

Smallpox on the “Chimborazo”

A report in the Sydney newspaper on 24th April 1886, recounted the voyage of the “Chimborazo” from when it left London until it sailed into Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) on 23rd April 1886.

Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), Saturday 24 April 1886, page 8

ARRIVAL OF THE R.M.S. CHIMBORAZO.

The Orient Company's RMS. Chimborazo, with mails, passengers, and cargo, arrived in port at 6 a.m. yesterday morning, after a successful voyage from London. The Chimborazo on leaving Plymouth was pretty nearly a full ship, having on board 67 first class, 56 second class, and 232 third class and steerage passengers ; 14 saloon passengers left at Naples, and 6 first class and 25 third class embarked. At Ismala 3 passengers disembarked on route for Cairo, and 2 left at Suez, thus leaving 19 passengers for Adelaide. 95 for Melbourne, and 258 for Sydney in all classes. Of the voyage it is gathered that the Chimborazo left London on March 4, and Plymouth at noon next day. After leaving Plymouth Sound the steamer experienced strong winds with rain and a high following sea, which increased during the night. By noon of the 6th the weather, was somewhat finer, with moderate S.W. and westerly winds, which accompanied the vessel to Gibraltar, which was passed on the morning of the 9th; easterly winds were carried thence to Naples, which was reached on the 12th. Left Naples at 7 p.m. same day, and soon after passed the company's R.M.R. Garonne. Through the Straits of Messina fresh breezes were experienced, but on clear-ing them the wind increased to a gale, with a nasty short, choppy, head sea, accompanied with violent squalls, which lasted until noon of the 10th, when the wind backed to the S.W., and fine weather was carried to Port Said, which was reached on the evening of the 19th. After coaling, and taking in a small quantity of cargo, the Canal was entered at 6.30 a.m. next day, and Suez was reached at 1.10 p.m. on the 21st. 392 bags mails and 10 packages were here shipped, and the Chimborazo proceeded on her voyage at 3.30 p.m.

On the run down the Red Sea moderate northerly winds and cool weather were met with until the 22nd, when, after a few hours calm the wind chopped round to the south. but the weather still remained fine and cool. On the 24th, at noon, Aden was reached and more coal taken on board, proceeded at 5 p.m. to Guardafui, the steamer carrying easterly winds.

On entering the Indian Ocean fine headway was made; Diego Garcia reached on the 1st instant; here stores were placed into the company's tender, and a start was made same day: fresh S.E. trade hold out until Cape Leuwin was rounded on the 12th instant, followed by light N. and N.E. winds and fine weather to Cape Borda. Glenelg was reached on the 10th instant. Left again at 2.10 a.m. next day for Melbourne, which was reached on the 19th instant. Having discharged cargo into lighters the steamer's detention in Melbourne was of a short duration, and a start was made for Sydney, Port Jackson Heads being made at daylight yesterday morning. The voyage has not been devoid of incident, for other than a case of smallpox breaking out on board. Mr C. R. Lynch, third officer, died of cystitis and peritonitis on the 7th instant and a passenger, named Miss Rebecca M'Mahon, died the same evening of heart disease. The Chimborazo was taken into quarantine on arrival.

The Voyage of the “Chimborazo” March 1886

Sadly, two passengers died during the voyage and a passing mention was made of a smallpox case on board:

Transcript:

The voyage has not been devoid of incident, for other than a case of smallpox breaking out on board, Mr C. R. Lynch, third officer, died of cystitis and peritonitis on the 7th instant and a passenger, named Miss Rebecca M'Mahon, died the same evening of heart disease.

The death of two passengers was seen as quite normal but the smallpox case was to extend the time passengers were unable to land at their destinations.

However, before the "Chimborazo" landed in Adelaide, the Colony of New South Wales (N.S.W.) had already published its views on the quarantining of ships carrying smallpox.

CHOLEHA, FEVER AND SMALLPOX.

THE PASSENGER AND CREW OF THE CHIMBORAZO.

A meeting of the Board of Health was held yesterday afternoon, when several matters, of importance were discussed. A communication from the Secretary of State for the Colonies was received, notifying that cholera was prevalent in Trieste and Venice and recent cablegrams were read with regard to the outbreak of the disease at Brindisi. In consequence of this, it was resolved — "That all vessels coming through the Mediterranean sea, either direct or intermediately, communicating with parts enroute, should be detained in quarantine on arrival at Sydney for the purpose of undergoing medical inspection." The late prevalence of dengue fever at Fiji was then considered. Ships recently arrived in Sydney have come with clean bills of health, a circumstance which was received as sufficient evidence that the epidemic had ceased to exist. The board decided that the present proclamation referring to the treatment of vessels from this colony should be rescinded. With respect to the expected arrival in quarantine of the R.M.S., Chimborazo, it was stated that copies of the following telegram had been forwarded to the boards of health at Brisbane Adelaide and Melbourne, viz. " That the Sydney passengers and crew of the Chimborazo should, on arrival, be detained at the quarantine station; Port Jackson, in accordance with resolutions, Nos. 36 and 37 of the Sanitary Conference, held in Sydney in September, 1884 ; quarantine to date from landing of passengers or disinfection of vessel by recognised health authorities. April 19, 1886."

The resolutions 36 and 37 are as follows : — " That those in whom vaccination runs a normal course, or who, after repeated trials at the quarantine ground, prove to be insusceptible of vaccination, may be released on the 15th day."

"That those who refuse vaccination, or revaccination, shall be detained until the health officer is satisfied of their inability to spread smallpox, but for no shorter period than 14 days." With a view to inconveniencing the passengers as little as possible, a telegram to the following effect has been sent to the Melbourne board by Mr. Sager, the secretary of the Sydney Board of Health, viz.: — " That if the passengers, in accordance with the above resolution, submit themselves to vaccination or revaccination, in the event of that precaution proving successful, they will be released on the fifteenth day, otherwise they will be detained in quarantine for the full period of 21 days. The Sydney board, therefore, urge upon the passengers to submit themselves to this as early as possible." Yesterday morning the Secretary received a telegram from Adelaide; stating that no disinfection [disinfection] by the health authorities had taken place there, and that simply that passengers and the patient had been landed. We understand that on Saturday the manager of the Orient Company, to which the Chimborazo belongs, telegraphed to Melbourne that the vessel should be thoroughly disinfected on its arrival.

New South Wales Guidelines for Quarantining of Ships

On landing at the first port of call, Adelaide, South Australia, the passengers who were disembarking at Adelaide were quarantined on Torrens Island Quarantine Station, just off Port Adelaide and were well provided for as detailed in the following account.

The Chimborazo's Passengers

The steamship Chimborazo, from which a person suffering from smallpox was landed at Adelaide, arrived in the harbour early in the morning of the 22nd ultimo, and at once went into quarantine. The landing of the passengers took place during the day, the official return showing that there were 33 first-class, 22 second-class, 40 third-class, and 135 steerage passengers. The crew numbered 120. The Orient Company made arrangements whereby it is hoped the stay of the passengers at the Quarantine Station will be rendered as agreeable as possible under the circumstances. The comfort of the passengers is being looked after by some twelve persons specially detailed for duty at the station; they include nine stewards and two cooks. Provisions and a supply of newspapers, &c., are sent down daily at 7 o'clock, and an ample supply of lawn tennis, croquet, and cricket materials, as well as other means of recreation, have been forwarded. The fumigation of the ship was proceeded with at once. Such of the passengers as may undergo successful vaccination will be released from quarantine in 15 days, dating from Monday. Those who do not undergo vaccination will be required to remain in quarantine 21 days.

Passengers and Crew Made Comfortable on Torrens Island

The "Chimborazo" was soon underway and arrived at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay (the Heads). The ship proceeded into the bay where, under close scrutiny the mail was fumigated and cargo unloaded. On the outbound journey to Sydney the passengers were landed at the quarantine station at Portsea, Victoria (the eastern side of the Heads).

In the following account, the nationality of the smallpox case was published and he was identified as a Italian passenger who had embarked in Naples. He was put into a bridge boat (with an attendant) and this prevented the disease spreading throughout the ship.

SMALLPOX AGAIN.

Adelaide, Friday. — The Orient R.M.S. Chimborazo arrived from London this afternoon. There is a case of smallpox on board, the patient being a steerage passenger, an Italian, bound for Sydney. He will be landed at Torrens Island and placed in quarantine, and 22 passengers will also be landed there. The mails will be fumigated and sent up to Adelaide, but the South Australian portion of the cargoes go on with the vessel. Later. — Only the Customs officers and ship's agent were allowed on board the Chimborazo. The passenger suffering from smallpox is an Italian. He embarked at Naples. He developed the first symptoms on the 31st March. The doctor at once fitted up one of the bridge boats, and put the patient in it with an attendant. This isolation of the patient prevented the spread of the disease. The master wished to land the patient here, although he was bound for Sydney, and the health-officer consented. No cargo transhipped. The passengers, for Adelaide were all sent to the quarantine station at Torrens Island, where arrangements were made for their reception. The patient is approaching convalescence, and he will be isolated. As soon as the passengers were landed the Chimborazo sailed again for Melbourne and Sydney. The Chimborazo arrived, at the Heads on Sunday afternoon, and came up the bay at once, it having been arranged that the Victorian passengers should be landed at the quarantine station as the vessel passes it again en route to Sydney. Dr. Sutherland boarded the Chimborazo at the Heads. He was instructed to see that the fumigation of the mails was properly done, and also to closely watch the discharging of the cargo. The Chimborazo reached the outer anchorage at about 10 o'clock. A close surveillance was maintained with the view of preventing improper communication with the shore.

Ships arrival in Melbourne

After making it to Sydney, again the passengers were quarantined but after an assurance by the Acting Manager of the Orient Shipping Co., the ship was given the "all clear" to depart Sydney on 8th May 1886.

RELEASE OF THE CHIMBORAZO - FROM QUARANTINE.

[By Telegraph]

Sydney. May 5.

A meeting of the Board of Health was held at noon to-day to consider a letter from the Manager of the Orient Line steamers, requesting that the Chimborazo might be released from quarantine on Friday, the 7th inst, on the ground that twenty-one days will elapsed since the patient was disembarked at Port Adelaide, and that the passengers who were detained at the Quarantine Station there and in Melbourne were being released on the 5th. The Board received an assurance from the Manager that the disinfection of the Chimborazo had been carried out by the master and the surgeon of the ship to the best of their ability immediately the patient was removed from the ship. Taking into consideration with the fact that twenty-one days will have elapsed since the patient disembarked at Port Adelaide, the Board resolved to admit the ship, passengers, and crew to pratique at noon on the 7th instant provided no fresh cases of smallpox occurred in the meantime. The Acting Manager of the Orient Company writes: - "I have just heard from the Board of Health that they have decided to grant my application and release the Chimborazo from quarantine on Friday next. This steamer will therefore sail punctually at 1p.m. on Saturday May 8th".

"Chimborazo" cleared to depart Sydney

John Roulston had finally landed in Sydney, more quickly than if the smallpox case had not been onboard. This probably occurred as the ship did not call at all ports that were on the ships itinerary.