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Islands of Segregation, c. 1870-1907. A comparative socio political study of Queensland and British Columbia (Canada)

From about 1870 a small number of cases of leprosy were diagnosed in Queensland and BC. Twenty years later the governments of both states responded to the perceived threat by isolating their patients on small islands: initially Dayman, then from 1891 Friday Island, both in the Torres Strait; and in BC on D'Arcy Island in the Haro Strait between Vancouver Island and mainland BC. In this paper we examine the social and political reasons behind the establishment of the lazarets and compare some of the features of the two establishments. Medical opinion at the time was uncertain about how the disease was transmitted, making it easier for politicians in both territories to justify their programs of isolation.