WESTERN STATE HOSPITAL – FT STEILACOOM, WA

The first American wagon train arrived in the Puget Sound region in 1845. The British had already arrived, at the Hudson Bay Company trading post Fort Nisqually (near present day Dupont). American settlers asked for and received military protection in 1849 when U.S. soldiers arrived to build Fort Steilacoom. The fort became a favorite site to train young officers who later commanded troups in the American Civil War. Washington Territory was established in 1853. The U.S. government closed Fort Steilacoom in 1868.

By 1871, the Washington Territory population had grown and the need for an asylum to house its mentally ill citizens became critical. Fort Steilacoom was chosen to house 21 patients, under the care of Dr. Stacey Hemenway. The population of Washington Territory continued to boom, and in 1887 the Legislature approved $100,000 to build a new institution on the former military fort grounds. Washington joined the Union in 1889.

One of the important early superintendents was Dr. John Waughop. Dr and Mrs. Waughop lived on the grounds, a custom practiced by all hospital personnel back then. Mrs. Waughop dedicated her time beautifying the grounds of the hospital and imported many exotic species to adorn the grounds and wards. Dr. Waughop dedicated himself to the care and recovery of patients.

By 1900, leading medical experts believed that insanity was incurable. Most patients admitted to the asylum were expected to stay. Thus, the institutions became overburdened. All state hospital administrators sought ways to make their institutions more self-supporting. Occupational therapy began and patients were set to task in farming, horticulture, laundry, kitchen and bakery, carpentry, tinwork and blacksmithing. In addition, Western State Hospital added basket-making, furniture upholstery, shoe repair, chair caning, rug weaving, sewing, and produce canning to its industries.

In its early days, the hospital was isolated. The nearest town was Steilacoom. People and merchandise were transported by horse or train. The 20th century introduced trolley cars and the automobile. With modern transportation, some employees chose to live off campus. Yet many chose to live and raise their families on the hospital grounds.

The 1910s brought the first break-through treatment for patients called hydro-therapy, using the calming effect of warm water for agitation. Later, insulin shock therapy became the prevalent treatment for severe psychosis. In the 1940s, electro-shock therapy was introduced as a safer alternative. As the years passed, Western State Hospital continued to introduce new advances in psychiatric care in patient treatment plans.

1915 was an important year for the hospital. The state's first asylum was renamed "Western State Hospital" to distinguish it from Eastern and Northern State Hospitals and the hospital farm was established as a primary occupational therapy tool.

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The 1930s saw a dramatic increase in admissions to the hospital and the need to update existing buildings and construct new ones. Dr. William Keller oversaw the hospital's operations during this era and he campaigned vigorously for funding to build departments with modern equipment and trained staff. Dr. Keller held the longest tenure as superintendent in the hospital's history.

By the 1940s, Western State Hospital had gained national acclaim as a leader in research. A national psychiatric convention was held on the grounds in 1941 and a nurses' school opened to offer practical training in psychiatric care.

Throughout its long history, the hospital housed and treated a diverse group of needy citizens. The elderly, mentally disturbed youth, juvenile delinquents, developmentally delayed, and disabled war veterans were integrated into the general population. Mental health professionals fought to provide unique care facilities for these populations and were eventually successful in the establishment of other institutions in Washington State.

Every year, the hospital staff presented scientific and educational exhibits at the Western Washington Fair in Puyallup. Hospital patients presented agricultural and floral displays at the Fair. The local Kiwanis sponsored the popular annual threshing bees in what is now the Fort Steilacoom County Park. And hospital staff shared their personal talents to develop many fine social events. There were dances, picnics, carnivals, parties, movie nights, and baseball games.

Patients also contributed greatly to the success of the hospital by their labors. In addition to their daily chores, patients accepted more challenges. Patients built the stone wall that has lined Steilacoom Boulevard since 1916. In World War I, patients prepared hundreds of Red Cross packages for soldiers overseas. The hospital's famous sunken gardens, now gone, were a local tourist attraction. In World War II, hospital patients picked beans and berries on Puyallup farms in answer to local manpower shortages. And their recycling drives earned $10,000 for the state in 1945.

The 1950s marked a pivotal point in the history of psychiatric care and state mental hospitals. Medications were introduced that controlled the most severe symptoms of mania and enabled patients to be discharged from the hospital and into the community.

President Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Center Construction Act in 1963. This Act called for the establishment of county-based mental-health centers, based on the assumption that psychotropic drugs would make the need for large state asylums obsolete.

In the 1960s and 70s, Superintendent Dr. Guilio DiFuria continued to implement new advances in psychiatry and psychology at Western State Hospital, including "milieu ther-

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apy" that sought to provide a less *institutional* environment. Group therapy became very popular. Genders were integrated on the wards. And staff no longer wore institutional whites.

But the prevalent consumption of street drugs in the 1960s further complicated mental health care. Hospital care teams were challenged by the dual diagnosis of mental illness and drug addiction.

In the early 1980s, a federal lawsuit outlawed unpaid labor by psychiatric patients. Occupational Therapy programs were drastically reduced. However, the hospital population continued to fluctuate widely. Another national trend of the 1980s was the decline of state revenues at the same time state populations boomed.

At the start of the 21st century, local mental health facilities have been overwhelmed by the demand. This gap in psychiatric care has resulted in the increase of mentally ill homeless and the use of jails and prisons to house the mentally ill.

And yet there is fresh hope with the passing of mental health insurance parity laws. Western State Hospital remains a major force in the treatment and recovery of Washington's mentally disabled citizens.

THE HOSPITAL FARM, 1915-1965

Prior to 1871, when the state's first insane asylum was established, the land that is today the hospital grounds and a public park had been enjoyed as a hunting ground for the Steilacoom Indian tribe, and later as sheep pasture managed by the Hudson Bay Company's Fort Nisqually. In 1845, the HBC hired Joseph Heath to establish a farm with Indian labor to feed British naval troops. When he died suddenly in 1849, the Hudson Bay Company of Great Britain leased the land to the American government to establish U. S. Fort Steilacoom (1849-1868). In 1853, the land became part of the United States.

At the turn of the 20th century, all American asylums were becoming overcrowded and expensive to maintain. Hospital administrators decided to try a new treatment method, known as "occupational therapy." Laboring long hours seemed to have a calming effect on patients, and the farms made a profit for the institution and state. In 1915, the hospital's superintendent was a former Iowa farm boy turned surgeon. His name was Dr. William Keller and he relished the idea of establishing a farm. But when Dr Keller was called up for active duty for World War I, Dr. Charles Taylor was placed in charge of the undertaking.

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The first problem was the unsuitability of the land for crops. The sand and gravel composition of the soil had discouraged settlement by early American settlers. A hospital employee solved the problem in a unique way. Silt from the bottom of spring-fed Lake Waughop was siphoned out and spread over the fields. This created fertile soil and Western State Hospital's farm went into full operation.

At its zenith of operations, about 350 male patients worked the livestock, fields and orchards. Livestock included prize-winning Holstein milk cows, turkeys, chickens and pigs. The cows were raised for dairy products. The Leghorn chickens were raised for their eggs. The Duroc Jersey pigs and turkeys were raised to provide meat for WSH and the state's other institutions. The women patients were responsible for seed preservation and produce canning. A separate housing unit was built for the patient farm workers in 1932 and it became known as *"Hill Ward"* or *"the White House."* The building was abandoned in the 1960s due to its obsolescence and demolished in 1989.

Dr. Keller acquired the amazing cows in 1915 as part of a scientific experiment. State cows that tested positive for tuberculosis were sent to WSH. The workers separated the calves and boiled their milk before feedings. The calves grew up disease free. One of those cows--Prilly Blossom--was a world champion milk producer. She is one of few U.S. cows that earned an obituary in the local newspaper.

Threshing Bees were annual events for the community and the biggest crowd drew 20,000. Events included games and contests and farm fun for hospital staff, patients and local citizens.

The introduction of psychotropic medications in the 1950s revolutionized psychiatric care. With medication controlling mania, patients could be discharged back into the community. Hope ran high that Americans who were in need of treatment could be helped at local mental-health care facilities. The new emphasis in psychiatric care changed from confinement to institutions to active treatment and discharge planning. Thus, the patient population at Western State Hospital dropped from 3067 ('55 census) to 1350 ('65 census).

But without patient labor, the WSH Hospital Farm became too expensive to operate. In 1965, the Washington State Legislature and Governor Albert D. Rosellini decided to close the farm. The land became the Fort Steilacoom County Park.

But 130 years of psychiatric care has left more than a few old barns on the county park landscape. The WSH Patients Cemetery contains the remains of nearly 3000 individuals who had worked, played and prayed for recovery. Since 2000, the Grave Concerns Association has worked to honor their memory and their noteworthy contribution.

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