 1853. A non-government organisation, its initial purpose was to provide relief and information only to new arrivals to the colony of Victoria, though its activities quickly expanded beyond providing aid to poor immigrants. Before the colonial government passed the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act* in 1864 which enabled it to establish government-run institutions, the Immigrants' Aid Society accommodated hundreds of children at its Immigrants' Home in St Kilda Road. In 1870, the Society changed its name to the Immigrants' Aid Society's Home for Houseless and Destitute Persons. In 1902, having become a benevolent asylum, it changed its name to the Victorian Homes for the Aged and Infirm.

The Immigrants' Aid Society came into being in May 1853, following a meeting of Melbourne's prominent citizens, concerned about the welfare of immigrants being drawn to the colony by the gold rushes. Many who came to the colony intending to seek gold found themselves stranded in Melbourne, without the funds to make the eight-day journey to the goldfields, let alone purchase the necessary equipment. A tent city on the outskirts of Melbourne, known as Canvas Town, was home for many of these impoverished immigrants. Others could not even afford the weekly rent required to pitch a tent in Canvas Town.

The initial purpose of the Immigrants' Aid Society was to provide aid only to new arrivals, however its activities quickly expanded beyond providing relief and information to poor immigrants. The Immigrants' Home was the name that early colonists gave to its ramshackle buildings on either side of St Kilda Road south of Princes Bridge. Over time, the Immigrants' Home came to serve a similar function to an English workhouse, operating a night shelter, convalescent hospital and providing shelter for deserted wives, single mothers, the disabled and orphaned and neglected children.

In 1857, the Victorian government authorised the Immigrants' Aid Society to accept children from the courts and maintain them at the Princes Bridge institution. This was done according to the *Criminal Law (Infants) Act 13 Vic., No.21 1849*, which provided that children could be assigned by the Supreme Court to persons willing to undertake their maintenance and education.

In the 1850s and 1860s, James Harcourt was the superintendent at the Immigrants' Aid Society Formerly, Harcourt had been a Poor Law administrator in England. He served as a Member of the Victorian Parliament from 1869 to 1872.

In 1864, when the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act* came into being, 463 children were transferred from the care of the Superintendent of the Immigrants' Aid Society to the newly-established Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools. The two sections of the Immigrants' Home that were already housing children at that time were proclaimed as industrial schools, with Harcourt as the superintendent.

By the early twentieth century, the Immigrants' Home had become a benevolent asylum. In 1902, to reflect this change in function, the Immigrants' Aid Society altered its name to Victorian Homes for the Aged and Infirm. Its operations were transferred from St Kilda Road to Royal Park in 1914. The institution underwent several further name changes throughout its transition from a benevolent Home to a hospital, specialising in aged care. In 1979, it became known as Mount Royal Hospital. In 2005, the name changed again to the Royal Melbourne Hospital – Royal Park Campus.

More info

Related Entries

Ran

- [Immigrants' Home \(c.1853 - 1902\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Royal Park Industrial School \[Girls\] \(1875 - c.1879\)](#)
The site and buildings of the Royal Park Industrial School were given to the Immigrants' Aid Society in 1882.

Resources

- [The Immigrants' Home](#), The Australasian, 10 July 1875

Records

Records

- [Records of the Immigrants' Aid Society \(c. 1878 - c. 1902\)](#)
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