The uses of rurality in twentieth-century youth justice: an Australian case study, 1900-1994

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Abstract

In 1900, the Westbrook Reformatory for Boys, an institution holding both young people convicted of criminal offences and those deemed to be neglected children, was established in a farming region just over 135km from Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, Australia. The institution would remain in the same location until 1994. By then, the institution had been rebranded as a Youth Detention Centre. Rather than the mix of neglected and offending children it had originally housed, its purpose was to hold teenagers who were convicted of crimes or who were on remand. In the institution's earliest stages, rurality, and particularly agricultural labour, were central to practices intended to reform young people. By the century's end, the institution's rural setting, its distance from the capital city, and its inclusion of a working farm were key contributing factors to its closure. Drawing on archival data, newspaper records, memoirs of former inmates, and the findings of three inquiries into the institution, this essay seeks to explain how and why rurality, perceived as central to projects of moral reform in 1900, became understood primarily through the lens of inconvenience and danger by 1994. In doing so, it argues that the moral and rehabilitative discourses associated with rurality did not necessarily become obsolete or irrelevant by the end of the twentieth century. Instead, they interacted with shifting cultural expectations about the treatment of institutionalised children, as well as changing economic circumstances, creating a situation in which the perceived value of rurality alone was insufficient to justify the continued presence of a youth justice institution at Westbrook. This analysis contributes to scholarly knowledge about the reach and limits of the moral values ascribed to place, particularly rural places.

Introduction

There is an ongoing and transnational connection between rurality, as both ideal and reality, and beliefs about moral reform and rehabilitation, particularly for children. The relationship is a complex one, whereby the perceived benefits of distance from the cities has been balanced against practical considerations. Institutions housing or supporting children, including but not limited to schools, have sought to negotiate these tensions.[1] This negotiation is more complex in the case of youth justice institutions – carceral sites which have often been required to they balance their carceral role with morally rehabilitative and educational activities.[2] Rurally located youth justice sites have the potential to reveal much about the relationship between place, actual and imagined, and the conceptions about how children ought to live and how they should be treated.

In this essay, I examine this relationship through a close analysis of a single, long-lived youth justice institution for boys in Queensland, Australia. This institution, operated, under various names, as a youth justice institution from October 1900 to June 1994. Situated in the farming town of Westbrook, the institution was just over 110km from Queensland's capital city, Brisbane, and just over 10km from the nearest regional centre, Toowoomba. Its proximity to Toowoomba made Westbrook more accessible than some other rural settings. Toowoomba, served by a railway line, by 1900 was no longer a "journey of four days" from

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[1] e.g. Wilfried Göttlicher, 'Rural Space as a Natural Space: Topoi on the Educational Qualities of Rural Space in the Debate on Rural School Reform in Austria, 1920–1960', *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 1–2 (3 March 2020): 171–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2020.1739086.

[2] Clarissa Carden, 'Managing Moral Reformation: The Case of Queensland's Reformatory for Boys, 1871–1919', *History of Education Review* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (26 October 2020), https://doi.org/10.1108/HER-05-2020-0034.

Brisbane.[3] Accessing the institution from the capital was still, however, an often arduous process that would reduce dramatically to two hours' drive by the time the institution closed in 1994. When it opened in 1900 it was the latest in a series of sites for Queensland's beleaguered reformatory school for boys.

By the time it moved to Westbrook, this institution had already had three homes, two of which – onboard the former prison hulk *Proserpine* and at the military camp at Signal Hill, Lytton – had been imagined as permanent. While these former sites had presented insurmountable difficulties, the new, rural, site would prove to be more sustainable. The reformatory school for boys would remain at Westbrook until 1994. During its 94-year tenure at the site, the institution experienced changes in name, population, and purpose. The effect of these changes on the meaning and reception of its location offers an opportunity to critically examine the shifting meaning and purpose of 'rurality' and the 'countryside' as imagined actual and potential sites of reformation and rehabilitation for children in the twentieth century. While, in 1900, the institution's distance from urban centres and its situation on fertile agricultural land were desirable, by the century's end the inconvenient realities associated with distance were a major contributing factor in the State Government's decision to close the institution.

Yet the history of the institution at Westbrook does not reflect a situation in which rurality itself ceased to be understood as having morally reformative potential. Rurality has continued to operate as a legitimating concept in Australian programs designed to respond to the behaviours of children "at risk" of offending, as identified in relation to the Brahminy

[3] A E Cole, 'Early History of the Queensland Railways' (Historical Society of Queensland, Inc., University of Queensland, 1944), 285.

diversionary program, subject of the documentary series *Outback Kids.*[4] Yet, as this essay will argue, the legitimating power of rurality and ideas about the moral and rehabilitative power of the countryside ebb and flow over time as they come into conversation with broader shifts in attitudes, policies, and practices related to the incarceration and institutionalisation of young people.

Data

This analysis draws on multiple sources of data. These include the institutional records held by the Queensland State Archives and supplementary material held in the John Oxley Library. The accessibility of original archival records is, however, limited. The reasons for this are twofold. Due to the sensitive nature of youth justice data, many records are closed for 100 years, significantly limiting the accessibility of archival material produced after 1920. A second consideration is the relatively small number of records that have been retained.

To respond to these limitations, this article draws on a range of additional sources. These include newspaper records, particularly those digitised through the National Library of Australia's *Trove* project, government reports, and testimony of former inmates. This last category includes both formal testimony, delivered to government inquiries, and memoirs, which I have elsewhere identified as a valuable means of accessing histories and experiences of former inmates beyond the confines of the testimony genre.[5]

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[4] Barbara Pini and Martin Mills, 'Constructing the Rural in Education: The Case of Outback Kids in Australia', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36, no. 4 (19 May 2015): 578, https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.829745.

[5] Clarissa Carden, 'Grief and Youth Remembered: Accessing Experiences of Historical Youth Justice Through Memoir', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 14, no. 1 (2021): 25–43, https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2021.0003.

Three key government inquiries into the institution deserve particular attention for the insight they provide into the institution as it existed in the second half of the twentieth century. The first, and arguably most significant, is the Schwarten report of 1961, which was produced by Stipendiary Magistrate AE Schwarten in response to a mass escape of boy inmates.[6] The second is a 1971 inquiry made into allegations, published in the Sunday Truth Newspaper, about the conditions under which boys were living.[7] The third report is the 1994 investigation into a series of incidents at the Westbrook Youth Detention Centre which eventually led to the State Government's choice to expedite the existing decision to close the centre.[8] These reports differ in relation to the extent to which they sparked public interest, their impact on the institution, and their authorship. All, however, were generated wholly or in part as a result of incidents that sparked public interest and concern beyond the confines of the institution itself or the government. The 1971 report is unique in that it was created in response to fears about the circumstances faced by the boys, rather than in response to an act of deviance or defiance. The following sections examine three broad periods in the relationship between the institution, its practices, public attitudes towards it, and its location.

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[6] AE Schwarten, 'Report: Westbrook Farm Home for Boys Inquiry', Inquiry (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 27 September 1961).

[7] Queensland Department of Health, 'Westbrook Inquiry: [Report of an Investigation Carried out at Westbrook Training Centre]', 1971, National Library of Australia.

[8] Don Smith and Ryan Majella, 'Investigation of the Circumstances Surrounding Incidents at Westbrook Youth Detention Centre Friday 18 March to Sunday 20 March and Friday 25 March 1994.' (Brisbane: Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, 1994).

The reformative rural

The reformatory at Westbrook, created under the auspices of the *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act* of 1865,[9] was the only government-operated facility in Queensland which was designed to house boys convicted of criminal offences. It had been created as part of a planned system of industrial schools, for children who were found to be neglected, and reformatory schools, for those who had committed crimes. The distinction, while it existed in legislation and policy, was never put into practice, contributing to a complex and uneven system within Queensland whereby boys, particularly white boys, were sentenced to a reformatory if they were found to be neglected or criminal, while girls were sentenced to a "reformatory and industrial school," which later became known solely as an "industrial school."[10] The boys' institution, by the time it opened at Westbrook in 1900, held close to equal numbers of neglected boys and those who had been convicted of, largely minor, criminal offences.[11]

The reformatory school at Westbrook was, in 1900, a vital institution in the context of Queensland's justice, welfare, and, arguably, educational systems. As the only government-run reformatory for boys, it held a range of young people who had been either convicted of criminal offences or found, by a court, to be neglected. These distinctions are

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[9] Queensland, 'Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act' (1865), http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-54468084.

[10] Clarissa Carden and Kerry Wimshurst, 'The Politics of Neglect: Policing, Institutionalising, and Providing for "Neglected Children" in Late Nineteenth-Century Queensland (1881-1900)', *Cultural and Social History*, 16 February 2021, 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2021.1888429.

[11] 'Queensland State Archives Item ID532416, Register - Admissions' (Queensland State Archives, 1906 1871), Queensland State Archives, http://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/Search/ItemDetails.aspx?ItemId=532416.

not necessarily useful, and it is recognised that the category of "neglect" was, at times, used to describe young people who had committed minor criminal offences.[12] This is further complicated by the reality that, where young people were sentenced to Queensland's reformatory after having been convicted of criminal offences, they were largely minor. Most of the institution's earliest offenders had committed small-scale larceny.[13] Children were defined by the original governing legislation, passed in 1865, as persons under the age of 15.[14] In 1906 this was revised to encompass persons under the age of 17,[15] and a few years later the *State Children Act* of 1911 allowed young people to be incarcerated up to the age of 18.[16]

The governing legislation for the institution determined the duration of sentences. Children convicted to the institution had to be sentenced for at least one year, with sentences based on age rather than the severity of any offence committed. This created a situation in which very young inmates received longer sentences than their older counterparts.[17] The consequences of this age-based sentencing were often, to modern eyes, unjust. However, the practice reflects the purpose of the reformatory school which was not to punish offenders but,

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[12] Gladys Scrivener, 'Parental Imposition or Police Coercion?: The Role of Parents and Police in Committals to the Industrial Schools in New South Wales, 1867-1905', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 86, no. 1 (2000): 23.

[13] 'Queensland State Archives Item ID532416, Register - Admissions'.

[14] Queensland, Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act, para. 5.

[15] Queensland, 'An Act to Amend the "Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act of 1865"' (1906), paras 4–5, http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/qld/hist_act/irsaaao19066evn6578/.

[16] Queensland Government, 'State Children Act' (1911), para. 25, https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/catalogue_resources/54694.pdf.

[17] Queensland, Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act.

rather, to educate them, to reform them, and to prepare them to take their place in Queensland society. A partial explanation may be found in the work of Schlossman who, in his study of the treatment of Mexican-American boys brought before the Los Angeles juvenile court during the Great Depression, argues that minority youths were less likely to receive out-of-family placements because these were viewed as beneficial and rehabilitative, and less interest was shown in the rehabilitation of these children than their white counterparts.[18] While race was rarely explicitly mentioned in descriptions of the institution's work, in its early years it housed an overwhelmingly white population.[19] Similarly, the broadly accepted practise of holding children who had not committed offences in the institution at Westbrook may be understood as evidence of an attitude whereby preventative institutionalisation was largely seen as beneficial.

This perspective was associated not only with beliefs about incarceration and institutionalisation more generally but also with the perceived value of agricultural training for young people. The institution's location, and its possession of highly viable farming land, allowed it to position itself as training actual or potential offenders to become productive workers within an agricultural economy. Similar attitudes to children and work were evident elsewhere in Australia. For example, from 1913-14, the state of South Australia's child migration program sought to bring urban British children to rural, agricultural, environments.

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[18] Michael B. Schlossman, 'Less Interest, Less Treatment: Mexican-American Youth and the Los Angeles Juvenile Court in the Great Depression Era', *Punishment & Society* 14, no. 2 (April 2012): 193–216, https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474511434435.

[19] Clarissa Carden, 'Reformatory Schools and Whiteness in Danger: An Australian Case', *Childhood* 25, no. 4 (November 2018): 544–54, https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568218775177.

This program, however, rejected applicants from British reformatory schools.[20] There was, then, a limit to the imagined capacity of rural training and rurally-located institutionalisation to support the moral rehabilitation of children in the Australian context.

There were also growing concerns, elsewhere in Australia, about the poor possible outcomes for children raised as agricultural labourers. For example, in New South Wales, the Teachers' Federation argued that conditions for unskilled agricultural labourers were so unfavourable that children raised in rural locations and provided with only a rudimentary education were likely to "drift to the city" and contribute to an already overcrowded unskilled workforce.[21] Yet, despite this, farming continued to be viewed as a worthy and desirable occupation for working-class youth, particularly in Queensland.

Another key institution established in Queensland during this period was the Riverview Training Farm, run by the Salvation Army. Riverview is situated in Ipswich, a regional city close to Brisbane. While Westbrook is over 100km from Brisbane, Riverview is fewer than 30km away. Despite this difference in distance, in 1926 Riverview was sufficiently rural for the Salvation Army to establish a 363-acre farm on which to "teach British lads farming techniques under Australian conditions."[22] While this institution was

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[20] Elspeth Grant and Paul Sendziuk, '"Urban Degeneration and Rural Revitalisation": The South Australian Government's Youth Migration Scheme, 1913–14', *Australian Historical Studies* 41, no. 1 (March 2010): 75–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610903483523.

[21] John Ramsland, 'Schooling Outback Children in Post-Colonial Australia, 1901–1950', *Paedagogica Historica* 34, no. sup2 (January 1998): 318, https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.1998.11434921.

[22] Esther Daniel, '"Solving an Empire Problem": The Salvation Army and British Juvenile Migration to Australia', *History of Education Review* 36, no. 1 (24 June 2007): 45, https://doi.org/10.1108/08198691200700003.

established for training migrants, it would later become part of the broader child welfare system in the state, with some Westbrook inmates having histories of being institutionalised at Riverview.[23] According to Esther Daniel, the Salvation Army "believed that the training farm would benefit the lads in a moral, social and physical sense. They would be in a healthy environment, learn the virtues of honest hard work, and be spiritually guided."[24] The pedagogical value of rurality, then, was broadly accepted and applied during this time.

These Australian practices existed in a far broader context. The concept that rural environments offer spiritual, social, or rehabilitative benefits, particularly to children, has a long transnational history. The significance of the 'countryside' as a morally loaded site is evidenced, for example, in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century practice, in the United States, of charitable organisations arranging rural holidays for economically deprived urban children. The provision of summer holidays away from the city in this context was made more significant by the fact that the recipients were often the offspring of immigrants and had not experienced "rural or small-town American life," making movement to the countryside a form of Americanisation.[25]

In Australia, perceptions of the value of rurality and rural citizenship, described by Kate Murphy as an "enduring rural fantasy" was present in the post-1900 urban reform movements in the major cities of Melbourne and Sydney, where:

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[23] e.g. Al 'Crow' Fletcher and Cheryl Jorgensen, *Brutal: Surviving Westbrook Boys Home* (Sydney: New Holland Publishers, 2010), 83.

[24] Daniel, '"Solving an Empire Problem"', 45.

[25] James C. Albisetti, 'Sending City Children to the Country: Vacations in "Nature" ca. 1870–1900', *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 1–2 (3 March 2020): 72, https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2019.1675729.

> To the minds of Australian urban improvers, the best environment for the creation of the ideal citizen was rural or semi-rural. Planning rhetoric stressed that the introduction of parks, gardens, and other "rural" elements and spaces was not just about beautifying the city but would ameliorate the negative effects of urban life on its citizens.[26]

Yet the relationship of rurality to *social* projects of nation-building cannot be easily separated from the *economic* value of hosting or institutionalising children in agricultural environments. For example, Birk argues that in the United States, from 1865-1920, there was a preference for institutionalised children to be sent out to work on farms. This was considered to have the potential for a very significant positive change for the future of the children.[27] Yet the value was not just moral. Just as children's homes depended on farms to take on children, farms depending on their labour. Birk describes the reciprocal relationship, noting that:

> Progressives worried that institutionalized children would grow up to be substandard workers, with nothing to offer themselves, their families, or their country. Even in children's institutions, the routine schedule, harsh punishments, and lack of individual expression stood to damage children beyond repair. By putting children who perpetuate a pattern of dependency with farmers, the process tried to 'Americanize' them by infusing American values where they were presumed absent. The children needed improved work ethics and more 'Americanness,' and if their work simultaneously benefitted farmers, all

[26] Kate Murphy, '"The Modern Idea Is to Bring the Country into the City": Australian Urban Reformers and the Ideal of Rurality, 1900–1918', *Rural History* 20, no. 01 (April 2009): 123, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956793308002616.

[27] Megan Birk, 'Supply and Demand: The Mutual Dependency of Children's Institutions and The American Farmer', *Agricultural History* 86, no. 1 (1 January 2012): 79, https://doi.org/10.3098/ah.2012.86.1.78.

> the better: farmers could be credited with doing another service for the American people.[28]

She states that the financial benefits of the arrangement overwhelmingly benefitted the farmers, who received cheap labour, but that "the children were supposed to receive something priceless: an American childhood complete with positive influences, religion, education, and work skills for the most American of occupations – farming."[29]

Farming was not merely the "most American" of occupations. It was also deeply embedded within the Australian psyche and played an important role in the development of youth justice practices for boys.[30] All of this created a context in which, in 1900, Westbrook, as a rural location with ample land and opportunities for boys to learn farm skills, was viewed as an ideal site for the reformatory. The use of a rural farm setting was by no means specific to the Queensland case. A similar trajectory, insofar as it relates to the increasing value of the rural in perceptions of reformation, is evident in a New South Wales institution that operated during a similar period to the Queensland reformatory.[31] In both cases, boys were brought to reformatory institutions situated in rural locations and engaged in farm work as part of the institutional process of rehabilitation and reformation.

The movement of these institutions, which held both convicted and neglected children, to rural locations was not an isolated action. It occurred alongside other efforts to encourage young people to enter, work in, and remain in, rural locations and agricultural

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[28] Ibid., 81–82.

[29] Ibid., 89–90.

[30] Clarissa Carden, 'From Reformatory to Farm Home: Developments in Twentieth-Century Juvenile Justice', *Cultural and Social History* 16, no. 3 (27 May 2019): 359–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2019.1594499.

[31] Ibid.

workplaces. The movement was situated in a set of twentieth-century economic realities whereby the need for a rural workforce sat uneasily alongside increasing migration to cities. In this context, rural reformatories and farm homes supplemented other means of encouraging young people to remain on the land, such as rural schools and agricultural colleges.[32] This suggests that conceptions of the moral and rehabilitative value of rurality interacted with government priorities and agricultural needs in a way that bolstered the perceived value of Westbrook as a carceral site. In Queensland, where the realities of the sub-tropical climate contributed to particular concerns about the extent to which white men would remain so, agricultural labour emerged as a key mechanism through which white British masculinity could be preserved, which in turn informed early youth justice practices.[33]

When the reformatory school first moved to Westbrook, it therefore both reflected local, racialised concerns and formed part of a broader movement that saw rurality as morally reformative and practically desirable. The Queensland reformatory held predominantly boys who had been sentenced in urban areas such as the capital city of Brisbane.[34] Their relocation to Westbrook, therefore, saw these young urban dwellers removed from cities to facilitate their moral development and reformation. The rural environment alone was not seen as sufficient to accomplish this. Farm work was also a key aspect of efforts at reformation. From 1900 to 1907, the reformatory operated in conjunction with the experimental farm, maintaining an uneasy relationship which was criticised by Queensland's Public Service Inspector in a 1906 report which stated that "[t]he Institution is run on peculiar lines. It is half

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[32] Tony James Brady, 'The Rural School Experiment: Creating a Queensland Yeoman' (Doctor of Philosophy, Brisbane, Queensland University of Technology, 2013); Carden, 'From Reformatory to Farm Home'.

[33] Carden, 'Reformatory Schools and Whiteness in Danger'.

[34] 'Queensland State Archives Item ID532416, Register - Admissions'.

a Reformatory and half a Farm" and recommended that the farm be subsumed into the reformatory.[35] From 1907, the reformatory and the farm were each allocated their own land, with the reformatory receiving 36 acres, an allotment that was increased to 112 acres in 1908.[36] During this period of adjustment, criticism directed towards the operation of the institution tended to focus on administrative difficulties and tensions between the two institutions. The core project of reforming boys who had either committed criminal offences or been found neglected through farm work was not questioned.

There was, however, a balance between the perceived moral benefits of the rural environment and its dangers. These did not and could not go unnoticed, even in the institution's early years. The shift to the rural institution demanded a change in the role of superintendent. Walter Richmond, the first superintendent at Westbrook, was a former teacher without agricultural experience. To maintain the institution at Westbrook, he needed to share authority with the warden-gardener, whose role was to oversee the growing of crops. He wrote repeatedly to the Home Secretary's Office to indicate that his authority was being usurped.[37] Other difficulties emerged during this period which exacerbated by Westbrook's

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[35] 'Report by the Public Service Inspector on the Westbrook Reformatory', 1 June 1906, Item ID 279902, Queensland State Archives.

[36] Walter Richmond, 'General Report on the Conditions and Progress of the Westbrook Reformatory for Boys', 16 September 1910, Item ID 279903, Queensland State Archives.

[37] Walter Richmond, 'Superintendent, Westbrook Reformatory for Boys to The Director, State Children Department, Brisbane', 13 November 1912, Item ID 279902, Queensland State Archives; Walter Richmond, 'Superintendent, Westbrook Reformatory for Boys to The Director, State Children Department, Brisbane', 4 June 1914, Item ID 279902, Queensland State Archives; Walter Richmond, 'Superintendent, Westbrook Reformatory for Boys to The Director, State Children Department, Brisbane', 20 February 1915, Item ID 279902, Queensland State Archives; Walter

physical distance from urban centres. This distance limited the type and regularity of external oversight that was possible. In its early iterations, on the hulk *Proserpine* and at Lytton, the institution had always been visible to outsiders.[38] This was no longer the case at Westbrook. A 1916 Home Secretary's visit leading to significant criticism of a failure to keep the boys clean and in tidy clothes.[39] This criticism had moral, as well as practical, significance. Training children to be clean and hygienic was a transnational project of great significance during this time. For example, in response to tuberculosis in early twentieth-century Montreal, Canada, children were invited to participate in a highly successful fly-swatting competition in 1912.[40]

The idea of "dirt" as dangerous and threatening to health was complicated in rural settings, where dirt is a necessary and inescapable reality. As Grosvenor and Myers identify, dirt was associated with delinquency in nineteenth-century urban Britain, while simultaneously holding a very different, rural, meaning.[41] At Westbrook, the "dirt" on the

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Richmond, 'Superintendent, Westbrook Reformatory for Boys to The Director, State Children Department, Brisbane', 19 March 1915, Item ID 279902, Queensland State Archives.

[38] Alan Savige, '"Naughty" Boys: The Education of Reformatory School Boys at Lytton 1881-1899', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 15, no. 1 (1993): 33–48.

[39] 'Westbrook Reformatory. Mr. Huxham's Visit. Radical Reforms to Be Instituted.', *Brisbane Courier*, 18 July 1916.

[40] Valerie Minnett and Mary-Anne Poutanen, 'Swatting Flies for Health: Children and Tuberculosis in Early Twentieth-Century Montreal', *Urban History Review* 36, no. 1 (September 2007): 32–44, https://doi.org/10.7202/1015818ar.

[41] Ian Grosvenor and Kevin Myers, '"Dirt and the Child": A Textual and Visual Exploration of Children's Physical Engagement with the Urban and the Natural World', *History of Education* 49, no. 4 (3 July 2020): 517–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2019.1701097.

bodies of the predominantly urban boys appears to have been seen as threatening to the success of intentions to engage in moral reformation, despite the distinct and very different associations between "dirt" and rural childhoods.

In media representations, the failure to maintain cleanliness was largely attributed to Richmond alone.[42] The location of the institution was not represented, by the Home Secretary or in media reports, as a contributing factor. The additional difficulties which must necessarily have been associated with managing an institution that was both farm and reformatory, and which was physically distant from suppliers, supports, and government observers, were not considered. Nor did the reality of rural life and agricultural practice play a role in reporting on the state of the children.

As soon as he reached retirement age, in 1916, Richmond retired (media reports suggested unwillingly) in favour of a new superintendent. [43] The choice of his replacement seemed calculated to solidify the centrality of rurality and agricultural labour to the institution's purpose. The new superintendent, Thomas Jones, was the former head of one of Queensland's state experimental farm and had no experience in education or child welfare.[44] Under Jones, the institution enjoyed significant positive media coverage for its successes in agricultural works.[45] In 1919, he was successful in calling for the reformatory to be renamed. No longer the Westbrook Reformatory for Boys, it became the Westbrook Farm Home for Boys: a name that centred the idea of rurality rather than reformation in and of itself.[46]

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[42] 'Turned Adrift. Superintendent of Westbrook Reformatory. Action by the Caucus Government', *Brisbane Courier*, 15 July 1916.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 6.

[45] Thomas Jones, 'Jones Family Cutting Book', 1947, Box 9381 O/S wrapped, John Oxley Library.

[46] Carden, 'From Reformatory to Farm Home'.

The concept of the "farm home" also spoke to ideas about the value of holding children in homes, rather than in impersonal institutions.[47] This, in turn, speaks to the extent to which the imagined moral value of the countryside for children is, in many instances, connected to ideas about freedom. The idea that children in rural contexts are free to wander as they see fit has been identified as unrealistic in relation to children growing up with their families.[48] This idea of freedom, troubled though it may be by the realities of family life, is impossible to sustain in the context of a site of incarceration. The institution had been renamed and existed under new management, but these factors did not alter its primary purpose. It remained, as it would throughout its existence, a site for the incarceration of children. The tensions between the imagined rural idyll, with its associations with freedom, and the reality of the containment and control which were part of the institution's function, would arise repeatedly throughout its existence.

Mid-twentieth-century transitions, crisis, and professionalisation

From 1919 through to 1966 the institution continued to officially operate as the "farm home."[49] This designation appears to suggest that the agricultural location and training programme of the institution remained core to its activities and intended public image. Yet the representation of an institution that was essentially homelike and reformative became increasingly out of line with more professionalised perceptions of youth deviance and the necessity of early intervention.

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Hugh Matthews et al., 'Growing-up in the Countryside: Children and the Rural Idyll', *Journal of Rural Studies* 16, no. 2 (April 2000): 147, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(99)00059-5.

[49] Lee Butterworth, 'Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook (1919-1966)', Document, 2014, https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/qld/QE00533.

The popularity of programmes intended to produce new agricultural workforces also declined during this period. As Esther Daniel explains, in Queensland, the British child migration programme centred on the Salvation Army farm at Riverview

> came to an end with the onset of the Depression and the outbreak of the Second World War. The farm became neglected and its physical condition deteriorated. While attempts were made to restore the farm and recommence the training programme during the 1950s, less than one hundred British lads were received at the farm and the programme was official[ly] abandoned in the early 1960s. This coincided with employment opportunities through increased mechanisation and the development of secondary industries which attracted people to urban centres.[50]

The farm would go on to become part of the broader child welfare system in Queensland. Yet the decreasing popularity of agricultural work was not the only factor at play in the slow reshaping of welfare and youth justice systems. As Katie Wright describes, the early to mid-twentieth century saw the emergence of new ways of measuring, understanding, and responding to delinquency as a diversion from "normality" in Australia as well as the broader world.[51] Wright notes that the emergence of ideas of "normal," children, "problem" children who were amenable to intervention, and "delinquents" created a situation whereby *early* intervention was essential because, "[f]or the confirmed delinquent, whose behaviour was described as entrenched and intractable, clinical intervention was soon dismissed as futile, for the potential of attaining the socially desired status of normalcy was considered remote unless problems were arrested at an early stage."[52]

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[50] Daniel, '"Solving an Empire Problem"', 46.

[51] Katie Wright, 'Inventing the "Normal" Child: Psychology, Delinquency, and the Promise of Early Intervention', *History of the Human Sciences* 30, no. 5 (December 2017): 46–67, https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695117737209.

[52] Ibid., 48.

Despite the more complicated reality, Westbrook was an institution that had been created to hold children who had been convicted of criminal offences. Its renaming, in 1966, to the Westbrook Training School for Boys represented a professionalisation that, to some extent, reflected expectations about the treatment of these children. It was also, however, indicative of a response to changed public perceptions of the institution which made former modes of talking and thinking about its rural reformatory processes untenable. From the late 1950s and 1960s, the harm which could be, to some extent, hidden by remoteness became evident. The 1999 Forde report into the abuse of children in Queensland institutions described the appointment of Roy Golledge, a former warder at the institution, as superintendent in 1952 as a key moment in Westbrook's history.[53] Golledge's mistreatment of the boys under his care has been well-documented in both government reports and the reflections of former inmates.[54] While the precise nature of this mistreatment was not openly or fully known during his tenure as superintendent, there was a level of public understanding about the problems with Westbrook such that the threat of transfer to Westbrook was a serious one employed to frighten boys in government care during this period.[55]

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[53] Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions' (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 31 May 1999), 125.

[54] Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions'; Fletcher and Jorgensen, *Brutal*; Schwarten, 'Report: Westbrook Farm Home for Boys Inquiry'; William Stokes, *Westbrook* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2010).

[55] Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions', 72.

The extent to which it is possible to know about historical child abuse has been questioned, including by Mark Smith, who critiques the focus of government inquiries on the testimony of former residents of institutional care at the expense of other potential sources of information.[56] For historians, efforts to understand the extent to which abuse occurred through archival sources are problematised, as Bingham et al identify, by the reality that "textual traces rarely reveal the experiences of the children and young people who suffered abuse."[57] While the precise extent and nature of the abuse which occurred at Westbrook during the 1950s and 1960s is unknowable, the fact that abuse did occur in this context is unusually well-established. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the emergence of government inquiries into the treatment of children in institutional care which, drawing in part on the testimony of former residents, identified Westbrook under superintendent Golledge as a site of severe, harsh, and abusive punishment and mistreatment.[58] This has been further reinforced by the narratives of former residents, including through memoirs.[59] These accounts provide valuable insight into the experiences and memories of former inmates, and the memoirs in particular highlight the significance of the rural environment in facilitating

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[56] Mark Smith, 'Victim Narratives of Historical Abuse in Residential Child Care: Do We Really Know What We Think We Know?', *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice* 9, no. 3 (September 2010): 303–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010367816.

[57] Adrian Bingham et al., 'Historical Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales: The Role of Historians', *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 420.

[58] Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions'; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 'Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or out-of-Home Care as Children' (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

[59] Fletcher and Jorgensen, *Brutal*; Stokes, *Westbrook*.

abusive treatment.[60] Alongside these accounts, however, contemporaneous sources demonstrate that unacceptable treatment of children – whether described as abuse or not – was a reality during this period.

This unacceptable treatment appears to have extended to the provision of inadequate formal education for the incarcerated boys. While the level and nature of the formal schooling provided is difficult to ascertain, it was only younger children who were required to participate in schoolwork. A former resident of Westbrook, Al Fletcher, who was incarcerated during Golledge's period of leadership, remembers that even those younger children often did not receive the education to which they were entitled. Remembering the case of a fellow resident, an Aboriginal boy who was sentenced to the institution at the age of nine for letting some horses free from the "pound," he noted:

> He was one of the schoolboys and he was supposed to received schoolin' in Westbrook, but he never learned to read or write. I often wonder about them other schoolboys, too, and what they learned in there.[61]

This appears to suggest that the education which occurred at Westbrook was less focused on formal schooling and more on practical agricultural skills and inappropriately harsh disciplinary practices. In earlier periods of the institution's history formal schooling had formed part of the mechanisms of moral reform which were enacted.[62] By Golledge's period of leadership, this aspect of the institution's purpose appears to have fallen by the wayside.

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[60] Carden, 'Grief and Youth Remembered'; Clarissa Carden, 'A Breakdown of Reformatory Education: Remembering Westbrook', *History of Education Review* 47, no. 1 (4 June 2018): 67–76, https://doi.org/10.1108/HER-12-2016-0037.

[61] Fletcher and Jorgensen, *Brutal*, 217.

[62] Carden, 'Managing Moral Reformation'.

The institution remained, during this time, closed and isolated. While it is only since the late 1990s that the full extent of the abuse which occurred at the Westbrook Farm Home for Boys has become public knowledge, the escape of 31 boys in 1961 provided important insight into the operation of the institution. Instances in which young people refuse to follow the rules of the institutions in which they are located can offer vital opportunities to open a window into the everyday practices of otherwise closed institutions. This was demonstrated powerfully in the case of the 1931 arson case at the Samarcand juvenile reformatory in North Carolina in 1931, whereby sixteen inmates were put on trial for arson with the possibility of execution. In defending their case, the inmates described the types of abusive corporal punishment which were common within the institution.[63]

Westbrook inmates did not have the same opportunity to make public the abuses they suffered in the aftermath of the 1961 escape. Immediately after the escape occurred, the government announced that no public inquiry would take place.[64] Instead, the government commissioned Stipendiary Magistrate A. E. Schwarten to undertake a closed inquiry into the institution. Inmates would have the opportunity to provide testimony but could not do so in a public forum. Despite this, the reality of the escape raised significant questions about the operation of the institution. The escape was front-page news in Queensland's most prominent newspaper, *The Courier-Mail.*[65]

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[63] Annette Louise Bickford, 'Imperial Modernity, National Identity and Capital Punishment in the Samarcand Arson Case, 1931', *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 3 (2007): 437–60, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2007.00296.x.

[64] '30 Break Out of Westbrook: 13 Are Free. Fire Helps Escape', *The Courier-Mail*, 15 May 1961, State Library of Queensland.

[65] Ibid., 1.

Publicly, the relevant government minister defended the institution, refuting claims that "floggings, sadism, and stand-over tactics" were in place.[66] However, the findings of Schwarten's inquiry revealed the significant failings of governance and particularly discipline which were occurring behind the closed doors of Westbrook. These findings, as significant as they were, would not become public knowledge for four decades and have still not been fully published. Schwarten's report was tabled in parliament and was thus officially a public document. However, it was not readily available to the public until 2011, when it was provided to the National Museum of Australia by a former inmate of Westbrook who had sought it out.[67] It has since also been made available by the Queensland Parliament. However, even though the public report can now be accessed, most of the material produced for the inquiry remains closed and inaccessible, as do some portions of the report, which were not tabled in parliament. The remaining material has been embargoed for 100 years and is therefore not due to become publicly available until 2061.

The portions of the report which have been published are damning. Schwarten demonstrated that the corporal punishment record was inaccurate and inadequately presented the extent of punishment that occurred in the Westbrook Farm Home.[68] The serious punishments he revealed were in direct contradiction to the public description offered by the relevant government minister, who stated that "the corporal punishment [at Westbrook] was meted out 'in full justice' and was no worse than existed in ordinary homes."[69]

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[66] 'Dr. Noble against Westbrook Public Quiz', *The Courier-Mail*, 15 May 1961, 6, State Library of Queensland.

[67] National Museum of Australia, 'Schwarten Inquiry into Westbrook', *Inside* (blog), 15 August 2011, https://insideblog.nma.gov.au/2011/08/15/schwarten-inquiry-into-westbook/.

[68] Schwarten, 'Report: Westbrook Farm Home for Boys Inquiry', 40.

[69] 'Dr. Noble against Westbrook Public Quiz', 6.

At this moment in the institution's history, the youth justice system in Queensland had undergone considerable changes, which had occurred alongside significant social shifts. By the time Golledge was superintendent of the institution, it predominantly held children convicted of criminal offences. In 1961 there was only one boy in the institution who had not been sentenced of an offence, having been transferred, as a State Ward, from another institution.[70] Its significance was changing in other ways, too. The government's focus on agricultural education had shifted, with rural schools declining from the 1940s.[71] In this context, the practical value of the institution as a site in which future agricultural workers could be trained was no longer self-evident.

Boys could still be sentenced to the institution until they reached the age of 18 or otherwise dealt with, an experience recounted powerfully by two former residents of Westbrook, who describe their sentences as uncertain and indeterminate.[72] The distance of the institution from urban centres continued to limit the extent to which oversight was possible. This was exacerbated by the significant level of control that the superintendent was able to exercise over aspects of institutional life such as visitation – a theme described at length by former resident Al Fletcher, whose parents were prevented from visiting him at Westbrook during periods when he was being disciplined.[73]

The distance of the institution from more populated areas like Brisbane likely contributed to the potential for harsh punishment and the lack of public knowledge about what occurred. However, rurality itself, as distinct from the associated reality of distance, contributed to the type and severity of punishment that occurred at Westbrook. These

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[70] Schwarten, 'Report: Westbrook Farm Home for Boys Inquiry', 17.

[71] Brady, 'The Rural School Experiment: Creating a Queensland Yeoman'.

[72] Fletcher and Jorgensen, *Brutal*; Stokes, *Westbrook*.

[73] Fletcher and Jorgensen, *Brutal*.

punishments, as much as the agricultural labour and training itself, formed part of the pedagogical practices of the institution.

Some of the punishments which occurred within the institution were very specific to the rural context. One notable example is The Path, which was described powerfully by former inmate Al Fletcher, who in his memoir of the institution wrote:

> It consisted of six parallel tracks, each twenty meters long and about two meters apart. There was a post at both ends of each track. You had to walk up and down between those posts all your spare time. You still had to do your day's work, but when the others knocked off, you went on the Path.
>
> You had to keep on walkin' quick. If you slowed down, they'd put a sergeant at each end to give you a smack in the head until you went quick enough for their likin'. If they went to the trouble of sendin' a couple of sergeants down, you got quite a few smacks, no matter how fast you went.[74]

This punishment was deeply entrenched in the rurality of the institution and the amount of physical space it had in which to operate. The connection between the punishment and the farm setting was further evidenced by the use of what one former inmate describes as "horse clippers" to remove the hair of boys subjected to this punishment.[75]

It was not just the punishments that were inextricably associated with the institution's rural setting. Acts of rebellion on the part of boys were also deeply placed. A former inmate describes other boys being punished for stealing food such as carrots from the institution's garden, a means of supplementing insufficient and unpalatable food.[76] The mass escape of 1961 itself, which was so pivotal in allowing for further insight into life inside the institution,

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[74] Ibid., 68.

[75] Ibid., 194.

[76] Ibid., 235.

began with a boy lighting a haystack on fire as a signal. Rurality was used by Westbrook's staff as a means of shaping and imparting training and as part of its punitive regime. It could also, however, be co-opted by the inmates.

Despite the significance of rurality in the operation of the institution and its punitive regime, Schwarten did not criticise its location. Rather, he suggested that Westbrook, being about "12 miles" from the nearest city, was less likely to encourage young people to abscond than a more urban institution.[77] The context of Schwarten's inquiry is key to his support of rurality. While his examination encompassed the operation of the Westbrook Farm Home broadly, he was asked to investigate the circumstances of a specific escape.

There is evidence, too, that the rural setting retained its moral associations even in a changed social context. In the immediate aftermath of the escape the state Health and Home Affairs Minister, who was responsible for the institution, made a public statement indicating that "less troublesome youths" would be transferred to other institutions. He also stated that additional reforms would take place to "give the farm a homelier atmosphere and to give boys more incentive to 'make good.'"[78] The connection between "the farm" and the idea that it could develop a "homely" atmosphere is significant. This connection was evident in the earlier renaming of the institution as a "farm home" rather than a reformatory.[79] Its reiteration during a period of disruption suggests that, even where the difficulties associated with rurality could not be ignored, the perceived moral benefits were nonetheless a relevant factor in decision-making about the institution's future.

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[77] Schwarten, 'Report: Westbrook Farm Home for Boys Inquiry', 79.

[78] 'It Follows Months of Controversy', *The Courier-Mail*, 15 May 1961, 1, State Library of Queensland.

[79] Carden, 'From Reformatory to Farm Home'.

In contrast to the depictions put forward by state government authorities, the mayor of Toowoomba, the regional city closest to Westbrook, suggested that the institution had outlived its usefulness. He told *The Courier-Mail* that the institution had been intended for non-criminal young people but that "today we find some of the very hardened criminals associating with boys, who are probably there for committing no offence at all, except that their parents won't look after them or that they have no parents," adding that the frequent escapes and car thefts by escaped inmates were harming the city of Toowoomba.[80] The concern about Toowoomba's reputation is understandable. However, Westbrook had never been intended for non-criminal children. As an early reformatory school, the institution had been designated to educate and reform children who had committed criminal offences. This misunderstanding on the part of Toowoomba's mayor is suggestive of a broader understanding of the "farm home" which obscured its inmate population and purpose.

In the aftermath of the Schwarten report, significant changes occurred at Westbrook. Perhaps the most significant change was the replacement of Golledge with a former prison warder, Kevin Sullivan. This change signalled a level of professionalisation whereby expertise from outside of the institution itself became essential for taking a leadership role. At the same time, it signalled the idea that the knowledge required for the management of Westbrook, an institution for young offenders, was comparable to the knowledge required for working within a broader, adult, carceral regime. The change in leadership was one of several transitions which signalled a movement away from the imagined reformative justice for which the institution had been built and towards a regime situated in more explicitly punitive models of imprisonment.

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[80] Staff reporter, 'Westbrook Outlived Its Usefulness, Says Mayor', *The Courier-Mail*, 30 May 1961, 7, State Library of Queensland.

Another, equally significant change, was the shift of the institution's name to the Westbrook Training Centre in 1966. This was associated not only with shifts in attitudes and practice but also with the need for the institution to distance itself from the scandals or escapes and from association with the negative legacy Golledge left behind.[81] Physical changes also occurred, including a rebuilding program that saw the institution change considerably, and the creation of a privilege system.[82] These changes, including the 1966 change of name, represented a modernisation of the institution. It, however, was a modernisation that allowed for rurality to retain a role in the work of educating and reforming boys, even if this role was an altered one.

The distant and inconvenient rural

From the 1960s there were considerable changes in the institution's role and significance. These included shifts in the demographics of inmates and in the institution's place in the broader justice landscape. One of the changes which most impacted the legitimacy of Westbrook's farm-based training and claims to enact a type of rural reformation was a reduction in sentence lengths and an increase in boys staying at Westbrook on remand. In its earliest years, the institution had held boys for between one and seven years. In the intermediate period, it had held boys until they reached the age of 18 or were "otherwise dealt with." Both of these forms of sentencing allowed for long pseudo-apprenticeships into agricultural labour.

By 1971, the proliferation of far shorter sentences had significantly changed the status and relevancy of farm work in youth justice practices. The report of an investigation into the

[81] Carden, 'A Breakdown of Reformatory Education'.

[82] Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions', 132.

institution noted that the "usual term of detention at Westbrook [was] about 4 months which would be exceeded only if the conduct of the inmate was such that his release could not be recommended or perhaps in the case of inmates who have served a number of previous terms at Westbrook."[83] The report further stated that, while boys took part in "the considerable amount of industry" on the farm, short sentences meant that "a training program to teach the inmates any particular skills is difficult to implement."[84] The rise in shorter stays coincided with a demographic change whereby increasing numbers of Indigenous inmates were sentenced to the institution. There were 13 Indigenous inmates in 1967 which jumped to 60 in 1971 and a projected 100 for 1972.[85]

Another shift had occurred by the 1970s. Westbrook was no longer the sole youth justice institution in Queensland. Rather, it was one institution within a broader youth justice system. It retained a unique and significant role within the broader system through developing a reputation as the institution to which the state's most serious young male offenders were sent.[86] While this role would continue into the 1980s, Westbrook increasingly came under criticism for its inefficiencies and the perceived ineffectiveness of its programmes.[87]

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[83] Queensland Department of Health, 'Westbrook Inquiry: [Report of an Investigation Carried out at Westbrook Training Centre]', 8.

[84] Ibid., 8–9.

[85] Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions', 56.

[86] Queensland Department of Health, 'Westbrook Inquiry: [Report of an Investigation Carried out at Westbrook Training Centre]', 19.

[87] Bernie Crawford, 'Report on Effectiveness and Efficiency of Youth Detention Centres' (Brisbane, Qld: Department of Family Services, 1989).

In 1989, an investigation into the effectiveness and efficiency of Queensland's youth detention centres criticised the rural work which was still occurring at Westbrook. Notably, it recommended that Westbrook's "farm work party" – the group of boys who were trained to undertake farm work – be discontinued, and farm work only be undertaken if there was insufficient other work to be done.[88] This reflected a change in perceptions of the utility of farm training programs. The report also recommended that "the Department of Family Services recognise that technical programs exist primarily for skills training purposes," highlighting the significant limitations with how the work programs at Westbrook were then carried out.[89]

The criticisms responded both to the limited ability of the institution to provide a comprehensive training program within the time allowed by a short sentence and to the reduced utility of agricultural training generally within a changing context. Agricultural labour had, by the 1990s, ceased to be a desirable career outcome for inmates. By the late 1990s, less than 5% of Australia's employed population worked in agriculture, with 4.4% in the industry in 1998.[90] In this environment, the need for an agricultural labour force could not form part of the rationale for maintaining the institution in a rural setting. The restorative and moral associations of the institution's setting, which had remained pertinent in the statements of state government officials during earlier periods of disruption, were also overshadowed by practical considerations.

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[88] Ibid., 4.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Feature Article - A Hundred Years of Agriculture (Feature Article)', 25 January 2000, https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/3852d05cd2263db5ca2569de0026c588!OpenDocument.

The changes in Westbrook's place within Queensland's institutional landscape, its inmate population, and the length of sentences, all contributed to the conditions under which its rural location could be understood as inconvenient, rather than as useful or morally reformative. The idea that rural locations are necessarily healthful and beneficial is troubled by the concept or discourse of rural deprivation, which holds that rural communities are economically and socially deprived compared to those in cities. This concept has been identified as having more traction in America than in Britain.[91] In the Australia of the 1980s and 1990s deprivation, in this case, exemplified not by structural poverty but by a lack of practical access to support services, was a key factor in decision-making about Westbrook's future.

In 1993, a report recommended the institution's eventual closure.[92] A 1994 report highlighted the problem of distance to cities as a key limitation of the location of Westbrook, one made particularly clear in 1994, during a major disturbance.[93] This disturbance highlighted the reality that Westbrook was particularly vulnerable in the face of events which rendered the involvement of emergency services essential.

As with the 1961 mass escape, it was the defiance of inmates that led to increased knowledge about the conditions within the institution. In March of 1994, a series of significant events took place. On March 18, nine boys absconded. On March 19-20 a series of

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[91] Mary Ann Powell, Nicola Taylor, and Anne B. Smith, 'Constructions of Rural Childhood: Challenging Dominant Perspectives', *Children's Geographies* 11, no. 1 (February 2013): 124, https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.743285.

[92] Anne Warner, 'Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Anne Warner, Minister for Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs' (Queensland Government, 12 April 1994).

[93] Smith and Majella, 'Investigation of the Circumstances Surrounding Incidents at Westbrook Youth Detention Centre Friday 18 March to Sunday 20 March and Friday 25 March 1994.'

incidents, including a "serious disturbance" described by the relevant government Minister as a "riot" occurred within the institution, followed on March 25 by the absconding of a boy from the Toowoomba Hospital.[94]

An investigation into these incidents highlighted the rurality of Westbrook as a key limitation. It noted that the March 19-20 "riot" was exacerbated as, despite staff calling specialist welfare and emergency services for support, "[t]he location of [Westbrook Youth Detention Centre] caused significant time delays in these specialist services arriving on site."[95] Presenting the report of the investigation to the Queensland Parliament, the Minister for Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander affairs stated that:

> It is clear from the report of the investigation that the location of Westbrook, some 14 kilometres outside Toowoomba, was a significant factor in the length of time in which the situation could be brought under control. Back-up personnel including skilled negotiators were some two hours time away from the Centre. Furthermore, the physical layout of the detention centre, including the proximity of adjacent sections, contributed to the escalation of the incidents from one unit to the other. The farm setting also contributed to the difficulty of maintaining adequate security around the centre during the incident.[96]

[94] Ibid., 4; Warner, 'Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Anne Warner, Minister for Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs'.

[95] Smith and Majella, 'Investigation of the Circumstances Surrounding Incidents at Westbrook Youth Detention Centre Friday 18 March to Sunday 20 March and Friday 25 March 1994.', 27.

[96] Warner, 'Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Anne Warner, Minister for Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs', 3.

Following the incident "[t]he extensive physical damage to Remand and Proserpine Sections meant that alternative safe and secure arrangements had to be made."[97] The limited availability of space meant that some young people were held in police facilities temporarily.

Just as rurality had been central to the selection of Westbrook as the site of the reformatory school in 1900, rurality was key to the decision to close the institution in 1994. The inconveniences involved in the operation of the institution and in its capacity to respond to major problems were present from its earliest days. On a purely practical level, the impact of physical distance was, to a large extent, reduced by the 1990s, when a journey from the capital city to the institution was no longer a difficult task, but instead demanded only two hours' drive. However, it was only in the context of significantly altered socio-economic circumstances and legal conditions that these inconveniences came to be a dominant motivation in government decision-making. The inconvenience of Westbrook's rural location had, by this time, became a more pertinent factor in government decision-making than the benefits, economic or moral, associated with remote or agricultural settings.

Conclusion

Youth justice institutions can adapt to shifts in policy and respond to changing inmate populations.[98] Westbrook's longevity speaks to its success in responding and adapting to broader changes in the youth justice and child welfare landscape pertinent to Queensland, Australia. It also, however, speaks to the enduring power of rurality as an ideal. While Westbrook is only one Australian institution, its experience speaks to the broader relationship

[97] Smith and Majella, 'Investigation of the Circumstances Surrounding Incidents at Westbrook Youth Detention Centre Friday 18 March to Sunday 20 March and Friday 25 March 1994.', 30.

[98] e.g. Prue Rains, 'Juvenile Justice and the Boys' Farm: Surviving a Court-Created Population Crisis, 1909-1948', *Social Problems* 31, no. 5 (1984): 500–513, https://doi.org/10.2307/800237.

between place and to the education and treatment of young people who are perceived as deviant or criminal.

This case reveals the extent to which economic imperatives, identified on a local or national level, can influence youth justice practices. In the context of a quickly urbanising early twentieth-century society, where there was a real economic need to encourage young people to remain on the land, farming labour could be understood as a social good and an inherently reformative practice. In the mid-twentieth century, Westbrook's distance from major cities was the most pertinent justification made for the institution's continued presence in place. However, the inconveniences associated with this distance – including a lack of potential oversight and the reality of the dangerous nature of farming work – were always present.

These risks and inconveniences eventually led to the closure of this institution. However, they have not been sufficient to permanently alter the perceived connection between rurality and the reformation of young people, particularly boys, in Queensland. Despite the shift in the way in which rural environments were used in the youth justice system, there remains an important association between the treatment of young people viewed as deviant and rural environments. In 2013, the conservative Liberal National Government in Queensland began a two-year trial of rural boot camps, which were part of a "get tough" approach to youth justice wherein boot camps became the only alternative to detention.[99] A 2015 evaluation of the program made several criticisms, including the criticism that the remote location of boot camps limited opportunities for family and

[99] Martin Mills and Barbara Pini, 'Punishing Kids: The Rise of the "Boot Camp"', *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 19, no. 3 (4 March 2015): 270–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.929748.

community involvement and reintegration for young people.[100] The program was not renewed by the subsequent Labor Party government. Other rurally-located programs have gained public interest such as the work of the Brahminy Group, which uses a rurally-located program to respond to "troubled" children, and which was the focus of a 2011 documentary series called *Outback Kid*s.[101] While this program has recently attracted significant criticism, including personal criticism directed towards the program's founder,[102] its existence in the twenty-first century highlights the ongoing symbolic power of the idea of the "rural," and in this case the Australian outback, in responding to children perceived to be poorly behaved or "at risk" of future criminality. None of the programs of the twentieth century has the aim of training children to serve as agricultural workers. Instead, they rely on the distance of rural settings from cities and on other forms of physical engagement with place which are oriented not towards practical employment outcomes but towards moral reformation alone.

As these examples demonstrate, the connection between rurality and the moral reformation of young people continued to exist long after Westbrook's closure. Westbrook's trajectory, at first glance, appears to suggest a simple trajectory whereby rurality, seen as reformative and desirable within the youth justice space at the beginning of the twentieth century was, by its end, viewed as inconvenient. Yet, as the ongoing existence of boot camps and other rurally-located efforts to respond to the needs of criminal or ill-disciplined children demonstrate, the shift in attitudes has not been complete or permanent. Nor has it been

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[100] KPMG, 'Final Report for the Evaluation of Queensland's Youth Boot Camps' (Brisbane: Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Queensland, July 2015), 9.

[101] Pini and Mills, 'Constructing the Rural in Education'.

[102] Anna Fromberg, 'Claims Man Running Program for Troubled Kids in Remote NT Fabricated Aboriginal Origin Story', 28 September 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-29/allegations-over-nt-program-troubled-youth-allan-brahminy/12646034.

entirely linear. Within this context, the history of the reformatory for boys at Westbrook demonstrates a more complicated trajectory. Rurality, it demonstrates, has long been perceived as having the potential to be both reformative and dangerous. Policies and practices which prioritise one aspect of this balance over another are based, not on the potency of ideas about rurality itself, but on far broader economic and social contexts.