

COLONY FOR EPILEPTICS.

SONYEA, N. Y.

From the inception of public care of the insane in New York State epileptics were undoubtedly provided for from time to time, but no special provision was existent beyond a separate ward in the various hospitals. In 1873 Dr. Ordronaux mentioned special provision for the epileptic on Blackwell's Island. In its twelfth annual report in 1879 the State Board of Charities referred to the epileptics as follows:

“The subject of providing for the care and treatment of epileptics has long attracted wide attention, but thus far little has been accomplished regarding the matter, either in this or other countries. That epileptics need intelligent oversight and care equally with the insane, both on account of their helplessness and dangerous tendencies, is fully and very generally recognized. The great importance of the subject certainly commends it to the thoughtful and earnest consideration of the Legislature.”

During the later 80's certain persons, chief among whom was Dr. Frederick Peterson, of New York City, agitated, by means of addresses and published papers, the need of providing in New York State a separate institution for epileptics, preferably a colony. Finally, Dr. Frederick Peterson and Dr. George W. Jacoby, as members of the State Charities Aid Association, were appointed a committee to report to the association on state provision for epileptics, and on the strength of this report the association drew up and introduced into the Legislature of 1890 a bill for the selection of a site for such a colony. Failing to pass, it was reintroduced in 1892, when it passed, and became a law on May 12 of that year.

To meet its requirements a committee of three commissioners of the State Board of Charities, consisting of Oscar Craig, president; Wm. P. Letchworth, LL. D., and Peter Walrath, was named to select a suitable site and formulate plans pertaining to the establishment of a colony.

After inspecting several sites, the committee made a report recommending the purchase of the Shaker estate of 1895 acres at Sonyea. The report was approved and a bill was introduced into the Legislature in 1893 for the purchase of this property and the establishment thereon of a colony for epileptics.

“By the terms of the statute the colony idea was essential. The colony design includes not only the separation of the patients in detached buildings, but the arrangement of the cottages upon irregular lines and at different distances, in accordance with the situation of the various building sites, adapted to the self-support of the inmates through natural advantages for economy of administration, and for the successful prosecution of trades, industries and agricultural labors.”

By Chapter 363, Laws of 1894, the Legislature authorized the purchase of the Sonyea property for \$115,000 and the establishing thereon of a colony for epileptics under the title of Craig Colony, so named in honor of the late Oscar Craig, president of the State Board of Charities.

The first Board of Managers consisted of Dr. Frederick Peterson, president; Mrs. C. F. Wadsworth, Dr. Charles E. Jones, W. H. Cuddeback and George M. Shull, secretary.

The managers assumed office April 25, 1894, and directly thereafter reported “that the Shakers had upon the property two settlements, each capable of accommodating 100 or more people.” These two settlements were to a certain extent distinct and occupied separate groups of buildings, one known as the “West House” and the other as the “East House.” Besides the buildings in the two groups, there were upon the premises dwellings, some of which were used by people in the employ of the Shakers, a saw mill and other structures. It was the opinion of the State Board of Charities, which was concurred in by the managers, that almost all the buildings could be made available for the purposes of the colony.

The property was surveyed and plans outlining the location of buildings, landscape embellishments, etc., were made by Olmstead Bros., of Brookline, Mass., architects, who mentioned that: “Although of harmonious design, each respective building was to vary from the other in detail and outline, so that its relation to them was to be of a purely domestic nature, each appearing to represent a private residence in architectural character and proportion, and corridor and other structural connection avoided in order to fully dissipate institutional effects.” The architects also stated that: “By the adoption of a dining room in each respective building the home life is maintained, and patients from several buildings are never massed together and embarrassed with the idea that they are a common lot, and furthermore a patient is thus not exposed to inclement weather in going through the open air to his meals.”

Dr. William P. Spratling was appointed medical superintendent on November 17, 1894. He had previously been first assistant physician at the New Jersey State Hospital, Morris Plains, N. J.

The first patient was admitted January 27, 1896. On May 1, 1914, there were resident at the colony 768 males, 665 females; 1433 in all.

The number of buildings at the colony is over 100, nearly 40 of which are occupied by colonists, the remainder being officers' and employees' cottages, barns, store rooms, shops, railroad station, etc. Male patients are largely employed on the farm, in the garden and brickyard and in the dairy, work shops, households and with the various mechanics. The female patients work in the various households occupied by their sex, in the sewing room and in the garden.

There is a special building where over 150 of the younger colonists of both sexes attend school regularly during eleven months of each year. This work is presided over by five teachers. A resident Catholic chaplain, a Protestant chaplain and a visiting Jewish rabbi are attached to the colony.

The funds for the Catholic chapel and rectory were donated by the Bishop of Rochester in 1901. The chapel was dedicated in April, 1902.

The Protestant and Jewish services are held in the House of the Elders, formerly used by the Shaker colony as a house of worship.

The means of recreation include baseball, basketball, croquet, band concerts, moving pictures, theatricals, an annual field day, a club house for male colonists, winter dances for female colonists, excursions to the neighboring village, etc.

The situation is admirably adapted by nature for the purpose to which it is devoted. Through the center of the tract, dividing it into two about equal portions, flows the Kishaqua Creek, which serves as a natural barrier for the separation of the two sexes. The soil is diversified, including a rich, sandy loam, clay and a rich alluvial deposit on the valley lands. There is a forest of nearly 1000 acres that is being gradually freed from useless trees, and where planting of pine and spruce is being carried on.

The patients' cottages vary in size, accommodating from 15 to 75 patients. The majority have a capacity not exceeding 50 patients.

On August 1, 1911, the buildings for patients consisted of the following: Peterson Hospital for both sexes, capacity 50; Schuyler Infirmary for females, capacity 162; Sage Pavilion for 30 tubercular female patients, 11 dormitory cottages for 17-60 females, Loomis Infirmary for 162 males, Proyor Pavilion for 30 tubercular male patients, 16 dormitory cottages for 15-36 males; two isolation cottages for contagious diseases, one for each sex. Some 20 cottages have been built for married employees.

In the haste to provide ordinary dormitories many of the essentials, such as central power and heating plant, amusement hall, observation cottages, nurses' home, etc., have not been provided.

In the early days of the colony the mistake was made of using exceedingly cheap construction for many dormitories. In consequence the cost of up-keep is rather large.

The fire equipment consists of large hand chemical apparatus, hook and ladder truck, six hose carts, automatic whistle blower, etc.

In 1912 the Letchworth Village, a new institution for feeble-minded and epileptic, was established at Thiells, Rockland County, for the purpose of receiving certain low-grade patients at that time in the other state institutions for feeble-minded and epileptic and also to relieve somewhat the number on the waiting list from the southeastern part of the state. As a consequence of the establishment of this new institution, the development of Craig Colony has been checked, all efforts being exerted by those in authority to push the erection of buildings at the new institution rather than add to the number now at the colony.

There is a laboratory at the colony, with a resident pathologist. This building is to be enlarged as soon as additional funds are received, so that it will be possible to carry on a great deal more work than can be done with present facilities.

An employees' and also a patients' band and patients' orchestra play at regular intervals during the winter for patients and in band concerts during the summer months.

There are several school teachers employed, so that instruction in the ordinary branches and also in sloyd work is given to both boys and girls whose mental condition permits their taking advantage of same.

A considerable number of industries are carried on at the colony: farming, gardening, mattress making, shoe repairing, painting, making of clothing, etc. One industry which gives employment to some 25 male patients is that of brickmaking, the present plant having a capacity of 1,000,000 bricks a year.

In 1905 a special act was passed permitting the colony to perform autopsies, to be confined to the brains of indigent patients dying at the colony, providing such autopsy is performed within 12 hours after the time of death. Under an amendment passed in March, 1914, this act was changed to permit a general autopsy on such patients.

A custodial law was enacted in 1911, but later declared inoperative, as it did not provide for judicial commitment. A new law was enacted in March, 1914, providing for the judicial commitment of all applicants who were mentally incompetent and for the voluntary admission of all applicants who were of normal mentality.

The supplies are purchased by the colony steward after estimates have been duly approved by the fiscal supervisor of state charities, these estimates being revised in detail and often without proper consideration of the colony from a medical standpoint. A considerable number of articles are purchased under contract awarded a central purchasing committee for the state charitable institutions. The total cost of maintenance for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1913, was \$274,492.71, the per capita cost being \$191.37.

No special reception building has ever been provided at the colony, but so far as possible all patients are isolated for a week following admission, after which they are given a detailed physical examination by a member of the resident staff and later presented at the staff meeting.

Typewritten histories are kept in a vertical filing system, these histories being as complete as facilities will permit of.

The acutely ill, so far as the bed capacity permit, are cared for in the Peterson Hospital, a 50 bed hospital, planned to accommodate 100 ultimately.

The training school for nurses is registered with the State Education Department, its graduates being eligible for the degree of registered nurse.

In the early days of the colony there was a gradual increase in the number of strong rooms until some 40 were in use. About 1910 these rooms were done away with, so that at the present time patients are not cared for in this manner. Two buildings at the colony, the infirmary for males and the infirmary for females, are the only ones with locked doors and bars on the windows. During the year 1913 practically all of the guards were removed from the infirmary for males.

Since the opening of the colony, January 20, 1896, there have been admitted 1937 males, 1371 females; total, 3347.

The present valuation of the property is \$1,103,692.36.

The medical library of nearly 3000 volumes has been secured since the colony was started and so far as funds permit is being kept up to date.

The number of employees at the present time (1914) is 220. The ratio of those in direct charge of patients is 1 to 11.

The staff consists of the superintendent, resident pathologist and eight assistant physicians. The position of resident dentist has been created and one is to be employed.

To be admitted to the Craig Colony for Epileptics the patient must be a citizen of New York State. All patients are admitted as indigents. Their financial standing is then inquired into by the colony's agent and if it is found that the patient can reimburse the state in whole or in part the patient must

do so. Admissions are regulated in accordance with the law which provides that equal favor be shown to every county in the state. The waiting list is always large. Epileptics of all ages are received, excepting infants in arms.

The first step to secure a patient's admission is to consult the superintendent of the poor or the Commissioner of Charities in the county or city in which the patient lives, who have the necessary application papers which must be filled out in every instance.

The following is a list of the Board of Managers of the colony for 1914: Percy L. Lang, president; Daniel B. Murphy, Mrs. L. L. Van Rensselaer, Dr. Frederick Peterson, Dr. George E. Gorham, Barney S. Beuerlein, Dr. William T. Shanahan, medical superintendent.

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