

"A Modern Madhouse: Springfield Hospital in 1898"

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by Jay A. Graybeal

Springfield Hospital near Sykesville was created in 1896 to provide mental health care in a rural setting. An early and highly complementary description of the facility was published in the November 5, 1898 issue of The Philadelphia Medical Journal. The writer, retired U. S. Navy Medical Director Dr. Albert L. Gihon, entitled his article, "A Modern Madhouse: An Inspection Report":

"About thirty miles from Baltimore, a little off from the main line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, on the undulating land bordering the valley of the Patapsco, lies one of the historic demesnes of the State of Maryland. The manor-house built in the classic simplicity of the Colonial period, although well in its second century, has fortunately escaped disfigurement by modern additions and improvements. Here lived the willful 'Betsy' Patterson, who, one night after her father had gone to bed, let herself out by a window and, mounting a horse, with a Negro slave upon another horse carrying her dress, rode to Baltimore to attend the ball, where she met the French officers and found her fate among them in the young Jerome Bonaparte; and here, one lovely summer evening after dinner, we sat on the beautiful lawn fronting the house, the road, unlike the approach to most dwellings, leading to the rear, listlessly watching the rising full moon, the hum of birds and insects in the surrounding park alone disturbing the blissful calm, until the notes of a distant bugle sounding the tattoo caused the post-prandial idlers to stroll out upon the lawn and look whence came the sounds, toward a group of buildings that had been erected within a year upon a hill 400 yards away, and which were then brilliant with electric lights. Again the bugle sounded 'taps,' and with the last notes the lights disappeared simultaneously save a few dimly marking certain sites.

It was not a military post that sent forth these familiar martial strains, but a madhouse, where 154 madmen had gone to bed as so many soldiers in a barrack, to sleep unmanacled and behind no restraining bars or locked doors until the bugle's reveille should call them to the labors of the day; and the old Colonial homestead is the official residence of the superintendent, Dr. George H. Rohe, where he rules his domain of 300 acres by the touch of an electric button.

Let us see how the madman of today lives his disjointed life.

By the time we had had our own breakfast and had crossed the intervening space to the 'cottages on the hill', we met gangs of apparently well-conditioned laborers or farmhands at work with spade and shovel and pick leveling off hummocks and grading hillsides; others with heavy iron mallets sitting in the road breaking stone for macadamizing; still others, rake and hoe in hand, weeding the vegetable gardens—here a party mending fences and trimming hedges, there a crown of jolly haymakers, and in the house some with long-handled frotteurs polishing the waxed floors of the corridors, sitting-room and dormitories, or with mop and cloth brightening mirrors and window panes and chasing incipient dust-heaps from their hiding-places in corners and crevices.

Of the 154 inmates, the morning report of the medical officer-of-the-day showed 113, actively at work, their troubled minds diverted from dwelling upon their one dominating idea by congenial occupations that demanded their attention, the outdoor employments giving them at the same time exposure to the sun and air and healthful exercise of muscles—Hygeia therapy—that made them keen for the signal to cease their labor and prepare for dinner—how?—by depositing their soiled working clothes in the

basement of their several cottages and washing at the spacious lavatories on that floor. Then, with clean hands and faces and combed hair and decent garments, they fall into line at the bugle's call to dinner and, led by uniformed attendants, march in squads, two by two, arm in arm, the stronger supporting the weaker, each with his chosen companion, along the covered corridors to the dining-room in the service-building, where, standing until all are in place, they seat themselves, upon a signal, at tables covered with clean, white cloths and furnished with porcelain plates and bowls or cups and saucers, glass tumblers and—what old madhouse-doctor would believe it?—knives and forks, and, at the time of our visit, spoons for ice cream, which was decently served as a dessert.

There was no stint of food. The plates of the hungry and the ravenous were replenished over and over by watchful attendants; the indifferent or obtuse were gently induced to eat, or whim and fancy catered. When all had finished, the knives and forks were gathered and counted and, this done, the medical officer-of-the-day, always present, pulled the gong-signal, then they rose in order, fell in in pairs, and at another stroke of the gong, marched back to their respective cottages to smoke, to loll, to gossip until their afternoon-duties should again call them to work, or to bathe or to stroll, or the whatever else might be the day's routine.

The distinguishing features of this new establishment for ministering to men with minds diseased may be briefly stated to be: (1) impressing upon the inmates the fact that they are patients under treatment in a hospital; (2) dispensing with every form of mechanical or visible restraint or irritating means of compulsion; (3) finding appropriate occupation, especially outdoor work for everyone, utilizing the skilled labor of mechanics, or giving the Polish Jew, who never knew other instrument than the needle, the task of mending clothing and bedding; (4) encouraging and exacting habits of personal cleanliness, water-closets, urinals, lavatory-basins or rain baths, soap and towels being provided on every floor in apparent superfluity; (5) instituting a quasi-military precision and regularity in the associated operations, in dressing and undressing, in beginning and quitting work, in going to bed and rising, bugle-calls, so far as possible, supplementing personal orders and the uniformed attendants acting rather as captains and guides than as keepers or guards.

The hospital-idea, in its full development, comprehends covering the numerous elevations embraced within the extensive limits of the estate with independent groups of building. One for male patients is completed and in successful operation; ground has been broken for a second for females, which is to have only female nurses, attendants, cooks and assistants and female medical officers; a third for epileptic insane will follow; and so, until the capacity of the grounds shall have been exhausted and the inmates number thousands. The group completed consists of four detached buildings, each occupying the side of an open space or court, 200 feet square, connected by covered but unenclosed corridors. One of the four is the service-building of the group, in which the medical officers and attendants live and have their offices, and wherein are the visitors' reception-room, the store-rooms and dispensary, this being the least frequented in the building, and in the basement, the kitchen, pantries, refrigerators and patients' dining-room, as only the bed-ridden and the helpless are elsewhere. The other three building are practically two-storied and basement cottages, of which the ground floor is chiefly devoted to sitting-room purposes, with large, open porches, whose attractive outlooks make them the preferred resorts; while on the upper floor are the dormitories, solely used as such. In the basements are hooks and boxes for working-suits and shoes. On all the floors are lavatories.

To be concluded next week.



*Springfield Hospital, photographed in c.1910, was established in 1896 on a property once owned by the Patterson family and later by Gov. Frank Brown. The circle at the center of the image is from the cancellation on the back of the postcard. Historical Society of Carroll County postcard collection.*