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Fact sheet

North Head Quarantine Station, Sydney

Quarantine and its administration in Australia

Quarantine was a period of isolation (originally of 40 days) imposed upon ships and persons on arrival at a port when they were liable to be or suspected of carrying an infectious or contagious disease. A period of quarantine could also be imposed on plants and animals, but this function was separately administered.

Quarantine stations, where the period of detention was spent, were established at each of the major ports of entry to Australia, and for some migrants the first experience of their new country was to be detained in a quarantine station.

In New South Wales, quarantine regulations were enforced from the beginning of the nineteenth century, initially on the authority of the colonial Governor. While Federation made the Commonwealth responsible for quarantine, it was not until 1909 after the *Quarantine Act 1908* was proclaimed that the function passed to the Commonwealth.

North Head Quarantine Station

The first known use of North Head as a quarantine site was in August 1828 with the detaining of the convict ship Bussorah Merchant when a number of crew became infected with smallpox. The average time of quarantine at North Head was three weeks.

The station was further developed as a complex to include accommodation blocks, hospital wards and morgue, as well as an administration centre, and it remained in operation until the early 1980s. During its life 580 ships were detained at North Head and more than 13,000 people were quarantined.

Records of North Head Quarantine Station

The records of North Head Quarantine Station, some dating from as early as the 1830s, are held in the National Archives Sydney Office. Use the series listed in the table below as a starting point for your research about the station. The CA (Commonwealth Agency) number for the Quarantine Station – CA 4234 – will also identify further records.

Collection references

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Photographs of North Head Quarantine Station and environs	1832–1984	C535
Register of deaths at the Quarantine Station	1881–1925	C526
Daily diaries of duty and occurrence at North Head Quarantine Station	1898–1983	C528
Prescription book	1917–30	C533
Register of admissions and discharges	1918–83	C525
Daily log books	1922–65	C527
Miscellaneous papers	1923–76	C702
Stores distribution book	1925–54	C573
Log books, quarantine launches	1958–77	C4616

Other records

Records about the North Head Quarantine Station were also created by a number of other Commonwealth agencies including the New South Wales Public Works Branch of the Department of Home Affairs (CA 762), the New South Wales state office of the Australian Property Group (CA 1061) and the Senior Quarantine Officer of the New South Wales regional office of the Department of Health (CA 1061). A selection of their records is listed in the table below.

Architectural drawings

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Correspondence – acquisition and sale of land and property by Commonwealth in NSW	1901–48	SP394/1
Berry's Bay – Quarantine Station site	1901–48	SP394/1, NL13/1712
Correspondence re quarantined ships, Sydney and North Head Quarantine Station (deaths and graves)	1917–49	SP399/1
North Head graveyard	1917–49	SP399/1, 80/8

For more information

For further information on quarantine stations please see *Fact sheet 228 - Torrens Island Quarantine Station, South Australia*.