

PHTHISIS AND PHILATELY

An Account of the Consumptive Homes Stamps
of New South Wales. The world's first Charity Stamps.

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SUMMARY

The Hospital Issue of two postal Charity Stamps in New South Wales, in 1897, established a new concept of health funding - a practice followed since in many parts of the world. This enterprise was undertaken by the Queen Victoria Homes for Consumptives Fund in conjunction with the Postal and Electric Telegraph Department of New South Wales. The Charity issue played a significant role in the rescue of Australia's first sanatorium for tuberculosis victims (the Home for Consumptives, Thirlmere). Renamed the Queen Victoria Homes for Consumptives, Thirlmere, in 1898, the hospital today is the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital, Picton. This account records the development to, circumstances of, and results of the Consumptive Homes stamps, the world's first philanthropic philately.

In 1897, the Government of New South Wales issued two "medical" postage stamps. This event was to have significant ramifications for patient welfare not only in Australia but in many other countries as well. The stamps comprised an ingenious new scheme to raise money for the care for tuberculosis victims. Known since that time as the Consumptive Homes stamps¹, their issue was the first

example of a new concept - Charity Stamps - a theme which has been followed by such ongoing issues as the New Zealand Health Stamps (since 1929), the Anti-tuberculosis stamps of Belgium (from 1922) and the Pro-Juvenile issues of Switzerland.

Recently discovered archival sources^{2,3} have allowed a history of the background of Charity Stamps to be interpreted for the first time. This account records the events leading to the concept of the Consumptive Homes stamps, the influence of those who introduced this new concept for the support and medical care of the indigent sick, and the results which stemmed from this enterprise.

THE QUEEN VICTORIA HOMES FOR
CONSUMPTIVES FUND

On 28 April 1927 two separate themes fused to promote the establishment of a vigorous new medical charity - the Queen Victoria Homes for Consumptives Fund.

The first of these was the special plight of the indigent tuberculosis patient in pre-Federation Australia. Such patients had engendered a widespread but fragmented philanthropic response in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In New South Wales, Lieutenant Colonel John Hay Goodlet had established probably Australia's

first tuberculosis sanatorium initially at Picton in 1877^a, and maintained this institution at his own expense for an incredible 17 years^b (One of the nation's most genuine medical philanthropists, Goodlet (1835-1914) made substantial contributions to the Sydney Hospital, the Royal Hospital for Women at Paddington, the New South Wales Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and Blind. He also built a hospital in Sholinghur in India^c).

In or about 1886 Goodlet's tuberculosis sanatorium was shifted several kilometres to Thirlmere, where it was formally titled the Home for Consumptives, Thirlmere. It was no trivial philanthropic enterprise, treating some 960 inpatients by 1893 of whom the great majority were very ill (226 had died as inpatients^d). The Thirlmere Home for Consumptives was experiencing financial difficulties by the mid-1890's in spite of its financial management being taken over by a Public Subscription Committee in 1893^e.

The other hospital providing tuberculosis beds was St. Joseph's Consumptive Hospital at Parramatta, established by the Sisters of Charity on 2nd July 1886^f, its entire role being the medical treatment of tuberculosis^g. Like the Thirlmere Home for Consumptives, the management of St. John's Consumptive Hospital was exclusively in private hands, and depended on charitable donations. By 1889, St John's Consumptive Hospital was in debt for £979^h. By 1892, in spite of a great demand for tuberculosis beds, this Hospital was sold as an internal Church transfer to the Sisters of Mercy, to be used as a school ("thoroughly fumigated and altered"ⁱ), and a new St Joseph's Sanatorium and Hospital (but of only 16 beds) was started at Auburn^j.

Thus by the 1890's, there was a manifest unmet need for hospital care for tuberculosis victims in all stages of the disease.

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee

The second theme which led to the postal Charity Issue was the fact that in 1897 throughout the country an unprecedented wave of enthusiasm and affection became manifest for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign. At what proved to be almost the end of her long reign, a great groundswell of public philanthropic enthusiasm developed to commemorate her life and influence. Her influence, as monarch, was unprecedented with respect to the Western ethics of wealth, conquest, civil order, rigid self-discipline and service to one's community and fellow man (Her name, given for example to the Victorian and Albert Museum, the Victoria Cross, and the Royal Victorian Order, embodied these themes of service, philanthropy and material excellence in all of man-kind's endeavours). Early in 1897, the citizens of Sydney sought a means of commemorating her reign by some philanthropic form of public service for the needy. This formed the basis of the Queen Victoria Homes for Consumptives Fund (QVHC Fund), and from it in turn developed the brilliant concept of Charity Stamps.

The QVHC Fund

On 28th April 1897, a group of influential men and women met at Government House, Sydney, to formalize the plans for a philanthropic fund to help tuberculosis victims^{1,2}. With the patronage of the wife of the Governor (Viscountess Hampden), senior members of the medical profession, the Legislature, Sydney University, the Churches and the

influential social elite were present. The Government House meeting was called for the purpose of establishing a Hospital for Consumptives somewhere in New South Wales.

A Public Meeting was held in the Town Hall, Sydney, on 17th May 1897 with the Governor of New South Wales, and the Honourable Edmund Barton (soon to be Australia's first Prime Minister) on the stage. Four leading Sydney doctors, influential in the practical management of tuberculosis in the Colony were also on the stage - Dr. Sydney Jones (from 1905 Sir Philip Sydney Jones), Dr. Scott Skirving, Dr. Cecil Purser and Dr Carmac Wilkinson. The Town Hall "was crowded in every part, a large portion of those present consisting of ladies"¹³. The following resolution was carried unanimously "That in view of the fact that no adequate provision for the treatment of consumptive patients has been made in this Colony, it is expedient that homes, to be known as the 'Queen Victoria Homes' for Consumptives' should be established in commemoration of the Record Reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria"¹³. So great was the philanthropic and royalist fervour on that occasion, that an extended General Committee of over 100 persons was constituted, including in its ranks no less than 18 Sydney doctors. The meeting resolved to implement "a Subscription List.....and that the monies collected for the Consumptive Hospital be vested in Trustees approved by the General Committee who shall have full power to dispose of the same, for the objects intended".

Thus was born the Queen Victoria Homes for Consumptives Fund.

In the first year of fund-raising, a flurry of ideas for fund-raising certainly bore fruit. Promissory donation cards ("Shilling Cards") were printed and distributed, extended sales of copies of letters of the Governor's Speech and one by the Mayoress of Sydney were sold, collecting boxes were shaken at public events (boxes borrowed from the Self Denial Fund which had been instituted and run by Prince Alfred Hospital at Camperdown¹⁴). Business groups gave donations, the Sydney Stock Exchange contributing £100. Theatrical and musical events were held including "The Sign of the Cross", the proceeds from which were given by the Sydney Dramatic Club to the QVHC Fund. The Sydney Telegraph opened a Subscription List and some £459 was donated. Collections were made at Tattersall's Club, the leading hotels of Sydney, and "every medical man in New South Wales (by the end of 1897) received a circular about the Fund and its aims of establishing Consumptive Hospitals"¹⁵.

THE CHARITY STAMPS

The members of the Executive of the QVHC Fund conceived the idea of asking the Postmaster General of New South Wales to issue postage stamps printed with a surcharge, the balance being given to the Fund to establish a Home or Homes to be tuberculosis sanatoria. This radical concept was accepted, and the Governor of the day (Viscount Hampden) gave his approval. After much informal discussion, Dr. Sydney Jones (a noted Sydney physician and surgeon) chaired the Executive Meeting of the Fund at the Sydney Town Hall on 26th May 1897 at which it was recorded - "Jubilee Stamps - A communication was read from the Governor and from the Honourable Mr. Brinker (Postmaster) with regard to the

issuing of such; on the motion (Mrs. R. Teece, seconded by Mrs. Keigwin) it was decided that such Stamps should be issued, of the values of 1/- and 2/6. Dr. Purser proposed and Mr R.J.Black seconded that the Leaders of various religious denominations be written to and a draft copy of a letter (promoting the stamps) was submitted¹¹⁶.

Much executive activity followed. There was a proposal that one stamp, perhaps of a halfpenny postage, be issued. However, the Committee perhaps conscious that they had a good idea, did not wish to compromise on the concept of the higher value stamps - "Mr. H.S. Levy and Miss Fairfax were directed to consult further with the Postmaster General on the question of the special stamps he proposes to issue for the benefit of the Hospital Fund, the Committee still recommend they be a shilling and a half-crown"¹¹⁷.

The New South Wales Government Printing Office undertook the task of engraving the designs and ultimately printed the stamps (sheets of 40). On 4th June 1897 at a meeting in the Town Hall, the Fund Secretary "reported the result of our interview with His Excellency, on the subject of the issue of special Hospital Stamps of the value of 1/- and 2/6, and submitted correspondence between His Excellency and the Government in the Matter; specimen designs were also submitted". Dr. Sydney Jones and Dr. Scott Skirving successfully proposed "that the stamps should be issued by the Government at a postal value and that the Department be requested to extend the time of issue to two months"¹¹⁸.

The final design for the stamps was very beautiful and indeed the 2/6 stamp (line engraved and printed

using multiple colours including gilt and a rich waratah crimson) is in the author's view Australia's most beautiful stamp.

This 2/6 stamp (postal value 2½d) was officially described by the Government Printing Office - "the motif of restoration is typified by two figures draped in white, the strong gently leading the weak and pointing to the motto 'Redifico'. The vignette is placed in a diamond shaped frame surrounded by flowers, with the inscription 'Consumptive Home' directly above it"¹¹⁹.

The 1/- stamp (postage value one penny) portrayed "an angel supporting an exhausted human being with a portrait of Queen Victoria in the upper right. Across the top appears the inscription 'Consumptive Home'".

The stamps were issued on 26th June 1897, the conception of the new idea, its approval, trial designs and final issue all being achieved within a few months. Known as the Hospital issue, the Postal and Electric Telegraph Department of New South Wales published the following notice at that time "It is intended to sell these stamps at the higher rates, and to donate the amount realized in excess of the denoted postal value to the Fund for establishing a Hospital for Consumptives in Commemoration of Her Majesty's Record Reign".

Initial sales were slow, perhaps because of the novel concept, and perhaps because of the high price (the 2/6 stamp, at 30 times the basic postal unit, would be the equivalent of using a \$10 stamp on a standard letter today). The stamps were never popular with the public, and as a result the QVHC Fund Committee felt that the Government should be more active in advertising the stamps. Indeed,

the Committee finally bought a number of the stamps for in-direct sale to business firms. On 5th July 1897, it was suggested that a sub-committee should be formed to press the sale of the Memorial Postage Stamp, but it was thought sufficient if one member of the Committee should take some cards to Banks, stationers etc. stating that they were for sale, and asking these business people to take them.... Mr. Levy consented to the responsibility of the safety of the stamps²⁰.

RESULTS

The Hospital issue proved a financial success for the QVHC Fund. The final profit for the Fund, from the sale of the Hospital Issue stamps was £2928/16/6d.²¹, which comprised some 23 per cent of the total income of the Fund in its first year of operation.

With this financial strength, the Fund went on to realise two important achievements, and to discharge its original terms of reference very effectively indeed. The Thirlmere Home for Consumptives was facing closure in 1898, because of unmet financial demands, and on 20th April 1899 a Deputation from the Board met with the Executive of the QVHC Fund at which it was decided that the Fund would take over the management of Thirlmere. This occurred on 1st September 1898, the Hospital being renamed the Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives, Thirlmere. The Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives (Thirlmere) continued in this role until 1965, in turn celebrating its own Diamond Jubilee.

In 1965, the role of the Hospital changed to that of care of the aged, a function still proudly

followed by it today as the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital²².

On February 18th 1903, a second Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives was opened at King's Tableland at Wentworth Falls²³. This was possible by the Fund's activity, following the purchase of property from Mr. Kelso King (later Sir Kelso) on the Blue Mountains. The Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives at Wentworth Falls was established as a modern well equipped tuberculosis sanatorium initially for 20 male patients. Its opening, a gala affair "to which people travelled from Sydney by a special train and a procession of vehicles headed by the only policeman in the district as an outrider to the Governor's Carriage" was long remembered²⁴. Thus the legacy of the Charity Stamps has been maintained in bricks and mortar in addition to the philanthropic work of patient care itself.

Many doctors were prominent in the history of Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives both at Thirlmere and Wentworth Falls. From 1897 to 1904, clinical service was rendered by the Honorary Examining Physicians (Dr. Sydney Jamieson, Dr. George Rennie, and Dr. M. McIntyre Sinclair). Their contributions to the treatment of tuberculosis will be recorded elsewhere. Many doctors were active in the organizational role of the Fund itself. However, two doctors in particular contributed to the success of the Hospital Issue stamps. They were Dr. Cecil Purser who was Secretary of the QVHC Fund throughout its formal life. He attended meetings of the Executive, took part in deputations to Government bodies to further the aims of the Fund, and left meticulous minutes of all deliberations and conferences. Dr.

Sydney Jones (later Sir Philip Sydney Jones) was one of the three founding Trustees of the Fund. A passionate believer in the open air treatment of tuberculosis, he became President of the King's Tableland Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives, and in 1912 was appointed to the Tuberculosis Advisory Board. In 1914 he was one of the catalysts leading to the foundation of the National Association for the Prevention and Cure of Consumption, and was its first President. A scholar as well as a clinician, he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney (1904-1906) in whose Great Hall his portrait now hangs. One tangible result of his advocacy for health funding is in the two Charity Stamps of 1897, now treasured possessions in the great stamp collections throughout the world.

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[Editor's note:

This excellent article answers many questions raised in previous articles in the philatelic press. It is Copyright (c) 1987, The Medical Journal of Australia, reprinted with permission. The illustrations which appeared in that journal (147: 575-578) have not been reproduced as most of the philatelic examples would be well known to collectors].

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MAX HOOPER WRITES...

Correction.

My article on why the first Commonwealth stamps took so long to produce contained the following sentence:

"In 1897, two of the three steel dies made for the N.S.W. Jubilee series had broken the second time they were used."

This is incorrect. The steel die for the 2d broke, apparently while the first plate was being made. The other two dies were sound.

WHY THEY DID IT

Max Hooper

File S2 36 at the N.S.W. Archives contains two letters explaining decisions of the Commonwealth Post Office. Each was written by the Prime Minister of the day to the Premier of N.S.W.

Why was the N.S.W. 9d of 1903 printed in Melbourne? To save money, it was resolved to issue a 9d stamp for two states printed from one set of plates. (letter of 18-8-03)

Why was the Victorian type of Postage Due preferred to the N.S.W.? Because they cost 4d per 1000 at the Commonwealth Stamp Printing Office in Victoria against 9d per 1000 in Sydney. (letter of 30-6-09)