

trader a hearty bonus

Murray saves Bendigo

And in any case, health officials' minds were elsewhere.

A deadly smallpox outbreak had erupted in Bendigo in the winter of 1872. Authorities rushed to find a new doctor willing to personally treat people for one of the most feared illnesses of the 19th century.

The industrious Murray was available and happy to help.

"Dr Murray will have unlimited power to order every requisite and to carry out every improvement which he may conceive to be necessary. No half measures must be tolerated in a case of this kind," the *Advertiser* reported.

Just as Bendigo's saviour appeared, news arrived that Murray would be needed in Sydney for the trial.

"There is a very general alarm throughout the district, and the report that other cases of smallpox had occurred caused a very painful feeling throughout the city yesterday."

The council urgently telegraphed contacts begging to keep Murray from Sydney courtrooms until the crisis ended.

And as the weather warmed, 150 years ago this month, Murray contained the outbreak and was preparing to nip off to Sydney for two or three weeks. It was an incredible achievement. Bendigo would gratefully remember Murray - "indeed the colony will ... for many a long day in connection with this outbreak" - the *Advertiser* trilled.

Then all hell broke loose.

City forsakes doctor

Enslaving South Sea islanders was a tricky business.

You could try imperson-



HUMAN TRAFFICKING: An image from 1873 depicting the seizure of slaving ship the *Daphne*, by HMS *Rosario*. The capture was a key event drawing public attention to the slave trade. Images: Courtesy of TROVE, LIBRARIES AUSTRALIA

ating a missionary, though islanders did not seem to fall for it by the 1870s. You could go on shore with a gun, though that had its own challenges if prisoners started getting ideas. Or you could trick them into coming on shore to trade, Murray told a Sydney courtroom in August 1872.

"A signal being given, a simultaneous rush was made by the crew upon the natives ... [they] were seized hold of and bundled down the hold in any way as quickly as possible," he is quoted telling the court in an account published in multiple newspapers, including the *Advertiser*.

The prosecution's most important witness appears to have been the person who worked out one way of capturing slaves. The crew would wait until islanders in canoes came alongside the *Carl* to trade goods and drop heavy pig iron chains. The canoes would sink and

islanders could choose to climb on board or drown.

Public opinion was not kind. Appalled Victorians asked how a ship purchased and registered in their colony had been caught up in slave trading, and why the doctor was not being booted from the medical profession. Multiple Victorians found themselves implicated in the scheme and insisting that they had helped finance the Fiji trip without knowing it was a slave voyage.

The colony's leader, James Francis, demanded to know how Murray had landed a job in Bendigo when he was "totally unfit to have control over any such institution", *The Age* reported in late August. Skittish health officials insisted they had had no idea the doctor was at all connected with the *Carl*.

As the backlash intensified, Murray telegraphed back to Bendigo saying he was preparing to return and once again be the district's

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So ends the colonial history of a man whose name will go down to posterity as one of the most vile offenders that ever disgraced the annals of this country.

Newspaper the *Sydney Empire* after Murray disappeared

health officer. "It would be impossible to say what kind of reception he ought to get from the citizens of Sandhurst, whose health he is to have the superintendence of," a perplexed *Advertiser* observed.

Murray never did return to Bendigo but he did take the time to thank the council for giving him bonuses and glowing testimonials.

"It is true that I was one of the humble instruments employed by God in stamping out the smallpox in your city and sundries," he said piously. "But in the

face of the dreadful opprobrium heaped upon me by the Victorian press I scarcely dared to hope that any public body could be found willing to deal out to such an one as me a full measure of reward and honour."

The council's "bold and honest" actions came at the dawn of a happier epoch of his life, the doctor gushed. He had rediscovered salvation in Christ and had dedicated himself to anti-slave activities.

No-one was buying it. "A more sickening and disgusting tirade of hypoc-

risy and cant has seldom, if ever, found its way into print," the *Advertiser* remarked. That said, its editor sympathised with a deeply embarrassed council, saying it had learned the worst of Murray's atrocities only when they had been aired in court at Sydney.

"They had previously determined on giving the man a reward for his services to them, which had unquestionably been of great public importance, and on no account that can we conceive of could they decide to withhold him from it," he said.

It would have been dishonourable not to pay the bonus, the editor argued.

In the months that followed, Fiji authorities officially seized Murray's boat as authorities bickered over who should take the islanders back to their homes. The *Carl*'s captain and first mate were sentenced to death, other crew members were convicted of assault and two passengers jailed for manslaughter. Two had their sentences lessened. Another two walked free on appeal.

Murray hung around Sydney for a couple of months after the first round of court cases ended, regularly attending church.

Then he vanished, leaving his wife and two children in Victoria.

"It is generally believed that he has gone to England," newspaper the *Sydney Empire* reported. "So ends the colonial history of a man whose name will go down to posterity as one of the most vile offenders that ever disgraced the annals of this country."

This is the latest story in the Bendigo Advertiser's history series entitled "WHAT HAPPENED?"