

TWEED HEADS HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



Stranded Queenslanders at Tweed Heads NSW - 5 February 1919

Photo: Gold Coast City Council, Local Studies Library

The Influenza Epidemic 1919

Tweed Heads Historical Society is proudly supported by the Tweed Regional Museum, a community facility of the Tweed Shire Council.

Robert Longhurst compiled this story for the Tweed Heads Historical Society's Log Book Issue No.77 which was printed in December 2006.

He researched newspapers at the time of the Flu Epidemic, how it began overseas and how it arrived in Australia, how it was reported in the press of the time and how state and local government handled the situation.

Through those paper reports, we now get a feeling for what it must have been like for those having to cope with it. While it was a very serious event in our history it also had it's lighter side.

SPANISH FLU AT THE TWIN TOWNS

This year, 2019, marks the 100th anniversary of the worldwide Spanish Influenza epidemic. The story is told here of how it impacted on one small border community in Australia – the Twin Towns of Coolangatta and Tweed Heads.

When “Spanish Influenza” finally struck this district in 1919, it had already claimed the lives of many millions throughout the world, yet there are few indications of mass panic or fear in contemporary local media reports. The world had just endured four years of a crippling world war, which itself had claimed the lives of millions of young men, including 59,000 Australians. Death had become a familiar figure in communities throughout the country, and news of the armistice in November 1918 had been greeted with immense relief and jubilation – in spite of the fact that Australians were already certain that “Spanish Influenza” might well travel to Australia along with her returning troops.

A bout of the flu can be mild. In young, healthy adults, many infections pass unnoticed. But sometimes the influenza virus evolves into a strain that decimates its victims. The worst known strain swept the world in the autumn of 1918, infecting 500-1000 million and killing 40-100 million, about 2-5% of the human race.

There are several theories about where the pandemic began, but the likeliest origin was in Haskell County, Kansas, in the United States. People in the sparsely populated county, where farmers raised pigs, poultry, cattle, and grain, began suffering from influenza in late January 1918. Unusually for flu, it was young, healthy adults who were hardest hit. Victims fell ill suddenly, many progressing to pneumonia and dying, often within days. Within weeks, however, the epidemic ended. The natural geographic isolation of this community normally might have contained the fatal flu in a sort of unintentional quarantine, but the First World War intervened. Men were uprooted from their home towns and congregated in huge numbers in army camps for training and then shipping out to other camps or to fight in Europe. The destination for men from Haskell County was Camp Funston, part of Fort Riley, Kansas, where the first influenza case was reported in early March. As soldiers moved among camps, the virus spread. Within two months, the epidemic spread to most of the army camps and most of the largest cities in the

United States. As American soldiers went to France, so did the virus, spreading first from the port of Brest.

The flu then spread worldwide. The pandemic reached its height in the Fall of 1918. Spain was affected early, and because Spain was not fighting in the World War, there was no wartime censorship, and news of the outbreak became widely known, leading to the flu being called the Spanish Flu in many countries. In Spain, however, it was called French Flu or the Naples Soldier. In India, about 12 million people died of flu. In some US cities, people died so quickly that undertakers could not cope with the bodies.

The disease started with cough, then headache. Temperature, breathing and heart rate increased rapidly. In the worst cases, pneumonia came next, the lungs filling with liquid, drowning the patients and turning them blue from lack of air. Patients bled from every orifice: mouths, noses, ears, eyes. Those who survived often suffered temporary or permanent brain damage. Several million developed encephalitis lethargica, in which victims were trapped in a permanent sleeplike and rigid state.

The world-wide influenza (Spanish Flu strain) pandemic killed at least 40 million people (some modern estimates put it as high as 100 million) – much more than the total military and civilian deaths in the “Great War”. Only Samoa in the South Pacific was spared. This was the greatest pandemic in history and in Australia the death toll of approximately 12,000 was from a population of only 4.9 million. This should be compared with 30,000 deaths in Canada (of a population of 8.8 million); and 850,000 in the United States (of a population of 105.7 million).

Its worst effects were felt mainly between January and December 1919, with the Sydney region of NSW worst-affected. WWI Australian soldiers returning from overseas duty carried the disease with them into the country and the first reports of the dreaded illness came from Melbourne in January 1919, believed to have come from a returning troop ship, quarantined in harbour. By 21 January the first case had reached Sydney, a returning soldier who had travelled from Victoria by train.

Theatres, churches, schools and race meetings throughout Victoria and New South Wales were soon closed. By the end of the month some 38 victims had died in Melbourne; by early February hundreds were dying in the two large southern capitals.

An effort was soon made to create a form of national quarantine, with Queensland determined to prevent the “flu” from coming north. The Victorian and Queensland borders were closed as of 2 p.m. Thursday 29 January, effectively shutting Tweed Heads off from Coolangatta, two towns which in spite of healthy rivalry were virtually interdependent.

People who had gone to Tweed Heads from Coolangatta that morning, perhaps to Greenwood’s new store, to Morley’s or to the bank, were unable to return. Many Coolangatta men worked in Tweed Heads, or vice versa, and in spite of the proclamation a good number sneaked through the “puzzle gates” in the tick fence.



Photo: Gold Coast City Council, Local Studies Library

Coolangatta had no doctor, chemist, milkman, butcher, baker or school. The only banks were in Tweed Heads as well as the only full postal facilities, as the Coolangatta (Kirra) Post Office had closed in 1918. Coolangatta also had no undertaker. The Mayor of Coolangatta was resident in Tweed Heads, and had to be granted four months’ leave of absence by the Town Council. He eventually resigned.

Initially mail, milk, bread, meat and even fresh laundry were passed across the fence, and the local press made light of the situation.

“One can imagine the plight of a swimmer in the surf from the Tweed Heads side of the fence being ordered to refrain from returning to his breeks and other wearing apparel on leaving the surf”

(Tweed Daily 31 January 1919, p. 3)

There were more serious implications however. The very suggestion of quarantine saw hotels in Coolangatta quickly empty (worse still, they no longer could receive New South Wales patrons after 6 pm, a happy source of income since early closing was introduced by the Sydney government in 1916). Queensland’s trains no longer crossed the border, but terminated at Coolangatta with goods shunted across to Tweed Heads and no contact between rail employees.

A Public Indignation Meeting was quickly held at Tweed Heads on the 29th of January, however the Quarantine Officer (Dr. Paul) would accede only to foodstuffs crossing the border. Extra police and mounted police arrived to patrol the border, and local doctors began mass inoculations. In what the *Brisbane Courier* described as a “Gilbertian situation”,

“This morning an assemblage of carts lined up at the gates. Bakers sent bread across, and it was delivered by employees residing there. The carters later sent their carts across in charge of “Officers in control”, and goods were delivered in carts on that side. Coolangatta residents lined the fence with jugs, cans, and other utensils, and were served over the wire by the milkman. The usual Friday shipment of pigs was allowed across the border, and was trucked away; a total of 65 children living “just across the road” in Coolangatta were prevented from attending the Tweed Heads School which adjoins the border fence”

(Brisbane Courier 1 February 1919 p. 5)

The Mayor of Coolangatta wired the Queensland Home Secretary (the Hon. John Huxham MLA) pleading that the quarantine border be removed to the new secondary tick fence between Tugun and Coolangatta. This was followed by a petition signed by residents on both sides of the border, and a further protest meeting. Meanwhile, the local manager of the English, Scottish & Australasian Bank conducted business sitting on a box in the buffer area, handing out change, receiving deposits, and conducting business with the Coolangatta residents over a barbed wire fence. By the 3rd of February even this activity was declared illegal – there could no longer be personal contact on the border and the banker now improvised with a cigar box attached to a piece

of string, “the box being pulled backwards and forwards between banker and client”.

The owner of a sawmill in Currumbin, unable to reach his mill across the border, (some one and a half miles from his home in New South Wales) was advised that the only route was “to go to Sydney, and round via Brisbane, undergoing quarantine”! If this was a humorous response, there were sadder stories. An elderly resident, James Ford, crossed the border over the foot bridge to a Tweed Heads butcher shop for meat. Returning home, he was immediately placed in quarantine, as were two other Queenslanders, Mr. And Mrs. James Anderson, whose house was quarantined and guarded, the tradesmen leaving food, etc. in a large box just inside their gate. For the next weeks, the Andersons viewed the world from their front steps.

Efforts were soon made to restore services lost by the closure of the border. Within days full postal facilities were established in Coolangatta, a butcher shop was opened, and moves began to establish a provisional state school, firstly in the Coolangatta Town Hall.

An isolation camp, capable of housing 200, together with an inhalation chamber, was erected at Sharks Bay (Rainbow Bay) in early February 1919, in the hope of allowing stranded Queenslanders back across the border. The camp was immediately adjacent to the Church of England Soldiers’ Rest Home and the first group was accommodated there on the 8th of February.

“ Presently came the word “Single ladies first”. There was a rush to the bridge, but they were only allowed to cross one at a time. People on both sides of the border were in the best of humour. And as the ladies entered Queensland they were greeted with “You’ll be sorry. You’ll miss your feather bed.” The mounted police also came in for a share of the banter. One member of the force, as his horse pranced about, was ordered by a wag to “Charge for the pig trucks”, whilst the sergeant was saluted with “Hey mister, can I kiss me tart good bye through the fence?”

(Tweed Daily, 11 February 1919 p. 5)

Once on the Queensland side of the border, they were literally frog-marched by police into quarantine; with the camp flying yellow quarantine flags and the guards wearing hats adorned with yellow bands. A party of fifteen health officials had arrived at Coolangatta from Brisbane, as well as thirty returned soldiers, employed to stand guard. Eighteen police were stationed in the



town, housed in eight tents on the allotment next to the station. In the camp, electric light had been installed, water had been supplied by railway tank trucks, and a large kitchen erected. There were guards placed on the beach and rocks below the border fence at Point Danger to restrict any movement in that direction, especially as Tweed Heads surfers, deprived of Greenmount and Kirra at the height of the season, were happily discovering the surf at what would become known as Duranbah beach (following the wreck of the Duranbah in November 1919).

The increasing number of Queenslanders trapped in New South Wales by the restrictions, entered the camp through February. Single men suffered even worse, being totally segregated from women and family groups, in a higher station at Point Danger, the boundary between them being a barbed wire fence, decorated with yellow ribbons. The first inmates were released to come to Brisbane by special train on the 15th of February, but hundreds more, many from “infected areas” further south were waiting at Tweed Heads to cross into the camp, much to the consternation and alarm of the

Public Meeting held at the border fence to discuss quarantine restrictions. Feb. 1919

Photo: State Library of Queensland



Inhalation

towns' residents. A public meeting expressing Tweed Heads' concern was held on the 23rd of February, asking that a free inoculation depot be opened, that "dumping" of Queenslanders cease at Tweed Heads, and that a temporary hospital be established in the town. Word had increasingly reached Brisbane of tension in the Coolangatta camp, with the Medical Officer (Dr. Merrilees) threatening "detention" of his more vocal critics - a somewhat hollow threat in that they were in any case detained. When the rainy weather set in, conditions worsened. Tents leaked or were blown down. What was worse, much of Shark Bay compound was badly drained, in fact it was close to the notorious

Swamp. Worse rain, with strong winds fell in early March. Each day the inmates were also treated to a period in the "Inhalatorium".

"Immediately after a batch passes through the inhalation chamber there is either a rush to the surf or to the tents, some preferring a rub down and change into warm, dry garments than a dip in the sea."

(Brisbane Courier 25 February 1919, p. 5)

Even more galling was the fact that the government expected each person to pay seven shillings and sixpence as guests of His Majesty! One inmate, James Allan (of the well-known Brisbane department store Allan & Stark's) stated that the "meals in the Coolangatta camp were not equal to an ordinary sixpenny feed in a hash house. It was simply commercial robbery to charge seven and sixpence for the fare, when the work in the camp was largely attended to by the voluntary committee." (Brisbane Courier 7 March 1919, p. 7)

As Shark Bay and Point Danger increasingly reverted to a quagmire, the decision was taken on the 3rd of March, to take over the Greenmount Guest House, to house the women and children. Yellow flags now flew from the

vicinity of Coolangatta township itself, scarcely an invitation to holiday visitors who were Coolangatta's bread and butter.

When, however, several cases of pneumonic influenza were diagnosed at what was then locally known as "the blacks' camp" at Fingal in late February, it increasingly became clear that the Coolangatta quarantine camp must be closed, and the remaining Queenslanders waiting in New South Wales be forwarded to a similar camp established at Wallangarra, on the border north of Tenterfield.

The last internees at Coolangatta left for Brisbane on the 6th of March 1919. Over 1,500 had passed through the camp since its establishment, undergoing daily treatment in sinister-sounding "inhalation chambers" and lining up for "thermometer parades".

The border however remained closed for many weeks, and the comic opera of life between the both towns only heightened. The local rifle club, for instance, held its annual general meeting on both sides of the fence, with members yelling their approval or disapproval of various motions while the Chairman (John L. Gordon) was seated on a bag of merchandise on the overhead bridge. The New South Wales riflemen could not, of course, practice as the range was at Kirra. Local auctioneers, Thornton & Allen, also conducted the auction of an estate subdivision from the buffer zone bridge with bids being received from each side of the fence. Most interestingly, perhaps, a Chinese market gardener whose cart and crops stood in the buffer zone at Shark Bay – a constant cause of complaint by local residents – continued to live there and cultivate his vegetables throughout the whole period.

The Tweed Heads community's reaction to a possible outbreak of "flu" at Fingal was remarkable, and was well documented in the press at the time. There were distinct shades of a local apartheid policy during the first half of 1919, and perhaps for much later. The Chamber of Commerce organised volunteer pickets to ensure no "blacks" escaped quarantine cordons, and were even prepared to isolate infected Islanders from Cudgen or Chinderah amongst those already ill at Fingal. One positive outcome was the first accurate published reports of living conditions at Fingal, with many family members living in the one humpy and a total absence of sanitation.

Federal border restrictions replaced state controls in late May 1919, and police patrols were only withdrawn on the 23rd of May. By this date the restrictions were of little use, with influenza rife in Brisbane and spreading rapidly throughout Queensland. Tweed Heads and Coolangatta came in for their fair

share of cases in June, fortunately however of a milder strain than elsewhere, including Murwillumbah, where an emergency hospital had been briefly set up. There were only a few deaths in Tweed Heads itself, although almost every household was stricken with the illness at one stage. Perhaps the Twin Towns' superb climate had much to do with it.

By June, any one furnished with a seven and sixpence federal health certificate could now cross the border, however with only the local constabulary left to control the overhead bridge across the tick buffer zone, many of the "Tweed Heads-ites" crossed at various points "for a look around and a dip".

In Tweed Heads itself all theatres were closed, indoor gatherings banned, and the wearing of masks in shops was made compulsory. Billiards and bars were taboo. A Red Cross kitchen operated from Mrs. Morley's residence, and Boy Scouts undertook street patrols. In Coolangatta the local school was closed for several weeks. July however saw glorious winter weather set in, and by mid-month most local cases were happily recuperating sufficiently to make the Peace Celebrations held that month a happy event.

The whole sorry story of the first six months of 1919, with its tales of family disruption, loss of income, empty hotels and boarding houses, did however have a positive side – the first bank (a branch of the English, Scottish & Australasian) opened its doors at Coolangatta, as did the town's first drapery (owned by W. Slattery). Coolangatta's postal receiving office, closed in 1918 as part of a Federal economy drive, was re-opened. An open-air cinema also operated in Griffith Street, established by Mrs. Gibson in September 1919 – known as the Diggers' Theatre. This proved highly successful and the theatre was roofed over early in 1920. Most importantly, however, Coolangatta obtained its own State School. As early as November 1916 the Secretary of the local School Building Committee (H.E. Twigg) had received a letter from the Department of Public Instruction rejecting their call for a school to be established in the Queensland town.

The Coolangatta Town Council undertook to support the Committee's case.

"Stating that the accommodation for children at Tweed Heads is over-taxed. That the education of children in Queensland should not be dependent upon the generosity of a neighbouring State, and that an unnecessary disability will be occasioned from obtaining scholarships in New South Wales."

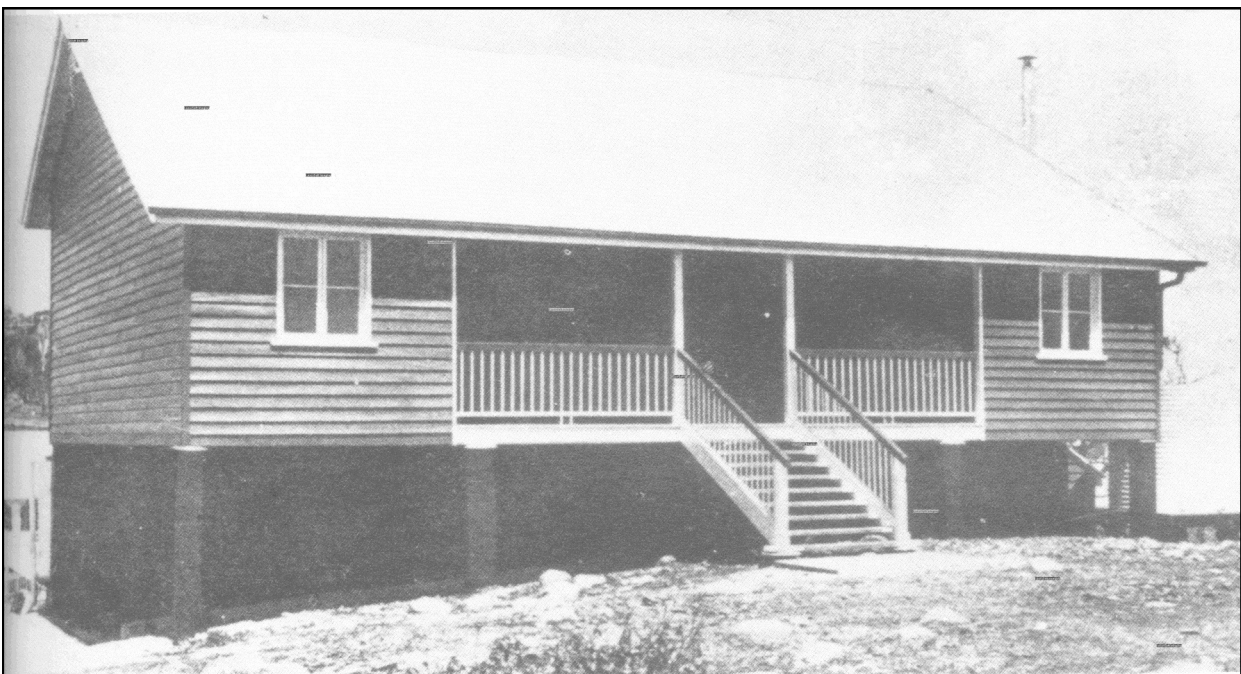
(Coolangatta Town Council Minutes 24 November 1916)

Nothing was done however until over fifty children in Coolangatta were unable to attend the Tweed Heads Public School once the border closed. A temporary school was soon established in the Coolangatta Town Hall, with Claude Frederick Henry De Jersey as the first teacher. Here it would remain (at a rental of £1 per week) until a new school building was constructed on Kirra Hill in 1920, surely one of the most magnificent sites for a school imaginable.

“An admirable site commanding a coastline view from Cudgen Headlands as far as the eye can reach on the north, and a crescent landscape view of Terranora, Currumbin hills and McPherson’s Range from the north to the south-west. Perhaps a little bleak for the winter, but a perfect spot for the summer. The new school consists of two class rooms separated by wood and glass partitions, each measuring 21 x 20, opening onto a nine foot verandah on the north side. Downstairs, on a concrete floor, are two rooms of similar dimensions, one a playroom enclosed on two sides, and the other a cooking and dress-making room. The latter is furnished with two cooking stoves, two tables, dresser and linen press, and well provided with light.”

(Tweed Daily 5 October 1920, p. 2)

When the school was officially opened by the local member (Hon. J.G. Appel, M.L.A.) in September 1920, there were 67 pupils on the roll and two teachers.



Coolangatta School 1920

Photo: Tweed Regional Museum Collection

NEWSPAPER REPORTS

Brisbane Courier 31 January 1919

At Tweed Heads : A Gilbertian Situation : The Border Chaos

Murwillumbah, Jan. 30

The position at Tweed Heads and Coolangatta has become most involved, and it is a position that is not without ludicrous aspects. Tweed Heads and Coolangatta are of course practically one town, and taking advantage of the 10-mile provision, traffic between the two places this morning went on as usual, but the border was absolutely closed at 2 pm today. People at Coolangatta who had gone to Tweed Heads earlier in the day could not get back, and Tweed Heads residents at the time in Coolangatta had perforce to remain there. Many scenes humorous as well as serious occurred, though the police did all possible to smooth matters. Three ladies who came to Tweed Heads to purchase fruit had to stay on that side of the border and men from Coolangatta working in Tweed Heads had to stay there, though their houses were only a hundred yards away. Meanwhile the bridges and tick gates were guarded, but there are not ample police to guard all the gates and sundry folk have succeeded in sneaking through the puzzle gates, which were left unguarded.

The position is much aggravated by the fact that Coolangatta has practically no separate entity in a business sense. There is no doctor there, no chemist, no milkman, no butcher and no baker. The only bank agency is worked from the Tweed Heads side. There is no school at Coolangatta and the only undertaker lives at Tweed Heads. There is no post office either, and the residents are restricted to telephone communication. Today the mails were brought to the dividing fence by New South Wales men and then handed through to a Queenslander. The milkman did likewise with his milk cans. The Coolangatta barber, in need of a number of fresh towels washed at Tweed Heads sent an S.O.S. message across the tick border barrier for his towels and had them thrown across in a bundle, but the string breaking way, they were scattered in the dust.

There were crowds this afternoon and tonight around the main crossing. Tomorrow morning promises to be lively at Tweed Heads. Bakers have carts on the Coolangatta side and it is said purpose to bring bread to the fence tomorrow, and will hand it to the carters for delivery, and the butchers will be compelled to adopt a similar course. No public proclamations concerning the new regulations have been posted and as regards the matter of the prohibition

against the passage of the border it has apparently been left to the police to make a verbal warning.

A particular position has also arisen in the local government matters, inasmuch as the Mayor of Coolangatta is a resident of Tweed Heads. There has been a rush for inoculation and the doctors have already done hundreds of applicants. There is much telephone congestion to-night, owing to wives speaking conversations with husbands, and the latter inquiring after their wives' appeals for food, &c.

Tweed Daily 30 January 1919

Flu – the Peace, Pearce and Price of Bananas have all suffered pride of place as the chief topic of conversation at Tweed Heads – the usurper (Spanish influenza) now holds sway. Dame Rumour, that lying jade, was yesterday responsible for the unusual “alarmist” reports. At first there were half a dozen cases not twenty miles distant, and towards evening it had advanced as far as Cudgen. Newspapers found a ready sale, and everyone with any “inside” knowledge soon had a crowd of listeners.

At 2 pm boats and cars from Murwillumbah brought their usual crowd of travellers who made their way to the railway station. Here a very unpleasant surprise awaited them. The carriages were locked and the police informed all who had travelled in from beyond the ten mile radius of the town that they could go no further. Quarantined!

Tweed Daily 30 January 1919

Cudgen. Last Friday night a meeting convened by Mr. Wray, Manager of Condong mill, was held in the hall for the purpose of discussing ways and means of combating an outbreak of pneumonic influenza, should such occur. Mr. Wray chaired the meeting, and explained what was being done at Condong mill and what the company was prepared to do at Cudgen in the way of use of locomotives, launches etc., for getting patients to hospital, supply of tents and stretchers, and in any other way possible. A committee of canegrowers and other residents was formed to be in readiness should the need arise.

Tweed Daily 1 February 1919

Tweed Heads : The Divided Town

Thursday was a day of wild rumours, official uncertainty and murmured gossip in Tweed Heads. The rumours were mostly false, empty things composed of

wind and seemingly carried with it. Really they were humorous, but the pneumonic influenza menace seems too serious a matter to joke about, and the class of people who spread these false statements deserve public horse-whipping. Silly as these rumours are they range from Murwillumbah being stricken with the plague to glib assertions that it has paralysed Sydney's business world and is steadily wiping out that city's population – they are likely to cause needless worry, if not a general panic. Tweed Heads is at present a divided town; the one half in quarantine, the other a “clean area”.

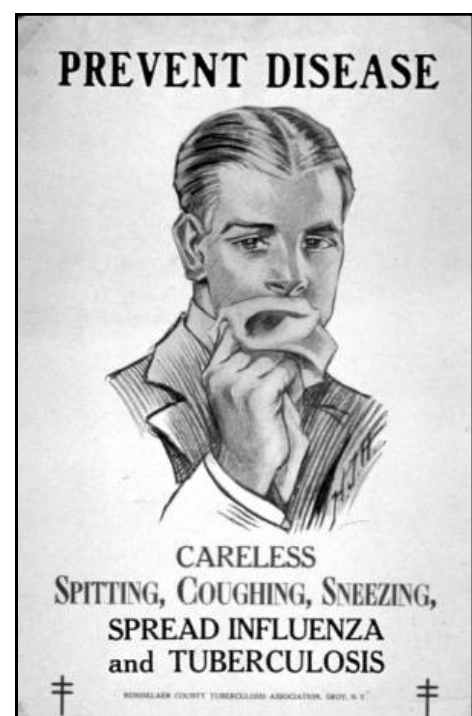
A number of business people who reside in the latter have shops in the quarantine section, and now in accordance with the official regulations, which came into operation at midday Thursday, these people have two alternatives; they can either close their business premises and reside at home in comfort or continue to trade and put up where best they can. Strict regulations coming into operation at short notice have made matters very awkward for a large number of people. One man who manages a business in the quarantine area had his mid-day meal at his residence, returned to his shop for the afternoon, and then found to his dismay that he could not return to his home for tea.

Another case holds with employees of a grocery store in the “clean area”. These men crossed the divide for lunch but could not cross it after. Unless arrangements less rigid are made this business will have to remain closed. The cabbies, who must be seriously affected by the sudden block in traffic, have changed their usual cry “Cab to train!” to such calls as “Cab to Coolangatta!”, “I'll Sneak You Through the Border”, etc. At the time of writing, it was not quite clear whether the regulations will be slightly relaxed to allow food, milk, groceries, etc. to be carried across, or whether same will have to be poked across with the aid of a long pole. One point which is advocated is the advisability of altering the present quarantine barrier.

Brisbane Courier 5 February 1919

*Marooned at the Tweed : Bitter Resentment
Shown : Threats to Cross the Border*

A large number of Queenslanders are “marooned” at the Tweed and private advice shows that deep resentment is being shown against the State government, in fact so keen is



the resentment that an agitation is on foot seeking to organise a general crossing of the border. Queenslanders have been held up at Tweed Heads for more than a week and their isolation seems indeterminable unless, something is done to relieve the position because each day brings its fresh arrivals.

Preparing for an Outbreak

Tweed Heads, 4 February 1919

At meetings of the Red Cross and the Chamber of Commerce last night it was decided to make preparations to meet the emergency should an outbreak of influenza occur here. A Committee was formed to obtain a site for an isolation hospital. The Tweed Shire has arranged for the first cases to be transported to the Murwillumbah District Hospital, and to establish an inoculation depot at Tweed Heads as soon as a vaccine is available. The Red Cross is holding a gift evening on Thursday to equip the proposed isolation hospital. Local volunteers are wanted, and all the local Red Cross ladies have offered their services here if required. Visitors are still arriving here from the South. Owing to telegraphic error Alderman Gordon was reported of having said the buffer area should be Byron Bay and Coraki. The report should have read Boyd's Bay and Cobaki, both on the Tweed River.

Brisbane Courier 6 February 1919

Conditions at the Tweed : An Easier Feeling

Mr. W. J. Tunley (Chairman of the Stranded Queenslanders at Tweed Heads) advised the "Courier" last evening that a much easier feeling now prevailed at Tweed Heads in consequence of the announcement at a further meeting in the Empire Theatre, that the following telegram had been received from the Acting Premier of Queensland, "The material and staff for the establishment of a temporary quarantine station at Coolangatta were despatched today". Those present expressed a good deal of thankfulness for this decision and a message to that effect was subsequently telegraphed to Mr. Hunter. Prior to the close of the meeting a vote of thanks was passed to the proprietors of the Empire Theatre for permission to use the building for meetings and also for the generous invitation of the management for stranded Queenslanders to attend the picture entertainments without cost."

Tweed Daily 7 February 1919

Preparations at Tweed Heads

The Red Cross and Chamber of Commerce Emergency Committee has decided that the Public School would make a suitable isolation hospital. Medical men

approve of the site and do not favour the Shire Council's idea to send the patients to the Murwillumbah District Hospital. Arrangements are being made to obtain the use of the Public School buildings, should an outbreak occur. The local branch of the Red Cross Society is manufacturing masks from a sample obtained from Murwillumbah.

Brisbane Courier 8 February 1919

At Tweed Heads : Isolation Area Ready

A meeting of stranded Queenslanders was held at the Empire Theatre this morning to make final arrangements before going into quarantine tomorrow afternoon. A telephone message to Mr. Hunter about the cost of those quarantined elicited the information that all must pay. Those unable to do so now will be given three months' time on their statutory declaration to pay. Mr. Tunley reported that he had arranged with the Y.M.C.A. for magazines and other reading matter and was trying to get a piano. The management is arranging to make all comfortable, grouping family and friends on a site at Shark Bay in the vicinity of the Coolangatta Soldiers' Rest Home.

Brisbane Courier 12 February 1919

Opposition from Tweed Heads

Press reports stating that stranded Queenslanders from Sydney are being carried by the North Coast Shipping Company to Byron Bay, and thence will proceed to Murwillumbah, to be quarantined at Tweed Heads, are viewed with alarm here. The Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce telegraphed the Sydney authorities as follows : - "The residents of Tweed Heads note with alarm the proposal to establish a quarantine station here. We emphatically protest against any such action, also against unrestricted travelling from other areas to Tweed Heads and other country centres." The question is being asked why Queensland does not repatriate her own people by ship direct from Sydney to Brisbane, instead of bringing them through the populous north coast district, the opinion being that land quarantine cannot be effectively carried out here. There are no means of treating a possible outbreak. It is claimed that the Coolangatta quarantine station is not to be in existence longer than seven days, Queensland should notify her own people to that effect, especially those in the South.

Almost all the bandsmen are absolutely stranded, and were playing in the streets last evening.

Tweed Daily 14 February 1919

Tweed Heads Benefit for Bandsmen : More Queenslanders Expected

Mr. A.D. Rawlinson, proprietor of the Empire Pictures, gave a benefit show and dance in his theatre last evening to assist the members of the Federal Band, who are stranded here and living in tents at the foot of Flagstaff Hill and in the Police Paddock. Most of the bandsmen are almost penniless and the benefit was a splendid success. The members of the Ipswich City Band are expected in the town in the course of a day or so. It is reported that 250 more Queenslanders are coming to town this afternoon via Byron Bay en route from Sydney, per the steamer Wollongbar.

Brisbane Courier 14 February 1919

Quarantine Experiences by an Alleged Sufferer

Judging by samples of correspondence received from one and another it is evident that a good deal of sympathy is being wasted on the inmates of the first Coolangatta quarantine camp on their bad luck. As a matter of fact they have all been having a very good time, and the memory of their camp experience will remain as a pleasant recollection for a long time to come. It would be difficult to imagine a more ideal situation than the one chosen for the quarantine site, giving as it does access to the beach off Shark Bay, and also Point Danger, from which a magnificent view is always obtainable. Practically all those now in camp had been stranded at the Tweed for several days.

The stranded Queenslanders, however had been working as well as waiting and filling in the intervals with surf bathing and other aids to philosophic outlook. When their labours were crowned with success, and the tents of the quarantine station became visible, there was naturally much impatience to get across, but the inevitable delays did not seriously affect the general feeling of good humour, as we knew everything possible was being done to expedite matters. When we actually got across, the general feeling was one of thankfulness of actually being on Queensland soil, tempered, however, by the anticipation of the unknown hardships and restrictions to be endured before "home sweet home" could be reached. At the same time there was a grim determination to endure the coming privations with heroic fortitude remembering the hardships of the soldiers in the trenches and of the still stranded and unquarantined Queenslanders at Tenterfield and elsewhere. We pictured the medical and other autocrats of the camp sitting in a solitary state, unapproachable to the common herd, and issuing their orders from which there could be no appeal. There were vague threats of mutiny, or appeals to Caesar

if the iron hand was used too ruthlessly, but like true Britons we resolved to go to the uppermost limit of human forbearance before jeopardizing the health of the community or the stability of the government by any dramatic action.

Tweed Daily 28 February 1919

The blacks' camp at The Caves is situated in a low-lying belt of heath scrub between Fingal sand hills and the river, and on account of the filthy conditions prevailing amongst its inhabitants, is an ideal spot for fostering of any kind of epidemic. Low-roofed and ill-ventilated bark huts are the principal dwellings and as no method is employed in sanitation, refuse and filth is allowed to lie about in and around the small clusters of stunted shrubs which grow throughout the camp. The actual living conditions, too, are vile. As many as a dozen persons are breathing foul air in huts which on modern health conditions would be considered decidedly unhealthy for use. If the present outbreak stops at having drawn general attention to this disease then it will prove more a boon than a curse.

The strictest isolation is being kept over the blacks' camp at Fingal in view of the suspicious illness there. Fortunately, the location being a narrow neck of land between the sea and river, lends itself to this purpose. Special constables will be sworn in at Tweed Heads to act as patrols as soon as authority is received. All boats are being taken away so as to prevent any of the coloured people getting out of quarantine. The Shire President (Councillor Marks) is taking a prominent part in measures to control the outbreak.

Tweed Daily 1 March 1919

Fingal Blacks' Camp : Seven Cases Reported : No Deaths

Several cases of pneumonic influenza and one suspicious case are reported at Fingal. No deaths have occurred so far. Dr. McDonald has been appointed by the Shire to take charge of the situation, which is well in hand. Three constables were sworn in this afternoon and five will be sworn in tomorrow morning for picket duty. Strict quarantine conditions now exist. It is reported on good authority that the missionary contacts are recent arrivals from Fiji and that they have visited in turn Lismore, Stony Gully, Kyogle and Fingal. A large tent was taken up by Dr. Willis and Sergeant Howie to isolate the patients, but they refused to vacate their huts. Medicine is also refused. Dr. Willis has already inoculated about fifty and the remaining thirty inhabitants of the settlement will also have to be inoculated tomorrow.

Tweed Daily 1 March 1919

Tweed Heads Influenza Precautions

A meeting of the Chamber of Commerce called to discuss quarantine arrangements for the blacks' camp at The Caves was held at Allen & Co.'s rooms on Thursday afternoon. The President (Mr. Allen) occupied the chair. Mr. Allen drew attention to the tabulated list of recommendations for the Shire Council in connection with combating the influenza outbreak at The Caves, which had been received from Dr. McDonald, the official Shire health officer. He suggested that a discussion be held on the first recommendation – “that three special constables be appointed to The Caves”. After a short debate this recommendation was rejected in favour of a proposal to appoint nine special constables to guard the three main entrances to Tweed Heads – Boyd's Bay, the Creamery Wharf and the Crane Wharf. This proposal was seconded and carried and a committee consisting of Mr. Allen, Mr. Twomey and Mr. Thornton were appointed to endeavour to enlist the services of capable men for the purpose.

It was proposed to write to Mr. J.H. Turnock of Chinderah, sending him a copy of the motion asking that he exert his influence to have Cudgen and Chinderah guarded in a like manner and to endeavour to assist Tweed Heads in taking precautionary measure against the possibility of the Fingal blacks trying to escape from isolation.....

Police Sergeant Howie was approached and asked what steps had been taken to guard the Fingal quarantine area. He reported he had received instructions from Lismore to order constables from Tumbulgum and Cudgen to proceed to The Caves immediately on horseback to ensure that no one entered or departed from the blacks' camp by land or by water.

Tweed Daily 4 March 1919

Special Shire Meeting : The Coloured Population : Request for Health Officer to Report

Doctor Aikin submitted a report of a visit to Chinderah and Cudgen in company with the Shire President. One house at Chinderah was found to be overcrowded, seven people sleeping in two beds. The coloured peoples' dwellings inspected at Cudgen were found to be in good condition. Mr. Joubert (Terranora), wrote asking the Government, through the Council, to appoint an officer to watch over the kanakas in the Terranora / Bungalora district. It was pointed out that in the event of an epidemic reaching there, the

white people would have enough to do without having to consider the coloured people. Dr. McDonald has inspected kanaka huts on some properties in Cudgen – Duranbah Road, and found same to be unfit for habitation. The doctor also examined the inmates, several of whom were suffering from colds, but nothing serious. That the Shire be asked to have an inspection of these huts made immediately and to instruct owners to put them in repair. That the Shire Council also be asked in the event of any suspicious case of sickness in the Cudgen district amongst the coloured people to have same at once removed to quarantine at Fingal.....

The Cudgen and Tumbulgum police constables are also doing duty at Fingal and the kanakas' fishing boats have also been commandeered and removed.

Tweed Daily 5 March 1919

Two Additional Cases At Fingal : One Missionary in Jeopardy

Two additional cases were diagnosed by Dr. Willis, who visited the blacks' camp at Fingal yesterday, making the total of victims eleven. The two fresh cases are Mrs. Philip and Mrs. Kora, who are both ordinary residents of the camp. Dr. Willis reported that one of the missionaries, who was ill, is in a very dangerous condition, but the two who were reported yesterday to be improving are now almost recovered. The strict isolation of the camp continues and in the camp there is in force a form of segregation by which whole families are quarantined as individual units and not allowed to mingle with others. No sanitary arrangements are as yet in vogue, but the efforts of Dr. Willis have caused the most offensive matter about the camp to be cleared away. He points out the difficulties which face all endeavour in this direction owing to the general filth which seems to be an indispensable feature of such camps. The child which was first attacked has now almost recovered.

A tour of inspection through the Ekerebagh Camp, Tweed Heads was made by Dr. McDonald and Police Sergeant Howie yesterday. No cases of sickness were discovered and the camp generally was in a fairly clean state, although the sanitary arrangements could be improved, however, they are much better than those at Fingal. Notwithstanding this, Dr. McDonald considered it advisable in the view of the migratory habits of these people, to have the place thoroughly isolated and acting under instructions from the Shire Council has issued orders to the special constables to keep the camp carefully guarded and to allow no one to pass onto Tweed Heads or any other township unless he or she can produce a medical permit. These permits will be sparingly issued, and only when the applicant has not been in contact with the Fingal blacks.

Brisbane Courier 5 March 1919

The Coolangatta Camp : Preparations for Closing

The final inhalation in connection with the camp at Coolangatta took place yesterday, over 400 men and women passing through the inhalation chamber. Already surplus stores are being returned to Brisbane in preparation for the closing of the camp, and judging from the indications yesterday the camp will be ready for closing as soon as the occupants have departed. Major Joss and Captain Lyons will wait on to complete their period of quarantine and it is possible that the doctor and some of the staff will be retained for this purpose but no official announcement has been made. Two special trains have been arranged to leave Coolangatta tomorrow and the final thermometer parade will be held in the afternoon.

Brisbane Courier 12 March 1919

The fact that the quarantine station had been temporarily stationed at Coolangatta has had a disturbing effect on the minds of many holiday-makers and those in search of health. Although the station has been definitely closed, and all buildings dismantled, there is still, perhaps, a vague fear that all is not well with Queensland's popular watering resort, and that by visiting Coolangatta one may run a risk of coming into contact with those who have been in infected areas.

Everything that could possibly be done by a paternal government to keep Queensland free has been done and done well in the south-east portion of the State. A vigilant police patrol of the border prevents any crossing from New South Wales and the removal of the quarantine camp has removed all danger of infection. Intending visitors may therefore take advantage of the usual Easter holidays.

Tweed Daily 16 June 1919

The epidemic is much the same at Tweed Heads as at Murwillumbah and other centres of the river. There are isolated houses where whole families are suffering or have suffered the unwelcome visitor, that after short struggles ranging from a few days to a week or a fortnight, they are all making satisfactory recoveries.

Profiting by the experience and advice of other places which had suffered, most of the effected residents are not rushing out and about after a bout of the disease, but are taking things quietly and keeping abed until thoroughly well.

This is a most sensible action, especially in view of the unpleasant, windy, and wet weather which the Heads is enduring at present.

Tweed Daily 16 June 1919

Mr. Smith, of the Tweed Heads Public School, has schoolboys to do patrol work so that the houses where the epidemic is ruling are called upon, and if anything is required the boys at once communicate with the Red Cross Kitchen. The town has been divided into beats which are being patrolled by the boys three times a day, between 9 am and 9.30 am; between 12 pm and 12.30 pm and 4 pm. and 4.30 pm.

In this way a most humane service is being administered and some most invaluable assistance is being accorded to sufferers. Precautions are taken to prevent the patrol boys coming into contact with influenza patients.

Tweed Daily 21 June 1919

Less than a week ago the flu made its appearance at Coolangatta. Dr. McDonald, though hard worked on the Tweed side of the border, still finds time to visit Coolangatta daily and reports having been called in to over a score of homes, in some cases several in a family being down at the same time. Apart from these cases there are quite a lot of mild cases – I should say three or four score cases at Coolangatta altogether.

In Tweed Heads it seems to be in every home, and fresh cases prove that the disease is becoming prevalent. At first only pains in the head and back are complained of, but now a number of cases are showing signs of bronchial pneumonia and other chest complaints. Although no organised district work is being undertaken in Coolangatta, several ladies are doing all they can to help where members in one household are down.

At Tweed Heads the Red Cross Emergency Kitchen is well organised at Mrs. Morley's residence and under the directionship of Mr. Smith (Public School) ten Boy Scouts are doing excellent patrol work. Several ladies are untiring in their labours for those needing help. The kitchen was started on Friday last, and assisted on Friday ten cases, Saturday eleven cases, Sunday nine cases, Monday twelve cases, Tuesday fourteen cases, sending nourishment to each of these homes twice a day. They also report one family of children where father and mother are very ill, being cared for by members of the Red Cross.

Tweed Daily 25 June 1919

The epidemic continues to rage in most of the homes in Tweed Heads. Although there are few serious cases, there are not many houses that have not had a visit from the scourge. All the church ministers, with the exception of Mr. Allison (Presbyterian), have been down, and the Rev. Mr. Lilley (Church of England) is not yet out of danger. Last Sunday when a death occurred from influenza which necessitated a funeral in the afternoon, the only minister in good health (Mr. Allison), was attending a service in the country and his place was taken by Mr. S. Thornton. Not a pleasant task for any layman. Generally the influenza position is not serious, and this is probably due to the care exercised by the sufferers in not attempting to get up and about until fully recovered. The hard work of a handful of willing workers has also helped to combat the epidemic, and the soup kitchen has been of splendid assistance. This kitchen which has been well attended to, has been the means of supply the necessary nourishment to many who, without it, would have had to leave the sickbed in order to do their own cooking, and thus risk a dangerous relapse which frequently results in pneumonia of a very serious form.

Tweed Daily 28 June 1919

A public meeting was held at the School of Arts, Tweed Heads on Thursday evening in conjunction with the influenza epidemic. Mr. S. Thornton occupied the chair, and Mr. A. Glass was elected secretary. Mr. Morley moved that a committee to be called the Influenza Committee be formed. It was agreed that Mrs. Morley's private residence should be the headquarters to which anyone in need of nursing assistance should make application. The offer of Mr. Greenwood to provide a sulky and that of Mr. Watkins to provide a horse for conveying the nurses about from house to house were accepted with thanks. Mr. McAuley moved that a notice be placed in prominent parts of the town calling for VAD volunteers.

Tweed Daily 14 July 1919

Glorious Days.

The weather for the week at Tweed Heads has been perfect. Glorious days of warm sunshine, with clear, still mornings, the evenings a trifle chilly, is the order of the weather which the gods that are bequeathing the place that usually is so subjected to their animosity. Convalescents from the influenza are, in consequence, most thankful to the aforesaid gods for their charity.

Numbers of these convalescents, both from the Heads, Murwillumbah, and other parts of the river, are making the best of things while the sun shines. Fishing is a famous resort and whether the bream bite well or the lines get tangled on the rocks – costing a small fortune in hooks and sinkers, the mere freedom to get out along the breakwater and around the point of Flagstaff Hill and lounge in the sun, comes as a wonderful pick-me-up to those recovering from the flu.

District Nursing

For the work of the district nurses nothing but admiration and appreciation is felt. Travelling long distances, enduring discomfort, and defying fatigue, they have, by their cleverness and perseverance, helped in a very large measure to combat the epidemic, and in doing so, they have endeared themselves in the eyes of all who have watched their work or benefited from their valuable assistance.

Not all these wonderful women were used, by experience, to the trying ideals of rough country travelling, or the long hours of vigil by the bedside of the very seriously ill, but they have proved themselves capable of overcoming every difficulty, and now the epidemic is on the wane theirs should be the lion's share of the credit.

The Doctor

A just distribution of praise, however, cannot be made without some reference in passing to the work of the Tweed Heads Medical Officer (Dr. McDonald). Playing a lone hand, his sleep for the past month has been a meagre snatching from the hours of toil. To cope with the number of cases which have been in Tweed Heads alone would have seemed a little more than the possible of ordinary human endeavour, but when one takes into consideration the vast area of the outlying districts, and the day calls and the night calls which have echoed from them since the beginning of the influenza epidemic, the work of this medical officer seems magnificent indeed. He has played a lone hand well, and has lost no possible tricks.

- *Robert Longhurst*
December, 2006

INFLUENZA

Spread by Droplets sprayed from Nose and Throat

Cover each COUGH and SNEEZE with handkerchief.

Spread by contact.

AVOID CROWDS.

If possible, WALK TO WORK.

Do not spit on floor or sidewalk.

Do not use common drinking cups and common towels.

Avoid excessive fatigue.

If taken ill, go to bed and send for a doctor.

The above applies also to colds, bronchitis, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.

TWEED HEADS HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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