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General correspondence relating to reformatories and industrial schools

Superintendent Walter Richmond

General Report on Condition and Progress of the Westbrook Reformatory for Boys

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The Reformatory at Westbrook was originally established many years ago at Lytton. It was removed to its present location in 1899. The removal being determined upon by a desire to have the Reformatory located where the boys could be given a regular course of instruction in practical farming.

For some time the institution was worked in conjunction with the State Experimental Farm, but in February 1902 it was decided to work each institution separately, and an area of 36 acres of land being assigned to the Reformatory for this purpose.

The following April a further area was obtained and the present total area is one hundred and twelve acres. The Superintendent found that owing to a continuance of dry weather it was not practicable to engage the boys in farming operations with machine employment until sometime after the severance of the connection between the Reformatory and the State Farm. In the meantime however, about three acres were thoroughly cultivated with the fork, and by the aid of the waste water of the place, vegetables in abundance were produced.

These, in the opinion of the superintendent, constituted not only a valuable addition to the diet of the boys but an object lesson was given to them in the art of market gardening under conditions of drought. Immediately upon the partial breakup of the long drought houses and implements, four cows, dairy utensils and other requisites for active farming operations on a small scale were provided. From this point steady progress has been made in industrial work. The whole of the one hundred and twelve acres of land attached to the School has been either cultivated or laid down in artificial grasses, a farming and dairying plant sufficient for present purposes has been provided. The herd of cows now number 55 and the young stock are numerous. There is a large number of pigs. Many of the cows provided in the first instance have been sold as inferior but considerable improvement is noticeable in the young female stock now "coming in". A few first class Ayreshires were recently purchased and the basis of a satisfactory herd has now been established. A grazing area for the dry stock has been added to the farm. A large income, roughly £500 per annum is derived from the farm from milk, cream, general farm produce, cattle and pigs.

...As to the health of the inmates the Superintendent reports as follows. "Their general health has, I am glad to report, been most satisfactory. Our lads could not grow up under more favourable conditions for physical development than they enjoy here. The daily exercise in the

open air, cleanliness, regular habits, judicious diet with fresh vegetables daily and the general attention to hygienic conditions which prevail, can hardly fail to make strong men of these, in many cases, weakly city waifs. The wisdom which suggested the removal of the institution from its erstwhile surroundings can never be questioned.

The physical development alone of the boys is sufficiently noticeable to repay the thought, trouble and expense involved in transferring them to this salubrious climate.

The institution is a Provisional School, and is attended by boys under fourteen. Lads under twelve years of age attend all day i.e. 5 hours. Those over 12 and under attend 2 1/2 hrs. Two hours in addition are devoted to the preparation of the next day's lessons. Boys who are found on arrival to be unable to read and write are retained at school until some proficiency in reading and writing at least has been attained.

Saturday afternoons are devoted to outdoor games and the evening to recreative purposes.

There are at present thirty three boys hired out to employers. On the whole they have been well conducted. Many letters received from employers speak highly of the lads, though occasionally some of them have been returned as unsatisfactory.

In some of the latter cases I am of opinion that the boys were not wholly to blame. Correspondence with these boys is maintained while they are in their situations and also as far as practicable with the boys after leaving the institution.

The general behavior of the boys in the institution is good. No severe punishments have had to be inflicted and boys who conduct themselves well are allowed considerable liberty. Ten or twelve of the older boys are taken regularly to the Annual Agricultural Show in Toowoomba. A library has been established, books for this purpose having been kindly donated by residents of Brisbane and Toowoomba.

The religious wants of the boys have been regularly attended to by the clergy of the several denominations and the School is visited at intervals by the Police Magistrate, Toowoomba as visiting justice.

Religious service is held by the Superintendent on Sundays.