

THE PAUPER HOSPITAL IN EARLY SINGAPORE (PART I) (1819—1829)

By Y. K. Lee

Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore, started its history as a Pauper Hospital. The foundation stone of the first Tan Tock Seng Hospital was laid on 25th July 1844. This hospital built at Pearl's Hill was not used until 1847. The hospital was for many years known as Tan Tock Sing's Hospital, named after its founder. It was the first hospital in Singapore to be built with non-Government funds. In the official records, the name "Tock Sing" was changed to "Tock Seng" in the 1850s.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital was however not the first Pauper Hospital in Singapore. It had a number of predecessors. It is the purpose of this article to record the development of Pauper Hospitals in the first ten years of modern Singapore's history. Later articles will trace and describe the events leading to the founding of Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and its vicissitudes during the first few decades of its history.

A general introduction to the study of the medical history of early Singapore has already been briefly outlined (Lee, 1973).

Very soon after the founding of Singapore on 6th February 1819, people from nearby countries flocked to Singapore to seek their fortunes. Some prospered, but not everyone was lucky enough to succeed in this pioneering outpost, where each man was for himself and the weak went to the wall. Those who fell ill or were injured were left to fend for themselves. These unfortunate people had no means of support, and before long the streets of Singapore were filled with sick and starving beggars and vagrants. They lived and died in the open as there was no where for them to go to for aid, financial or medical.

To alleviate this distressing situation, the Government erected a shed in the Cantonment as a Pauper Hospital, and Sub-assistant Surgeon Prendergast was put in charge. The money for running this hospital came from the Licence Fund, which was the revenue received from granting licences to sell opium and arrack, or for operating gambling dens (S.S.R., L. 7., 1822).

The cost of running the hospital for the three months from 1st November 1821 to 31st January 1822 was \$72.19, as follows:

Establishment of the Hospital (i.e. salaries) at \$16 per month	-	\$48.00
Diet money	- - - -	14.00
Articles furnished for use in the hospital	- - - -	10.19
		<hr/>
		\$72.19
		<hr/>

In the three months from 1st May 1822 to 31st July 1822, it was \$68.30 (S.S.R., L. 8., 1822). Mr. Prendergast was not paid any salary for this additional duty of looking after the paupers.

In June 1822, the buildings used as Hospitals in the Cantonment became a nuisance and were moved as a result of this Station Order by the Resident and Commandant, Colonel William Farquhar, issued on 2nd June, 1822 (S.S.R., L. 8., 1822):

"The site of the temporary buildings in use as Hospitals for the Europeans and Paupers, appearing to the Resident and Commandant to be objectionable in as far as these buildings encroach too much on the Parade Ground, and are also contiguous to the Line of Officers' Quarters, as to become a nuisance. A Committee of Survey of which Captain Murray is President, will assemble on Monday morning at six o'clock for the purpose of examining the site of the said buildings and out-houses, and reporting on the expediency of removing the same further back so as to form a line with the European Barracks and Sepoy Hospital.

Mr. Assistant Surgeon Montgomerie will be pleased to attend the Committee for the purpose of affording his professional opinion on such points as the Committee may require information."

In November, 1822, Sub-assistant Surgeon Prendergast wrote to the Resident for an allowance for looking after the Pauper Hospital: "... Aware as you must be, Sir, of the many and heavy expenses incidental to a person having a family to support, from the exorbitant rate of wages and high prices of the necessaries of life in this Settlement, I need not point out the obvious inadequacies of my present salary. . . ." He quoted as a prece-

dent, Sub-assistant Surgeon Palmer who received an allowance for looking after the Pauper Hospital in Penang (S.S.R., L. 9., 1822).

There is no record of Prendergast having received an allowance. He was in fact dismissed from the Singapore Medical Service on 20th January 1823 and returned to India. This came about partly as a result of shortage of staff in the General Hospital. An appeal had been made to Sir Stamford Raffles for funds to increase the establishment of the General Hospital (S.S.R., L. 6., 1822). This was sanctioned, but Raffles decided that in the interest of economy and to balance the budget, the Pauper Hospital should be discontinued and Prendergast dismissed (S.S.R., A. 31., 1823).

The local authorities in Singapore managed to convince Raffles that the Pauper Hospital should not be abolished, but could not prevail on him to retain Prendergast. In May 1823, it cost only \$20.30 to maintain the hospital (Establishment \$16 and Diet \$4.30) (S.S.R., L. 20., 1823).

The Pauper Hospital was moved again from its site in December 1825, "the ground being required to build a part of the new Sepoy Lines upon, owing to the late augmentation to the Troops serving at the Settlement, and without which this could not have been effected." This was the second Pauper Hospital, and the third one was partly built with materials salvaged from it. "The old building was in a state of considerable decay, and would shortly have required extensive repairs. The available materials have been however brought to account in the new building" (S.S.R., M. 12., 1826).

Since money matters seemed to be all-important to the Government authorities, a brief mention of the financial aspect of the hospital administration would not be out of place. The Surgeon in charge of the hospital was given a fixed allowance to employ subordinate non-medical staff for the hospital. In this instance, it was \$16 a month. The Surgeon also supplied the patients with food, clothing and medicines at a fixed rate, and submitted his bill to the Government at the end of each month. The rate was 20 cents per man per day in 1826 (S.S.R., A. 28., 1826).

In June 1827, the Medical authorities submitted through the Resident Councillor at Singapore to the Governor a proposal that more funds should be allotted to the Pauper Hospital as the admissions had increased.

The reply which is quoted below was by no means encouraging (S.S.R., V. 2., 1827). The Governor suggested that the Chinese should contribute towards supporting their poor, and that

there was a great risk of having to spend a lot of money on the sick and poor of the neighbouring countries who flocked to Singapore. He also ordered that in the interests of economy the system of dieting patients by the Surgeon should be abolished:

"... means must be devised to raise the expense by some assessment on the Chinese, on whose account, it (the Pauper Hospital) is principally incurred. The expediency of such an establishment may be doubted in a place like this, where there is no indigenous population. The effect must naturally be to bring upon us all the sick and invalids of the neighbouring islands. The patients are now fed at a fixed rate by the Medical Officer in charge, which as reported by the Senior Surgeon far exceeds the rates allowed on similar cases at Penang. A regular contract should be substituted on the lowest terms procurable."

The Authorities at Singapore tried to carry out the instructions but failed with regard to voluntary contributions by the Chinese community. On 24th August 1827, a very drastic step was taken by Mr. J. Prince, the Resident Councillor. He issued the following instructions to the Surgeon:

"I take this opportunity to acquaint you that it is my intention not to admit any more patients into the Pauper Hospital until the Chinese Community establish the means of covering its expense, and consequently that the present patients are to be discharged as early as possible consistent with humanity" (S.S.R., N. 2., 1827).

And in October 1827, he recommended to the Governor that reductions should be made in the establishment of the Pauper Hospital. The Governor however was of the opinion that the "Pauper Hospital should be struck off" (S.S.R., N. 3., 1827). This was also the view of the Senior Surgeon after a tour of inspection of the medical establishments at Singapore. This was his official report to the Governor (S.S.R., A. 51., 1828):

"Pauper and Chinese Hospital"

This is a large attap boarded shed close to the Singapore Infirmary. Supplied also with a few cots. They have discontinued to receive additional sick and four Chinese only now remain in that Institution.

Return of the Establishment Attached

J. Caswell	Assistant Surgeon.
J. Powell	Assistant Apothecary (employed, here occasionally).
Mittre	Dresser.

... observing that the numbers both in the Singapore Infirmity and in the Pauper Hospital are extremely limited, that the objects of both establishments are precisely the same, but that they are maintained at the expense of two houses and a double establishment of servants, I therefore beg leave to recommend to the favourable consideration of His Excellency the Honourable the Governor in Council that the Pauper Hospital should be forthwith abolished, the building placed at the public disposal and the establishment of servants discharged."

The Governor and Council decided to postpone decision and ordered "that the subject do lie over for consideration", for Mr. K. Murchison who succeeded Mr. Prince as Resident Councillor at Singapore, had other views. He was of the opinion that something had to be done for the diseased and decrepit beggars who were once again filling the streets of Singapore. He proposed that a tax should be levied for the maintenance of the Pauper Hospital.

The imposition of a new tax was not within the authority of the Governor, and he wrote to the Court of Directors of the East India Company in London in May 1828, setting forth the case (S.S.R., A. 53 and B. 9., 1828):

"... relative to the proposed establishment of an infirmity at this Settlement, the arrangements connected with which, particularly in respect to inviting contributions, were entrusted to the Resident Councillor, but we regret to state that there appears to be much reluctance to comply with the suggestion for voluntary subscriptions, and that attempts to induce voluntary subscriptions either on the part of the Europeans or Chinese, have been entirely unsuccessful, and we apprehend the burden of expense must principally fall on the Government, unless indeed it may be considered expedient to impose a tax upon the retail of pork in the same manner as at Penang, the receipts from which at that settlement afford an ample fund for the support of a Poor House, which has for a series of years afforded an asylum to a vast number of distressed and diseased objects, principally Chinese."

In Penang at that time, the monopoly of killing pigs and selling pork was awarded by auction, and was known as the Pork Farm. The Renter or Farmer had authority to demand one dollar from anyone else (except European butchers) for every pig killed. The revenue from the auction of the Pork Farm was used to support a Poor House and Infirmity. "The Farm in question was originally initiated at the desire of the Chinese themselves for

the purpose of providing funds for the support of their old and infirm, and it continued for a long period under the direction of the principal persons of that nation, but in consequence of neglect and mismanagement, Government was obliged in the year 1803 to assume the collective management of the tax as well as the charge of the Asylum for the poor, and the farm has ever since composed a part of the public revenue" (S.S.R., B. 7., 1824). The Pork Farm was also to play an important part in the history of the Pauper Hospital in Singapore.

In the meantime, medical servants were discharged from the Pauper Hospital (S.S.R., A. 54., 1828), and the remaining staff had to look after both the General Hospital and the Pauper Hospital (S.S.R., A. 53., 1828). There were only three patients with ulcers ("ulcus") in the Pauper Hospital in July 1828 (S.S.R., A. 56., 1828).

The Government, reluctant to re-impose a tax which would affect the poorer class of Chinese oppressively, asked the Resident Councillor, Mr. Murchison, for other concrete proposals. (The Pork Farm had been introduced into Singapore in 1823, and the income derived was paid into the general revenue of the Settlement, and was not ear-marked for the Pauper Hospital. It was only in force for that one year, as the then Resident Councillor, Mr. Crawford was not in favour of this "extremely injudicious tax, affecting one of the principal necessities of life of the most numerous and industrious class of our population").

Mr. Murchison replied on the 15th January, 1829 (S.S.R., AA. 1., 1829):

"... I fear that I cannot suggest any efficient remedy for the great and increasing evil of mendicity. In such a place as Singapore, it is hardly possible to check the influx of paupers and diseased persons from China, Rhio, etc. and when once here, there is no apparent remedy but the establishment of a hospital and poor house, which would entail a very considerable expense on the East India Company, for generally speaking, the miserable objects who now infest the streets are beyond cure and would have to be maintained as long as they lived. On a former occasion, the Honourable the Governor in Council was pleased to take this subject into consideration but the measure then contemplated entirely failed in consequence of the Chinese inhabitants refusing to make any contributions towards the expense of a Poor House."

At about the same time, at the Criminal Sessions of the Court in Singapore on 18th February 1829, the Grand Jury made a Presentment which, among other things, called for action to deal with

the increasing problem of the pauper sick, and suggested that funds be obtained by assessment on properties in the Town (CHR. 1829).

A minor digression is necessary here to explain the function of the Grand Jury at Singapore in the early years of the 19th century. This function was not similar to that of Grand Juries in England during this period. In England, the function was strictly legal and consisted in presenting criminal cases to the Court for trial. The Singapore Grand Jury, however, in addition to its legal duty, felt free to criticise the Government and made recommendations for the better administration of the Town.

The Grand Jury in February 1829 presented (CHR. 1829):

“... Fifthly, the Grand Jury beg further to present to your Lordships as a great public nuisance, the great increased and daily increasing number of public beggars, particularly Chinese. The most shocking and loathsome objects are daily exhibited in all parts of the Town and roads of Singapore of Chinese paupers who since their emigration to the Settlement have fallen victims to sickness and disease so as entirely to incapacitate them from earning an honest livelihood. The Grand Jury therefore beg to be permitted to recommend and suggest to your Lordships, the great benefit which they conceive would arise from the construction of a General Pauper Hospital for the reception of these miserable and disgusting objects. By this means the Town will be freed from the present nuisance and the ends of public charity at the same time effectually answered. Such a hospital should also be provided with a ward for the admission of sick Europeans who are sometimes unavoidably thrown upon the public. The maintenance of this hospital would be provided for from the funds of the Assessors, and after its establishment, they recommend that all public beggars from the Settlement be taken into custody of the Police, and if proper objects, sent to the hospital or otherwise treated as idle persons and vagrants. . . .”

The merchants and property owners however were not in favour of this proposal.

The Court of Directors of the East India Company did not authorise the building and maintenance of the Pauper Hospital from the tax on pork until September 1829. In the days of the sailing ships it took a few months before the authorities in the Straits knew of this decision. The Pork Farm Regulations of Penang were accordingly amended and extended to Singapore in 1830 (see Appendix A).

On 15th April 1830, the Farm was put up for auction and sold (CHR. 1830). The Resident Councillor forthwith wrote to the Governor for sanction to build a Pauper Hospital and its maintenance from the funds obtained from the Pork Farm. The Governor and Council approved the proposal but advised caution in its implementation:

“The Board approves of the Resident Councillor’s suggestion to build a Hospital and Poor House, and desires he will forward Plans and Estimates of the same without delay. As the ground alluded to in his letter as the site for these Buildings is understood never to have been occupied or enclosed in the Botanical Gardens, and is on the opposite side of the Stream, there seems no occasion to reserve it for Botanical purposes. (The ‘Stream’ referred to is the present-day Stamford Canal. It used to be a fresh water stream).

The Board directs that the Resident Councillor be reminded of the danger of such institutions, as those now to be established from the proceeds of the Pork Farm, increasing beyond the means of support, and especially in a place situated like Singapore, and that great care must therefore be taken that not more than two-thirds of the monthly accruing income be expended, and every means taken to confine the benefits of the institution within the circle of our own Population” (S.S.R., A. 70., 1830).

Further developments will be recorded in the next article of this series.

APPENDIX A

A.D. 1830. REGULATION VI. PORK FARM.

Designation

Regulation for rescinding Regulation IX of 1825 of the Code of Prince of Wales Island and for vesting in one person the exclusive privilege of killing hogs in the Settlement of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca.

Section I—Preamble

Whereas it has been found expedient to rescind Regulation IX of 1825 of the Code of Prince of Wales Island entitled “A Regulation for vesting in one person the exclusive privilege of killing Hogs and selling pork”; to make certain alterations in the rules hitherto in force for that purpose and to extend their operation to the Settlements of Singapore and Malacca. Wherefore the Honourable the Governor in Council of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca has passed this regulation sanctioned by the Honourable Court of Directors

and approved by the Board of Commissioners for India Affairs to take effect from the date of its promulgation.

Section II—Regulation IX of 1825 rescinded

Regulation IX of 1825 of the Code of Prince of Wales Island is hereby rescinded.

Section III—The privilege of killing hogs and selling pork vested in such persons as the Governor in Council may license for that purpose

The exclusive privilege of killing hogs and selling pork within the limits of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca and its dependencies shall be vested in such person or persons as the Honourable the Governor in Council may license for that purpose, whether renters for a certain period on terms and conditions to be determined by Government or committing it to public officers as agents acting under the direct orders of Government, due notice being given at the commencement of each financial year.

Section IV—Person not allowed to kill hogs without permission from the renter or person or persons licensed by the Government. Persons neglecting to obtain permission shall forfeit Sicca Rupees 50

No persons, inhabitants or residents of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca or of the territories or places subordinate or annexed thereto, shall be permitted for the purpose of an entertainment or for the use of their own families, to kill a hog without permission be first had and obtained from the renter or person or persons duly licensed by Government and persons so licensed by Government shall have authority to demand and take one Spanish dollar for every hog killed for either of the purposes in this section contained. If any person or persons neglect to obtain such permission, he or they shall on conviction before a Magistrate forfeit and pay Sicca Rupees 50.

Section V—Persons duly licensed not to demand a greater price than 22 pice a catty. For breach of this rule to forfeit Sicca Rupees 50

The renter or person or persons duly licensed by Government shall not demand a greater price for fresh pork sold than 22 pice a catty. For every breach of this rule, he or they shall on conviction before a Magistrate forfeit and pay Sicca Rupees 50.

Section VI—Persons desirous of killing hogs and to retail are at liberty to do so on paying to the renter three pice for every catty so retailed. Persons breaking or violating these conditions to forfeit Sicca Rupees 50

Persons desirous of killing hogs for the purpose of retailing the flesh shall be at liberty to do so on agreeing to pay the renter or person or persons

duly licensed by Government for every catty so retailed three pice, giving notice of the place and time where the hogs are to be killed and the flesh exposed. Any person or persons breaking or violating these conditions shall on conviction before a Magistrate forfeit and pay for each and every offence Sicca Rupees 50.

Section VII—Persons duly licensed not to kill hogs that are unhealthy or of less weight than 60 catties. Breach of this rule to forfeit Sicca Rupees 50

The renter or person or persons duly licensed by Government and retailers of fresh pork as specified in the preceding section shall not kill for sale hogs that are unhealthy or that weigh less than 60 catties or blow water into the meat for the purpose of increasing its weight. For every breach of this rule the offender or offenders shall on conviction before a Magistrate forfeit and pay Sicca Rupees 50.

Section VIII—To declare when wild hogs are exposed for sale. For neglecting to do so to forfeit Sicca Rupees 50

The Renter or person or persons duly licensed by Government shall particularly declare when wild hogs are exposed for sale to be such. If he or they neglect to do so and if the same shall be sold as home-fed pork, he or they shall on conviction before a Magistrate forfeit and pay Sicca Rupees 50.

Section IX—Persons duly licensed have authority to take an account of all hogs within the limits of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca. Proprietors of hogs to permit their hog styes to be examined

The Renter or person or persons duly licensed by Government shall have authority to take from the first day of May an account of all hogs within the limits of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca and their dependencies, and all proprietors of hogs shall permit him or them to examine their hog styes at any time in the daytime during the said term as they may think proper to ascertain that the number of hogs from time to time correspond with the account kept by the renter or person or persons duly licensed by Government.

Section X—Account to be furnished by importers of salt pork to the person duly licensed by Government. For a breach of this rule, importers to forfeit Sicca Rupees 50

The importers of salt pork from any of the adjacent states shall furnish the renter or person or persons duly licensed with an account of the whole or any part thereof previous to landing the same. For the breach of this rule the owners of such imported salt pork shall on conviction before a Magistrate forfeit and pay Sicca Rupees 50.

Section XI—Not to exercise any control or interference with hogs killed by European butchers or killed by Europeans for their immediate use

The renter or person or persons duly licensed by Government shall not exercise any control or interfere with hogs killed by European butchers for sale to Europeans or the supply of the Army or Navy of His Majesty or the Honourable Company or killed by Europeans themselves for their immediate use, which are hereby declared to be free and exempt from the operation of this Regulation.

Section XII—Nett revenue derivable from this source appropriated to charitable purposes

All the revenue that may result from the renting of the exclusive privilege above provided for shall be appropriated to the purposes of supporting a Native Poor House and Infirmary for the benefit of such fixed residents of these Settlements as may from time to time require such assistance.

REFERENCES

- S. S. R. = Straits Settlements Records (1800-1872). Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.
- CHR. = Singapore Chronicle (1827-1837). Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.
- CHR. 26.2.1829.
- CHR. 22.4.1830.
- Lee, Y. K.: "The General Hospital in early Singapore (Part I) (1819-1829)." *Sing. Med. J.*, 14, 37-41, 1973.
- S. S. R., A. 28., 1826.
- S. S. R., A. 31., 1823.
- S. S. R., A. 51., 1828.
- S. S. R., A. 53., 1828.
- S. S. R., A. 54., 1828.
- S. S. R., A. 56., 1828.
- S. S. R., A. 70., 1830.
- S. S. R., AA. 1., 1829.
- S. S. R., B. 7., 1824.
- S. S. R., B. 9., 1828.
- S. S. R., L. 6., 1822.
- S. S. R., L. 7., 1822.
- S. S. R., L. 8., 1822.
- S. S. R., L. 9., 1822.
- S. S. R., L. 20., 1823.
- S. S. R., M. 12., 1826.
- S. S. R., N. 2., 1827.
- S. S. R., N. 3., 1827.
- S. S. R., V. 2., 1827.