

**KINGS PARK STATE HOSPITAL.
KINGS PARK, LONG ISLAND, N. Y.**

Prior to the establishment of this institution in 1885 all of the insane of Kings County were treated in the local institution situated in the suburbs of Brooklyn and known as the Kings County Lunatic Asylum. The rapid growth of the general population of the county, due largely to an unprecedented immigration, produced a disproportionate increase in the number of insane in the county and added enormously to the serious overcrowding in the county asylum.

Although successive superintendents pleaded with the county authorities for additional buildings, no provision for relief was made.

Finally, when conditions became intolerable, after patients had been crowded into the basements of the large asylum building and into an old frame building quite unfit for the purpose, public sentiment compelled action by the county authorities, and in 1885 about 850 acres of land were purchased at St. Johnland, 43 miles to the east, on Long Island, and a branch asylum was established.

Temporary frame buildings were erected on the new site for the immediate reception of patients, and in the fall of 1885 55 patients, 32 men and 23 women, were transferred to the St. Johnland Farm.

The new institution was established on the cottage plan. Sixteen frame buildings were to be erected to accommodate about 450 patients, and a laundry, heating plant, barns, etc., were also to be built. But progress in the erection of these buildings was very slow. In the spring of 1887 150 additional patients were received, making a total of 200, all being crowded into the three original temporary buildings.

In 1887 Dr. D. A. Harrison, assistant physician in charge of the St. Johnland Branch Asylum, was made medical superintendent, the general superintendent in charge of all the charitable institutions of the county, including the two asylums for the insane, then being Dr. John A. Arnold.

The first two permanent cottages were opened on June 18, 1888, and 14 more in 1889. Although these were promptly filled with patients far beyond their estimated capacity, the overcrowding in the Flatbush Asylum, instead of being relieved by these transfers, was actually worse than ever, so that it became necessary for the county to provide for the erection of more buildings.

A change at this time in the personnel of the Commissioners of Charities and Corrections of Kings County, who controlled building operations, brought about a very serious condition. Medical officers were soon warned against a too plain presentation of the existing situation or of the most obvious necessities required for the patients under their care, and failure to observe this warning resulted in demotion or dismissal. Thus in 1889 Dr. Harrison's salary was reduced by \$600, the difference being added to the salary of the recently appointed counsel of the commissioners. Dr. Harrison protested and then resigned, being succeeded by Dr. John L. Macumber.

At Flatbush Dr. Arnold, the general medical superintendent, resigned in 1892, being followed by Dr. Walter S. Fleming, who in turn was succeeded in 1893 by Dr. William E. Sylvester.

During the four succeeding years a large amount of construction was carried on at Kings Park. Four large brick buildings to accommodate 600 patients were built (buildings A, B, C and D); two large water reservoirs were constructed, also barns, an engine and dynamo room, a steam plant, conduits, sewers, etc. A subsequent investigation showed an extraordinary waste of public funds in this construction. Eighty thousand dollars is said to have been paid for a cow barn for which a fair price would have been \$10,000 or \$12,000. Eleven million bricks were used to fill an excavation prepared for the erection of buildings (C and D) and charged as an extra. Hundreds of barrels of cement were ordered to reduce the grades of a road near the canal, though it was said that the barge carrying this material sprung a leak and after the cement became wet it was simply piled on the bank. The cement in round barrel form can be seen there to this day. Hundreds of wagon loads of dirt were removed from the excavation for the water reservoirs and carted to a distance of nearly a mile into the woods, and then brought back again to build an embankment around the upper reservoir.

Meantime Dr. Macumber, who had protested against some of the more flagrant developments, was forced to resign on January 1, 1893, the vacancy being filled by the promotion of Dr. Oliver M. Dewing.

Conditions became so scandalous that an investigation was undertaken by a committee of the Assembly into the affairs of the Department of Charities and Correction, and Hugo Hirsch, of Brooklyn, was made special counsel.

The committee quickly found gross violation of law on the part of the commissioners. Officers and subordinates of acknowledged capacity and honesty had been superseded by men of no experience in the work to be performed, or, if not deficient in capacity, of doubtful integrity. Additional and useless employees were appointed with duties assigned to them that had previously been properly performed by other employees of the board. To quote from the report:

“The conspirators proceeded to violation of the law and acts of fraud. We found that the department was being used not only for the purpose of making places for the hangers-on of the corrupt politicians who controlled the department, but that these hangers-on did no work and received pay purely as sinecurists. We found men who were chronically sick, and thousands upon thousands of dollars were paid to men who were marked absent on the time books and who received their pay for the full month.”

In spite of the millions of dollars which the county thus spent upon the insane, the standard of care under the county regime was very low. The buildings were unsuitable and unhygienic, facilities inadequate, clothing insufficient and of poor quality, food often unfit for human consumption, the physicians were underpaid and their recommendations unheeded. Thus, Dr. Carlos F. MacDonald, State Commissioner in Lunacy, who had served as medical superintendent at Flatbush, testified before the Assembly investigating committee as follows:

“I may say generally that the standard of care and treatment of the insane in Kings County was, and had been for years previous, very much below that of any other locality in the state.”

It is gratifying to be able to record that in the midst of this atmosphere of shameless corruption the medical officers connected with the work of caring for the insane, without a single exception, had thrown expediency to the winds and at the risk of having their entire careers blighted, boldly opposed dishonesty and inefficient methods until they were, one after another, removed from their posts. But the flagrant dishonesty of the county officials brought about as a direct result the

legislation by which, in 1895, in the face of the most determined opposition, the asylums at Flatbush and Kings Park were transferred to the care of the state.

At the time of this transfer the medical superintendent at Kings Park was Dr. Oliver M. Dewing, serving under General Superintendent Dr. William E. Sylvester.

Upon assuming financial supervision of the hospital the State Commission in Lunacy authorized the erection of a large group of buildings at Kings Park to accommodate 1000 patients, with a view to the early discontinuance of the establishment at Flatbush. These buildings, now known as Group I, were opened in January, 1889. By the time the buildings were completed new problems confronted the commission. The crowding of the buildings of the Manhattan State Hospital had become such that the commission was compelled to retain Flatbush Asylum, and to use the new group of buildings for the relief of overcrowding on Ward's Island and in part to care for the patients of the buildings abandoned on Hart's Island and Blackwell's Island. Accordingly, 500 patients were received by transfer at Kings Park.

Thus the hospital at Kings Park soon became more important than the institution at Flatbush, of which it originally was a branch. The headquarters of the general medical superintendent were soon transferred to Kings Park, and finally, on May 1, 1900, it became by law a separate state hospital, independent of the institution at Flatbush, and the position of general medical superintendent was abolished.

On June 1, 1904, the State Commission in Lunacy transferred Dr. William Austin Macy, then superintendent of the Willard State Hospital, to the Kings Park State Hospital, Dr. Dewing going to the Long Island State Hospital at Flatbush.

It is generally to the credit of the medical men who struggled under the adverse conditions above described that sustained systematic individual and collective studies were made as to the causes of insanity and its various forms, in order to keep the hospital abreast with others of the state.

Determined efforts were made to abolish all mechanical restraint, and, as heretofore indicated, a constant struggle was made for proper food, sanitation, proper clothing, heating, lighting and ventilation, but obviously a systematic organization of the medical work could not be perfected.

As soon as the hospital entered the state system, however, a reorganization of the medical service and a readjustment of salaries were at once made. Blank forms were introduced for use in making physical and mental examinations, and reports made showing the progress of each case and a convenient and uniform loose-leaf system of files for medical records adopted. Finally, it became apparent that the personnel of the state hospital medical staffs was made up either of young men without special psychiatric training or of older men who had merely gone through the general movement throughout the state by which the construction, organization and administrative adjustment of the institution for the insane was accomplished. To remedy this condition a State Pathological Institute was established.

The contrast between conditions under county care and those under state care is well brought out by the history of this institution, and constitutes perhaps a lesson never to be forgotten.

The hospital continued to be known as the Long Island State Hospital at Kings Park until 1905, when the name was changed by legislative enactment to Kings Park State Hospital.

An employees' home, with a capacity for 300, was completed and opened in the early part of 1906. A new laundry was completed in 1910, the old one having been destroyed by fire. A new boiler house was completed in 1910.

The Legislature has provided funds to extend this hospital materially. During 1912 a large group of brick buildings with accommodations for 700 patients was finished and three large frame pavilions for 250 patients of the tubercular class were occupied in 1913, bringing the capacity of the institution up to 4000 beds.

The Kings Park State Hospital is much better off in equipment and facilities for doing its medical work than it was in the years gone by. Its laboratory, while not perfectly equipped, has everything necessary for average work of any kind.

The present value of the real estate and personal property of this hospital is, in round numbers, \$4,500,000. The cottage system upon which it was originally planned has not been maintained, being superseded in late years by congregate groups of buildings. Even the frame pavilions for the

tubercular class just completed are connected and thus made easy of administration. The large group of brick buildings for the chronic class, completed in 1912, has been found in practice the most economical as well as the most suitable for this type of patients.

The growth of the hospital from its beginning in 1885 as a branch of the county asylum, with temporary accommodations for 65 patients in crudely constructed shacks, to its attainment in 1914 of an equipment of 76 buildings and a population of 4266 patients, with all that these figures imply, has been but a reflection of the expansion and progress of the district from which it draws its patients, the counties of Kings, Nassau and Suffolk, and its future development will be likewise as rapid and progressive as may be anticipated for such district. The continued increase of the demands that will be made upon it for service should take no one by surprise.

Reprinted from *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada*, By Henry Mills Hurd, William Francis Drewry, Richard Dewey, Charles Winfield Pilgrim, George Adler Blumer, American Medico-Psychological Association. Committee on a History of the Institutional Care of the Insane, Thomas Joseph Workmann Burgess, Volume 3, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1916, Pages 220 – 225.
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