

1881.

NEW SOUTH WALES.

ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS INQUIRY BOARD.

REPORT

OF

J. MILBOURNE MARSH,

WATER POLICE MAGISTRATE,

AND

GEORGE F. WISE,

AGENT FOR IMMIGRATION,

APPOINTED BY THE HONORABLE THE COLONIAL SECRETARY, AS A BOARD TO
INQUIRE INTO THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND FUTURE PLANS OF THE ITALIAN
IMMIGRANTS WHO ARRIVED IN SYDNEY BY THE STEAMER "JAMES PATERSON,"
FROM NOUMEA, ON THE 8TH APRIL, 1881;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE TAKEN BEFORE THE BOARD,

AND

APPENDICES.

SYDNEY: THOMAS RICHARDS, GOVERNMENT PRINTER.

1881.

REPORT.

On Friday morning, the 8th April, 1881, in accordance with instructions received from the Honorable the Colonial Secretary, we proceeded on board the steamer "James Paterson," for the purpose of inquiring into the "circumstances" and the plans for the future of the Italians who had been forwarded in that vessel by the French Government at Noumea, and had just arrived. These immigrants originally formed a portion of the Italians who were sent out to New Ireland (situated to the north-east of New Guinea) by the Marquis de Rays, for the purpose of colonizing that island. The Italian Consul accompanied us, and at our request addressed the immigrants informing them of the intention of the Government relative to their protection and welfare.

We found the steamer in a state of great confusion, the cargo being landed, and the decks above and below crowded with about 200 men, women, and children, Italians unable to speak any other language than their own, and all anxious to make themselves heard and understood at one and the same time. (Vide Appendix A for nominal list, ages, and callings.) The urgency of the case demanded that prompt steps should be taken to provide food and shelter for them. Previous however to looking for a place in the city where so large a number of people could be at once properly housed, we applied to the acting Manager of the Australian Steam Navigation Company, with the view of ascertaining if they could remain on board the steamer for twenty-four hours, but for good and sufficient reasons we found that this request could not be granted unless at a cost of about £70 or £80,—an expense we did not feel justified in incurring.

Failing in the first instance to find any suitable building, we called upon the Mayor of Sydney, to ask if these immigrants could be permitted to occupy the Exhibition building in the Prince Alfred Park, but it was not in his power to comply with our request, as the Agricultural Society was then about to take possession of the building.

We subsequently found that the large building recently occupied as the Agricultural Hall in the Domain was vacant and could be obtained. The Colonial Architect was at once communicated with and the building was placed at our disposal. We returned to the vessel and made preparations for landing the people. Before however they left the ship we required that each one should sign a document of which the following is a copy, and the meaning of which was clearly explained to them by the Italian Consul, Dr. Marano—

"We, the undersigned Italian immigrants, who came out under the auspices of the Marquis de Rays, and who have just arrived from Noumea, New Caledonia, by the 'James Paterson', being without home or means, request the Government to afford us shelter and food for a short period, and a small change of clothing, and that we may be assisted to obtain some kind of employment; and we do hereby agree to submit ourselves entirely to the regulations of the Government of New South Wales or any constituted authority appointed by them for the time being." [Here follow the signatures of the 96 adults, male and female.]

"I have witnessed the signatures of the above-named persons, to whom I have read the conditions upon which the Government of New South Wales have undertaken to supply them with food, lodging, and clothing for a few days, and they have all signified their acquiescence."

The Consular Agent for Italy at Sydney,

"Sydney, April 8, 1881.

V. MARANO.

"P.S.—There are two women and one man ill, who have not subscribed their names in consequence of their illness.—V.M"

Men, women, and children were then mustered, and forwarded in vans with their bedding and luggage to the building in the Domain, where an ample supply of provisions had already been forwarded, together with firewood, coal, water, and all necessary cooking utensils, additional beds, blankets, &c., &c. Constables at our request were placed on duty, for the purpose of keeping order within and without the building.

As the building consisted of only one large room about 220 feet long by 76 feet wide, without any partitions in it, directions were given that for the first night all the men should be placed at one end and all the women at the other end; sentries (taken from the immigrants themselves, under the supervision of one of the police) being placed on guard in the centre of the room.

The next day (Saturday) our immediate attention was given to the division of the building. A large space was enclosed by sheets of galvanized iron for the married couples with their children; another for the single women; and, at the furthest end of the building, a third compartment was apportioned to the single men; a fourth compartment being enclosed as a store-room. These several alterations, together with the erection of stoves, washing-sheds, fences, and other necessary requirements, were most expeditiously and satisfactorily accomplished under the direction of the Colonial Architect.

Four of the most intelligent of the immigrants were appointed to supervise their countrymen, to inquire what they most needed, and to keep order generally amongst them. As some of the infants were in a very sickly state, it was thought advisable to send two of them (one accompanied by its mother) to the Benevolent Asylum; and as several of the adults appeared to be seriously ill, apparently stricken with fever and ague, it was also deemed expedient to send for the Police Doctor. In his stead came Dr. Day. Dr. Marano, however, having signified his wish to act as medical adviser to his countrymen, we willingly accepted his services; but ultimately, he thought it inexpedient to continue in that capacity whilst acting as Consul, and therefore Dr. Day has since been in daily attendance, assisted by Dr. Marano.

We requested Professor C. O. Michel, the Government Interpreter, whom we had specially engaged, under the authority of the Colonial Secretary (and of whose services then and subsequently we are able to speak most highly), to translate into the Italian language certain rules and regulations which we had drawn up for the guidance of the Italians, a copy of which is annexed. These regulations were printed in Italian and in English¹, and copies thereof were affixed to different parts of the building. We also found it necessary to appoint Mr. Orlando Stevens, a gentleman who speaks English and Italian fluently, to be in constant attendance, to receive stores and issue them, to look after the sanitary arrangements of the place, and to impress upon the people the necessity of guarding against fire; requiring them also to attend to the cleanliness of their persons, as well as of the building generally.

As there were still a few of the women of whose state of health Dr. Day reported unfavourably, we gave directions that another compartment should be enclosed as a temporary hospital, thus enabling the doctor to go his rounds more expeditiously, and to

¹ Appendix B

treat the sick in a more satisfactory manner than when they were dispersed through the building.

The Rev. C. Collingridge, one of the Roman Catholic clergy, held divine service within the building on the following day. The Rev. Dr. Coletti, the Rev. C. Collingridge, and many other clergymen of the Roman Catholic Church have been constant in their attendance and ministrations. On the same day, Sunday the 10th, in the morning, and again at night, we visited the immigrants, and observed that decorum was maintained; we found everything in a satisfactory state-the people themselves being most orderly and anxious to carry out our instructions to the letter.

Having been so continuously engaged in looking after the comfort and well-being of the immigrants, we were unable, until Monday, the 11th instant, to commence our examination.

The whole of that day was occupied in taking evidence, through the interpreter, Mr. Michel, and having it transcribed by Mr. Charles Lyne, the very able short-hand writer; the Italian Consul, Dr. Marano, being also present, and giving every assistance.

About thirty of the men were assembled in the large room of the Immigration Barracks. We examined three or four in the presence of all, so that they heard everything that was said, and were individually asked by us through the interpreter whether they agreed to what was so said and taken down, and they signified their assent at our request, by holding up their hands.

On Thursday, the 14th instant, in the presence of about thirty others, we held a similar examination of the women. It will, therefore, be understood that ,although the evidence of only a few of each sex has been taken, it may be regarded as the general expression of opinion of the whole of them.

On reference to the evidence, a copy of which is herewith enclosed, it will be seen that merely the cost of their travelling expenses to the port of embarkation was incurred by themselves, and that only in three or four instances had any money been paid to the Marquis de Rays for land which was to be given to them on their arrival at New Ireland. A copy of one of such agreements which each one made with the Marquis de Rays previous to his leaving Italy is annexed. On the voyage from Barcelona, at which port² they embarked, they do not appear to have suffered in health, very few deaths occurring; but after arrival at New Ireland, partly owing to the climate, but more especially to the bad and unwholesome description of the provisions that had been shipped, a large quantity of which was thrown overboard, many deaths occurred--in. all a total of 48³.

On arrival at their destination at Port Breton, New Ireland, it was found that the supply of food was very deficient, the heat was excessive, the latitude of the place being only 3 or 4 degrees south of the Equator; the immigrants therefore requested that the captain of the "India," the use of which vessel they still retained, there being no accommodation for

² Appendix C

³ Appendix D.

them on the shore, should land them at some port in New South Wales. By stress of weather, want of provisions, and other causes, the vessel was obliged to put in at Noumea, New Caledonia, where the ship is now ordered to be sold with all its cargo. (See the advertisement⁴ herewith annexed).

The immigrants having refused to remain in New Caledonia, were provided with passages in the steamer "James Paterson," at a cost of £3 per adult, paid, as they stated, by the Government at Noumea. They informed us that they were most generously treated by the Governor of the Colony, as also by the citizens of Noumea. Their health on the voyage thence to Sydney appears to have slightly improved, and since landing, with the exception of the infants, all show a most marked change for the better.

Annexed hereto is a report from Dr. Day, the medical officer in charge, as to their present state of health⁵.

On referring to the evidence generally, we think that the following conclusions can be arrived at :---

- 1st. That the immigrants have quite made up their minds to settle in Australia; they do not wish to return to Italy.
- 2nd. That they would prefer to be located together on one spot, and form. as it were a colony of themselves.
- 3rd. That there are no mechanics amongst them, excepting one carpenter and one bookbinder; all the others, both men and women, have been, brought up as agricultural labourers and vine-growers.
- 4th. That all, both. men and women, have a thorough knowledge of the, cultivation of the vine and of olives, also of the making of wine.
- 5th. That they do not understand the cultivation of oranges.
- 6th. That they are perfectly penniless, and had only a few old clothes on arrival.
- 7th. That the men are well-skilled in felling trees.
- 8th. That all (including the young lads and young girls) are able to milk.
- 9th. That the young women have not had any experience either in cooking, or in other domestic duties---they having followed mostly out-door employment, such as labour in the field, &c.
- 10th. That they would, if located together, be quite willing to support the six widows and their children.
- 11th. That with the exception of the two officers who were appointed by the Marquis de Rays, the immigrants have neither arms nor ammunition.
- 12th. That they have all been vaccinated.
- 13th. That if they cannot be located together they will be willing to hire; but they would wish that their children, if hired, should be located within a short distance of their own place of residence.
- 14th. That almost all of them come from Treviso, in the north of Italy, and appear to have been previously known to each other.
- 15th. That they unanimously decline to blame the Marquis de Rays, but they find fault with the administration of affairs by others.
- 16th. That they appear to be a moral and sober set of people.

Whilst engaged in the examination of the immigrants, applications (one written, the other verbal) were made to the Board by two gentlemen proposing to place upon their farms the whole of the Italian immigrants, for twelve months, at current rate of wages and rations.

These offers were communicated to the Colonial Secretary, and immediately . afterwards⁶. the address to the immigrants was issued; the Government also directed that

⁴ Appendix E

⁵ Appendix F

⁶ Appendix G

they should each be provided with suitable clothing, the distribution of which occupied nearly the whole of two days⁷.

. A list of articles supplied is annexed herewith.

On the following day, Wednesday, the 20th April, the hiring, which had been duly advertised in the three daily newspapers, commenced; and although at first great disinclination prevailed amongst the immigrants to part from each other, yet afterwards they saw the necessity of accepting engagements, the result being that, with the exception of eight families, all have found employment in different parts of the⁸ country, as the return herewith forwarded will show.

It will be noticed that they have obtained a very fair rate of wages, especially under the circumstances that they can neither understand nor speak a word of English. Many of them have been hired by well-known employers of labour, whose sympathy has been thoroughly evoked in their behalf.

In conclusion, it is but just to these immigrants to state that, during the time they have been under our supervision, their conduct has, in every respect, been most satisfactory, and many have repeatedly expressed their gratitude for the generous treatment which they have received in New South Wales.

We have also much pleasure in testifying to the great kindness evinced toward them by the citizens of Sydney; clothing of every description having been forwarded for their use; also fruit, and even toys and playthings for their children, and many ladies have constantly visited. the people, ministering to the sick and cheering all by their presence.

⁷ Appendix H

⁸ Appendix L