

JOURNAL OF HER MAJESTY'S HIRED CONVICT SHIP
'AURORA'

Mr. W.S.B. Jones - Surgeon

Between the 26th day of March, 1851 and 18th day of August, 1851.

General Remarks

H.M. Hired Convict Ship "Aurora"
Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land
August 18th, 1851

During the period of this Journal from the time of embarking the Prisoners viz; 26th day of March 1851, to the date hereof, on a voyage from England to this Colony, conveying thereto 232 Female Convicts, 35 Adults, Children, and Infants, their Families, Total 267.

There have been admitted on the sick list in all (17). Discharged off the list cured (10). Discharged dead of Convicts 3. Remaining on Sick List - Sent to the Colonial Hospital (1). Discharged dead (?) of Infants (3).

On the arrival of the Prisoners on board at Woolwich, there were no less than 14 Infants at the Breast, of these, Two very sickly ones died, and a five to six months child, who lived only 13 days after its birth. The fourth that followed was a Woman, who was not intended at Newgate Prison to be sent out, as she was labouring under Secondary Syphilis in the worst form, the palate was quite destroyed and the offensive state she was in before dissolution, was most obnoxious. Scorbutus had suddenly seized her and Dysenteric Diarrhoea, combined carried her off, an easy prey having no stamina to withstand such ravages, constitution so undermined. This woman was in handsomely pawned upon my hands from Millbank Prison, and that direct from the Infirmary, under medical treatment as well as many others, which I think highly derogatory to those in Authority.

The Two Last Cases are No's 4 and 6 in this Journal, it will manifest to all in the case of Elizabeth Colling's the insidious character of Scorbutus, altho' the symptoms of the disease were purely superficial apparently nothing shewing itself of disease, except shortness of breathing, which prominent symptom in advanced scurvy has before now, come under my notice amongst Convicts to administer antiscorbutics at nearly the twelfth hour will avail nothing. Important internal organic disease have become deeply implicated, altho' shewing no external appearances, and neither internal urgent symptoms worth noticing either by my own observation, or the feelings of the Patient in manifestation of immediate dissolution, careful as I am always with the Prisoner not too overlook their trivial complaints even amongst the most artful, and degraded of criminals.

The last case is No.6. Emma Williams who was delivered of a 5 months Child and who also died 13 days after birth not having properly arrived to its natural vigour and maturity.

Phthisis had shewn itself before she was delivered, and a slight check to disease was experienced about the period of parturition, but very shortly afterwards a rapid galloping progress to confirmed stage of the disease, baffling every kind of treatment, carrying her off a perfect shadow. She was kept alive for a longer period by kind, soothing treatment, and fed by every thing she might fancy from the Cuddy(?) table.

I had anticipated that disease would have subsided after her confinements, as it often happens in many similar cases, but in this instance it was quite the reverse.

General Regulations adopted on Board

The Prisoners are to conduct themselves at all times in a respectful manner to the Officers, Matron and other persons placed in Authority over them.

Communication with any person, or persons of the Ship Company, is strictly forbidden, except on duty, or under sanction of Surgeon Superintendent.

The main prison decks are to be under the care of Superintendents, assisted by Overseers, who are to attend to the cleanliness, maintain order, and report any irregularities.

The Prison Deck is to be kept dry by the messes, the water is not to be spilled, and washing cannot be permitted.

A.M. 6. Prisoners to roll up and stow bedding, and proceed to wash prison. 8, Breakfast. 12, Dinner, 5 P.M. Supper.

Two Women chosen from two messes in rotation to attend at the serving out of Provisions, to see justice done.

One Woman from each mess to attend, and receive rations, and allowances.

Two Overseer Cleaners will have the water closets thoroughly cleansed morning and evening, throwing up the solution of Chloride of Zinc.

On Mondays, Issues of Soap and Vinegar. Tuesdays and Fridays, general washing day.

Two Women from each mess are to wash the clothes of Mess. Washing can only be done on the appointed days, except by express permission of Surgeon Superintendent to exchange or alteration of clothes permitted.

A watch at night is to be kept by the Overseers, one for each side, they are to relieve every four hours, their duty is to manifest order and decency.

Theft, fighting, profane and disgusting language will be punished severely.

Prisoners who are appointed to classes for instruction in reading and writing are required to place themselves with the least possible delay in their respective classes, and diligently apply themselves.

It is expected that no person will attempt to be absent from the classes without proper Authority, anyone doing so, will be reported to Surgeon Superintendent.

Noise and confusion cannot be allowed during the time of instruction, nor can anyone be permitted to run up and down the hatchways, except in case of necessity.

N.B. A report of the Character, and Progress of the Scholars during the voyage is sent to the Authorities of the Colony.

W.S.B. Jones M.D.

Surgeon Superintendent

(To be stuck up in a conspicuous part of the Prison and to be frequently read to the Prisoners from time to time).

Recapitulation of daily proceedings as recorded in my journal on board the convict ship "Aurora".

As health is the primary inculcation to be studied by Surgeon's Superintendent of Convict Ships where a dense mass of Human Beings are so closely congregated together, it will be observed on a reference to the Journal in question, from the daily routine therein contained during a most tempestuous voyage, that cleanliness was the first object from dawn of day to its close, whenever practicable, and this prosecuted systematically both in prison, and also in the various compartments of the Ship, disseminating the solution of the Chloride of Lime liberally, morning, and evening, in the specified proportions, within Prison, especially in the neighbourhood of, and ___sons? of the respective privies, also into the ship's well from time to time.

The advantages of these proceedings cannot be questioned and will be best appreciated by judging final results, that is on arrival in the Colony, and this will be commented upon, ___? I shall confine myself to our daily proceedings and beg a reference to Page 27 of daily Journal, to a copy of a letter addressed to the Medical Director General of the Navy, in Latitude 7 - 39_?, Longitude 23 - 41N(?), but which on due reflection, might be transcribed here:

Convict Ship "Aurora"
May 23rd 1851

Sir,

In conformity with the Printed Instructions for Surgeon's Superintendents of Prison Ships, I respectfully beg leave to report to you the state and progress of this Ship since leaving the Downs, 27th day of April to the date hereof for the information of the Admiralty.

It is very satisfactory in being able to state that all on board are in the enjoyment of the best of health and that the Prisoners, conduct themselves correctly, and orderly, since leaving Woolwich so that nothing transpires to mar the Public Service.

There are 232 Female Convicts, but inclusive of their Children and Infants, in all 267. The largest number of Prisoners I believe of this class ever sent to a Penal Colony is on Ship from Millbank and it is unnecessary here to recapitulate the proceedings and daily routine carried on in a sanitary point of view. But suffice it to say that it is conducted precisely on similar principles to that adopted when Superintendent of the "Bangalore" C.S. of last year. The solution of the Chloride of Lime is most ___ously? disseminated throughout every compartment of the Prison, and adjacent parts contiguous to it, and which renders as usual everything sweet and wholesome, and which is duly appreciated by the Prisoners themselves.

As there has been but two individuals admitted upon the Sick list altogether since leaving England, one with Severe Acute Rheumatism, and the other with Lyna___? Tonsillaris, but who are now discharged the List, cured, and there remains not one on the List, at the present date, so there appears every probability from the healthy condition of everyone, that the voyage will be prosecuted throughout.

I have the Honor to be Sir,

W.S.B.J.

There is no question that the Chloride of Lime possesses unqualified advantages as a disinfectant, destroying anything having the least tendency to obnoxious odour, hence its congenial, powerful antiseptic properties, in the preservation of health, the greatest of all blessings, more especially under certain circumstances, as in crowded Ships conveying a large number of Human Beings, as Troop Ships, Convict Ships, Emigrant Ships, the Convict Ship being more prone to disease, from their unfortunate mode of living before conviction, and labouring under a variety of diseases, by living a profligate life, and that probably for a series of years.

On first joining these classes of Ships, it is usual to draw up a code of regulations for the guide (of) Prisoners, which are stuck up conspicuously within the Prison, as in the Case of this present Ship, but I always have observed my verbal orders, much better attended to, than written ones.

The first duty every morning after the Bedding were properly rolled up, and stowed, the admittance of Prisoners on deck for ablution, by messes, under cover of screens especially provided to Female Convict Ships, under the surveillance of the Matron, and her Deputy, and this was done as early in the morning compatible to Season, and climes. Within the Tropics, 4, 5, and 6 o'clock a.m. daily when all went thro' the process of a thorough ablution, by good dousing of buckets of salt water.

The whole of the Prisoners from the time of leaving England, to our destination were daily allowed every consistent privilege, on deck, the poop, and after part of the Ship, as the quarter deck, assigned to them, apart from the fore, as much as possible from the Ship's Company, and Boys, being more under my own eye, and cognizance satisfactory to myself that no impropriety should take place during voyage, and I fully believe, as far as I am able to judge, nothing clandestine has transpired as I have been most vigilant myself, no person could be more on the alert.

The Superintendence when issuing out Lime juice and wine daily, is an indispensable duty on the part of the Surgeon Superintendent, more especially when within the Tropics, not only to see this duty properly served out correctly, but compelling them to drink it at the Tub before you. It affords the Surgeon a favourable opportunity by the whole of them, at the call of the roll, passing in rotation, from one side of deck to the other to detect hidden disease, in whatever form it may happen to develop itself, whether in the countenances, skin, muscular contractions, or the respiratory organs, especially, a prominent feature, and constant attendant is that most insidious of all diseases, "Scorbutus."

As I look upon Dinner the principle of all meals, my presence during that period, I was as particular in discharging, as any other of my public routine of duty on board, to Superintend (each?) person, the meat properly weighed, and served out justly, and fairly, well proportioned in lean and fat, by which means, the results are general satisfaction (by?) the Prisoners, perceiving their general interests so much studied, prevents murmuring, and discontent, but independent of all this, it must be viewed as a salutary measure in a sanitary point of view upon the health of the Convict individually.

After the Prison, Hospital etc are thoroughly cleansed every morning by dry scraping, and the sprinkling, and flannel washing the boards, with the Chloride of Lime (in solution) in the usual manner as recommended. The Matron, and her Assistants reports to me when the Prison is ready for inspection.

Having no Religious Instructor, the duty of reading within the Prison, and Prayers, devolving upon me daily. Devine Service performed by myself every Sunday, morning and evening.

Schooling below, and on deck, according to the State of the weather, morning and evening, the numerous Children joining in with the Women.

In conclusion, what has been the result of such strict and rigid mode of carrying out so onerous a charge on a long trying voyage, with such species of the human race to contend with. Why, by strict exactions of order, coupled by lenity of deportment, this, not only enhances respect, but amalgamates with it fear, from the cunning, artful, untutored, for it must not be expected, brutal force, either by language, or gesture, will the British convict be overcome, or be Governed by, for the whole matter rests in a nutshell, which is this; The admixture of Sympathy and Kindness, when deserving of it, but blended with firmness of purpose.

W.S.B. Jones M.D.
Surgeon Superintendent

To the
Medical Director
General of the Navy
Admiralty
