

## **EXTRACTS: FROM PRISON TO PARADISE**

### **Genealogy of Ngawhatu Hospital Previously known as Nelson Lunatic Asylum**

#### **1840 – 1991 And St Mary's Orphanage At Stoke**

By Marjorie M. Webby, 1991

Father Garin built a large five storey convent and a high school — the largest and most notable building in Nelson. Near to the school, in ample grounds, two orphanages were erected - managed by the Sisters of the Mission: one for girls and one for boys. The facilities accommodated 42 small boys and some 70 girls. The children were chubby, clean, well-nourished and comfortably clad.

At the age of eight, the boys were drafted to the Stoke Orphanage.

#### **The Orphanages**

Father Champagn insisted that the aim of the Institute was the evangelisation of the poor, the abandoned, the disinherited and all those about whom no one cared.

The first Catholic orphanage in Nelson was a small cottage opened in September 1872 by Father Garin in order to rescue and 'preserve to the faith' some of the parentless Catholic children who were being brought up in an alien creed in a non-Catholic orphanage in the suburb of Motueka.

In the early part of 1877 increased accommodation was added at a cost of two hundred and forty pounds. In 1882 another addition was made, this time at a cost of about five hundred pounds. Up to 1884 the orphanage had been supported by grants from the Provincial District of Nelson. In that year it was gazetted as an Industrial School under the Act and entitled to direct Government capitation.

In 1880 St Mary's Orphanages in Nelson were proclaimed an Industrial School.

*"To the industrial school may be sent orphan children, or children in charge of parents of immoral or dissolute habits, or children begging about the streets, or wandering about, or frequenting taverns, or having no settled home, or means of subsistence, or dwelling in any brothel, or associated with any reputed thief, or habitual drunkard, or convicted vagrant, — or any children having*

*committed some offence which the justices, having regard to the tender age of such children, think should be sent to an Industrial School rather than to prison."*

**New Zealand Tablet 9 April 1880:**

The boys were trained in farm work, gardening, the care of sheep, horses and cattle, and provision was to be made for imparting a knowledge of carpentry, smiths' work to those having an aptitude and inclination for such work. They were kept until the age of fifteen and then placed with farmers.

Magistrates from all parts of New Zealand were thenceforth empowered to commit children to St Mary's. As a consequence its numbers soon increased rapidly and Nelson home became too small for the new conditions.

Because of the increase in the number of pupils a fine estate of 375 acres was purchased, in 1885, at Stoke. A two story wooden building was built on the property, situated approximately where Highland Valley branches off from Ngawhatu Road. This was named St Mary's Orphanage and Industrial School and was opened in August 1886. Under the agreement signed in 1889 the diocese retained ownership of the two properties, but the Brothers were given the unrestricted management and tenure in perpetuity in return for paying the interest on the debt of about three hundred and sixty pounds a year.

By 1890, when the Marist Brothers took over, the Orphanage was caring for 180 boys in residence. Their tenure of office was terminated by the unfortunate occurrences of the year of 1900 which were known as the "Stoke Persecutions".

Archbishop Redwood used the school at Stoke as an ideal place of retirement for elderly brothers, and as a convalescent home for those who were ill. The growing number of Brothers in New Zealand needed a large building for their annual retreat. A large farm would provide employment for those Brothers who were unsuited to teaching, and would provide room for the construction of a novitiate. In addition, the property in Nelson itself would be very useful in many ways: "as a receiving house for the children on their arrival from various parts; as a small boarding school where those children (or others) might be placed who were now at the Orphanage solely at their relatives' desire and expense; as a residence for the Brothers should they take up the parochial school later on". The farm might even be a source of income, sorely needed for the maintenance of the Australian juniorate and novitiate, and for the construction of St Joseph's College, Sydney.

The school was grossly overcrowded; given the type of pupil enrolled, interest in academic progress was minimal and escapes, often in groups, were common. The manners, cleanliness and general behaviour of the boys also left much to be desired. The standard forms of punishment were caning or confinement in a prison cell. For such a challenge, it seems unlikely that the Brothers were fitted, in numbers, by temperament, or by training. It is understandable that the first Director remained in charge for little more than a year, and reports on the school by Brother Provincial give the impression that some of the community lost their initial enthusiasm and concentrated their efforts on the relatively undemanding work of the farm and domestic duties around the school.

Under Brother Loetus, who succeeded Brother Cyril as Director, the liturgical life of the school flourished. Several sodalities (ie brotherhoods or communities) were founded, large numbers received Communion, and the singing at Mass and Benediction was excellent. As in other schools at the time, the boys knew the letter of the catechism fairly well, but lacked the ability to explain it. Academically, the school reached no great heights. The daily programme consisted of work on the farm in the morning and classes in the afternoon, except that there were classes from ten thirty to midday for the young and backward. Father Mahoney, who had founded the orphanage, complained, probably justifiably, that the children were being employed on the farm during the time assigned to school.

Conditions improved greatly in 1894, when the old building in Nelson was moved out to Stoke and a new dormitory was opened. In 1896 Brother Felix reported that "each child has his own bed, the children's food is better and more abundant, punishments are less harsh, the prison has been turned into a dark room for photography, there are few escapes, the children seem less wild; there has been some progress:.

In May 1900, two boys absconded from the school, and were discovered after some time, arrested, and brought before Judge Robinson, who ordered them to be returned to the school, there to be punished according to the rules of the school. A few years previously, flogging had been abolished in the school where the rule was that a boy absconding was kept in solitude a number of days equal to the number of days he had been absent. Rumours circulated that the punishment inflicted on the runaways had been too severe, and, as a result, three members of the local Charitable Aid Board visited the orphanage.

The members of the Board could offer no suggestion except flogging. Members of the Charitable Aid Board had no legal right to enter the school, but as a result of a report of their visit published in a local newspaper, Dean

Mahoney invited a number of prominent citizens to make a visit. The party consisted of the District Judge, the Mayor, three doctors, and members of the Charitable Aid Board. Afterwards the party made an entry in the visitors' books: "The undersigned have this day visited this institution, and find that the boys are in good health and spirits, and well nourished. No complaints made, nor any signs of corporal punishment. The whole place clean, bedding clean and sufficient; and ample means of washing provided,

The rooms for seclusion contain ample light and air, the inmates have each day been taken out for work and exercise. The only corporal punishment every inflicted has been with a light supplejack -upon the palm of the hands."

The following certificate appeared in the Nelson Colonist of 8 June:

*"We, the undersigned medical practitioners, certify: That yesterday we visited the Industrial School at Stoke and found the boys in good health and spirits, they were well nourished and quite free from any signs of infliction of any corporal injury or punishment –*

*Wm. J Mackie, M.D., Edw. J Roberts, M.B., Jas Hudson, M.B."*

The report of Commissioners was presented to Parliament at the end of August. Their principal findings were:

(1) that the punishment of the boys at the school had been, and was, more severe than was allowed in Government Industrial Schools, although there had been no case of flogging for more than four and a half years; a great deal of the evidence given by the inmates and ex-inmates was tainted by exaggeration;

(2) that the food supplied was not sufficiently varied, but it was sufficient in quantity and wholesome in quality, and the health of the inmates had not suffered;

(3) that the clothing of the boys was made of rough material, but sufficiently good in quality; there had been no death at the school for more than two years, and no case of pulmonary disease or other illness for more than two years;

(4) that an improvement could be effected in the cleanliness of the persons and clothing of the inmates;

(5) that the outside work had been too desultory and unsystematic, and had been regarded by the boys more as a holiday than as work, and that

more technical education should be given.

The Stoke Industrial School was still known locally as "the Orphanage". It was a branch of a Roman Catholic Institution established at Nelson by the Rev F Garin in 1874, becoming an industrial school under an Act of 1882. Boys of nine years of age and upward were housed at Stoke.

It was reported to the commission that there were 10 "brothers and employees", and at that time 125 boys were at Stoke. The state paid seven shillings a week for 39 of these and 39 were supported in some degree by 11 charitable aid boards throughout New Zealand. The brothers received no salary but fifteen pounds per year for clothing.

It was the Nelson Charitable Aid Board which sought the inquiry, complaining that the institution had no matron, too severe punishments, insufficient food and clothes, too hard a work requirement, and other grievances.

It was admitted that punishment was "by hand and by supplejack ... freely and with severity". Prior to 1895, two Brothers had been removed for flogging, boys. There had been "cell punishment" — one boy was kept in seclusion, one for three months.

It is strange that one report states that boys 9 years and upwards were housed at the Stoke Orphanage but according to the tombstones on the hillside there were two boys aged 6 years and two aged 7 years laid to rest there between the years of 1890 and 1895.

They recommended that the management of the school remain in the hands of Father Mahoney, that a system of classification of the inmates be adopted, that a duly qualified medical man should be appointed to visit the school periodically, and that at least two women should be employed at the school.

One immediate result of the inquiry was the complete withdrawal of the Brothers from the Stoke school, in September 1900. The immediate reason for their departure seems to have been the recommendation of the Commissioners for the employment of women, which was contrary to the custom of the Brothers at the time.

A Royal Commission of Inquiry was appointed. Its reports exonerated the Brothers from the allegations of cruelty, and recommended certain alterations in clothing (which was admitted to be strong and sufficient, though somewhat coarse), and in the food, which was pronounced to be abundant and wholesome, though not sufficiently varied.

A select and efficient day staff was introduced. It consisted at the time of the following: Master and Matron (Mr and Mrs Fitzgibbon), head teacher (Mr Beech), two assistant teachers (Messrs F Kelly and J Dwyer), a female staff (Mesdames Beech and Kelly, Misses Cummings and McCarthy); farming staff (Mr V Beech in charge), gardener (Mr C McGee), and Mr Matthews, who is in control of the brickworks. Among the workers on the farm is an aged man from the Glen of Athlone. Old James Kelly was the discoverer of Reefton's first reef.

On 27 April 1903 the whole School was destroyed by fire. William Wilson aged 9 years lost his life and is buried among the trees. Within six weeks plans and specifications for a new St Mary's were ready but tenders were too high and Rev George Mahoney began a brickworks and using day labour managed to build a replacement for less than the lowest tender. The new St Mary's Orphanage was opened 24 May 1905.

In 1917 the Education Department turned St Mary's Orphanage into a State Training Farm for delinquent boys