

IMAGES

... then and now

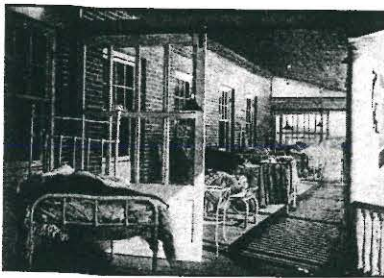
From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

The Story of Rockhill Sanitarium

One of the most dreaded diseases of past centuries was tuberculosis, also known as TB or consumption. Though the tubercule bacillus was isolated in 1882, no effective medical treatment was found until 1944. Health practitioners treated it with a mixture of popular knowledge, common sense, and medicinal doctrine.



From Cure of Pulmonary Tuberculosis

TB's symptoms included a persistent cough, weight loss, spitting of blood, hoarseness, night sweats, increased pulse rate, fever, and pleurisy. Tuberculosis was called a "house disease," and citizens were urged to practice hygiene to prevent it. Tuberculosis caused more deaths in the U.S. than any other disease in 1890; and in 1921 it was the 3rd leading cause of death.

Some treatments were questionable. Pneumothorax (collapse therapy), popular in the 1890's, involved compression of the affected lungs and introducing gas filled air into the pleural cavity for 2-4 years. Surgery to remove ribs was practiced. Gold therapy (ingestion) was occasionally tried in America until 1935 when violent reactions to gold's toxicity were a constant side effect. Vaccines were given to humans after 1921, but were replaced by the antibiotic streptomycin in 1944. X-rays (after 1895) were used to record patients' lungs, revealing infected and healing areas.

The most popular therapy, sanitariums, originated in Europe in the mid-1800's as luxury retreats for the wealthy. The first American Sanitarium was built in the Adirondacks (NY) in the 1870's. Eventually they became the mainstay for treatment of TB. Confining people with the disease promoted societal well being (by isolating the infected) and patient well being (by adhering to therapy). Individual sanitariums differed but all imposed a routine based on rest, food, and fresh air, and moderate exercise.

Patients' monotonous lives were supervised by physicians and staff of the sanitariums. After breakfast at 7:30 invalids went outdoors (on chair, bed or porch). Some places ordered exercise, like walking (the "TB tread"). At noon, rest, then dinner and more rest outside until supper at 6:00. After supper patients went outdoors again until the mandatory bedtime about 9:30. Temperatures were taken 3 times daily, and snacks were offered periodically. Warm water was provided each morning for washing, but baths were permitted only once a week. Patients were required to be outside for at least 8 hours daily to be "faithful to the cure". Sleeping out was encouraged also. Such a regime was most likely followed at Indian Hill's only sanitarium.

Dr. Charles S. Rockhill, a U.C. Medical College graduate who specialized in lung disease, founded the Rockhill Sanitarium overlooking the Little Miami Valley sometime after 1900. Patients from all over the U.S. were treated at the complex built to "chase the cure". The staff consisted of 7 nurses, a bacteriologist, 2 members of the U.S. Vocational Training School, a stenographer, a dietician, and workers from the Red Cross. Dr. Rockhill and Dr. R. H. Lambert were the physicians, and Mrs. (Margaret) Rockhill cared for patients too.

After World War I, Dr. Rockhill's Sanitarium was devoted exclusively to the rehabilitation of veterans suffering from tuberculosis. He discontinued his private practice to devote all his time to the Sanitarium. In 1923 seventy-five veterans were being treated there, and plans for enlarging the facility were made. The Sanitarium had a large main building, several smaller outbuildings, a laboratory, 2 barns, 3 sheds, at least 2 cottages, 7 chicken houses, and its own septic tank and filter beds. Dr. Rockhill died in 1925, but the date of the Sanitarium's closure is unknown.

Rockhill Sanitarium served its purpose. Patients with tuberculosis were isolated from the general public and treated by medical professionals using accepted procedures of the era. Today only the name Rock Hill Lane (off Miami Road) reflects the history of the long-gone Sanitarium.