

Pennsylvania Hospital for Crippled Children

After the First World War, the United States experienced a sense of common culture for the first time in its history. This cultivated what is known as the Progressive Movement, where many political reforms, government programs, and societal changes occurred. As a result, the United States experienced a wave of prosperity and programs that would increase the standard of living. Throughout the Roaring Twenties, Pennsylvania elected Governor Pinchot, a conservative who was involved in the United States Forestry. Throughout his terms, he emphasized relief of the unemployed, Prohibition, public utilities, and other areas which may have contrasted to the popular belief of his Republican Party.¹ Progressivism, as well as the newfound culture of the United States, was no longer about which political party you represented, but what your ideals as a person were. As Pinchot stated, “It is greater to be a good citizen than to be a good Republican or a good Democrat.”² Under the administration of Pinchot, a proposal for a new institution that would help children with tuberculosis was introduced to the Pennsylvania Senate in the year 1925. The bill was passed, and in the year 1929, the Pennsylvania Hospital for Crippled Children was built, treating children with the prior disease and other life-threatening conditions. The building of this facility was anticipated with grandeur, as only one other institution of its kind existed in the world at that time, located in Copenhagen, Denmark.³ The building itself was built in a classic revival architecture style by Thomas, Martin, and Kirkpatrick Architects.⁴ This building, which still exists, is located on 265 acres of land at 1451 North Market Street, Elizabethtown.⁵ This facility was able to bring new meaning to life in Elizabethtown, as well as a new opportunity to children who were unfortunately affected by harsh diseases such as polio and tuberculosis. Thanks to the effort that went into making such an unprecedented and prestigious entity, the Pennsylvania’s Hospital for Crippled Children was dubbed an “Institution of Hope.”⁶

The Hospital opened in March of the year 1930, having commenced with a total of 37 staff members and 15 patients.⁷ In its beginnings, the Children’s Hospital’s main focus was to bring attention and treat young patients with tuberculosis, polio, or congenital deformities. Surgery was soon implemented to the treatment path of patients, leading to treating a wider variety of cases, such as scoliosis cases, kyphosis cases, and other curvatures of the spine. This also led to the treatment of cerebral palsy cases as well as treatment for diabetes in children.⁸ The mission of the Children’s Hospital was to make the lives of these affected children as livable as possible. To do so, the hospital hired an abundance of caring staff in order to accommodate more patients. In the year 1933, a nursing house was added to the facility; in Pennsylvania at the time, nurses were not allowed to marry and were obligated to dedicate their time to their profession.⁹ The patients of the facility were always the first priority, and many improvements were made over the years to better fulfill the lives of the young people that resided in the hospital. The average period of stay for a child in this facility could lie anywhere from fifteen to nineteen months, making it difficult for a child to adjust to a new way of living.¹⁰ However, the staff was highly dedicated to the patients, and many of those who were interned at this hospital tend to retell a great experience.

In 1937, a \$545,000 project was implemented into the hospital, sponsored by the state authority in Harrisburg. This was able to allocate 138 new beds into the facility and funded projects such as a glass “warm springs pool” for crippled children, as well as a brace shop, where braces and prosthetics were made for those patients who required them.¹¹ These projects and new facilities would play an important role in the height of the

¹ Jean-Paul Benowitz, “Governor Pinchot’s Act in 1925 Started Children’s Hospital,” *Elizabethtown Advocate* 8, no. 14, April 6, 2017.

² Ibid

³ Richard K. MacMaster, *Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries* (Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown Historical Society, 2002), 218.

⁴ Benowitz

⁵ Rosalba Ugliuzza, “An Institution of Hope,” *Elizabethtown Chronicle*, January 25, 2007.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Macmaster, 218.

¹⁰ Benowitz

¹¹ Editorial, *Elizabethtown Chornicle*, May 1937

polio epidemics in the 1940s. During this time, the shop provided braces and other forms of mechanical assistance to affected polio patients by attending to more than 6,000 different cases.¹² Throughout its early years alone, the Children's Hospital was becoming a very important aspect of life in Pennsylvania and Elizabethtown. Over the years, the facilities were improving, and the scope of life-saving treatments and procedures were increasing.

The policy of the Pennsylvania Hospital for Crippled Children was a very open, offering treatment for all Pennsylvania residents. When it opened in 1930, the hospital accepted patients from the age of 1 to 16.¹³ However, by the year 1966, the hospital provided surgical, medical, and rehabilitation services for all children up until the age of 21.¹⁴ After the polio epidemics in the forties and the fifties, the Hospital also became an amputee center for children in the year 1959.¹⁵ The initial motive for the construction of the hospital, contracted tuberculosis, was becoming rarer every year. By this time, the State Hospital for Crippled Children became a center for children who were recovering from polio or other diseases that affected their ability for movement. In 1965, the hospital made leaps in constructing vital parts to the schooling system such as an auditorium, classrooms and a library¹⁶. To inform and broaden the outreach of the mission of the hospital, Robert W. Saunderson, Jr. M.D., the medical director of the hospital in 1966, released a brochure titled: The State Hospital for Crippled Children." In this brochure, Saunderson states, "The patients being treated at the Crippled Children's Hospital are no different from children in any community... they come from all walks of life, but have one thing in common: they can be helped the comprehensive care program that has been assembled at the hospital."¹⁷ At this time of the hospital's history, there were orthopedic clinics held every Wednesday.¹⁸ Appointments were not necessary, but they were recommended if the patient was travelling from a considerable distance from the hospital.¹⁹ "Appointments should not be made," as is written in the brochure, "for families living in Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, York, Cumberland, Northumberland, Adams, and Perry counties."²⁰ Every patient was treated equally and with the most urgent and personalized care as possible. There existed a "care program for in-patients" which was referred to as the "start to finish" program that followed the course of treatment and recuperation of the child who was treated.²¹ This was a multistep process that was taken over the course of the registration and diagnosis of the child all the way to until discharge and beyond. The steps of this process would be: Diagnostic, Surgical, Medical and Nursing Care, Special Consultative and Surgical Programs, Rehabilitation, Social Service, Dental and Orthodontic Care, Clinical Laboratory and X-Ray Services, and finally Home Follow-Up Service.²² Admission into the hospital was as fair and equal as it could have possibly have been in society. In the admission policy, the hospital could not discriminate against people for their color, gender, race, creed, or any other differentiating factor.²³ The Children's Hospital was run by the government of Pennsylvania, meaning that business could not be privatized, nor could service be denied to a patient without a healthy reason. Furthermore, in The State Hospital for Crippled Children, it states the following: "The hospital is not really only for 'poor' people."²⁴ People were encouraged to not take their household income into account, as the mission of the hospital was to help eradicate disease in children. The only requirement that the Children's Hospital had was that the child must have a "type of disorder reasonable [chance] of responding to the various treatment programs available."²⁵ This truly was a hospital for the people of Pennsylvania, and one that would not discriminate by any means necessary, in order to ensure the best treatment possible for children at the time.

Arguably one of the most important aspects of the Pennsylvania Hospital for Crippled Children is the way the institute was able to preserve the childhood of nearly all the patients habituating there. The facilities were

¹² Ugliuzza

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Robert W. Saunderson, Jr., M.D., The State Hospital for Crippled Children, (Elizabethtown: 1966).

¹⁵ Editorial, *Elizabethtown Chronicle*, date unavailable.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Benowitz, Historic Elizabethtown Pennsylvania: A Walking Tour (Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 2015), 79.

¹⁷ Saunderson

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

equipped with various buildings and wings dedicated to the children. Patients were able to attend school there from Kindergarten up to twelfth grade²⁶ Not only this, but many co-curricular activities were held for the children such as crafts, swimming, annual Halloween Parades, scouting programs, and television.²⁷ Most importantly, the children who spent most of their lives there did not have to miss out on being a kid. The facility truly cared for the members of the hospital, and dedicated their time to be able to make their young days as innocent and normal as possible. However, the care of the children was not limited to the faculty and medical caregivers. Parents were encouraged to visit their child often, although limited by visiting rules, as any hospital would require.²⁸ Additionally, many volunteers were accepted in the caring of the patients that resided in the hospital. Three categories of volunteerism existed in the hospital. These were “Regular Trained Volunteer,” “Volunteer Groups,” and “Donors.”²⁹ The latter did not physically help the patients, but contributed funds, while the two prior were under supervision by a certain department or were sponsored by an organization in order to contribute.³⁰ Many people in Elizabethtown today still recall the days when they used to go to the hospital in order to volunteer and help children. Above all, children in the facility were loved, and it was very evident through many celebrations and relationships that were created. In 1961, Ruth Ann Beck became the hospital’s 10,000th patient, marking a landmark for the hospital, as well as honoring her and all of the other patients of the time.³¹ A multitude of accounts can be found when reading local newspapers in Elizabethtown about this history of the humanity that the Children’s Hospital had, and it is something that is retained in one’s memory forever.

Until the year 1982, the hospital had undergone many renovations and improvements. These included air-conditioning, remodeling, and waiting rooms for different age groups.³² In this year, Governor Dick Thornbaugh transferred ownership of the hospital from the State Department of Health to the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center.³³ Penn State Hershey had influenced the Children’s Hospital since 1974, when the institute had begun an Orthopaedic Residency Program at the State Hospital for Crippled Children.³⁴ This was the end of an era for the people of Elizabethtown, as the Children’ Hospital would become a training facility for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections in order to train workers of the state and county.³⁵ The Children’s Hospital is widely remembered by a variety of residents in the Elizabethtown area. Many friends keep in touch with each other after sharing years together of their young lives. As the Children’s Hospital in Elizabethtown becomes a memory of the past, the friendships, bonds, and loving times that took place there shall never be forgotten.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ugliuzza

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Benowitz, Images of America: Elizabethtown, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 100.

³⁵ Benowitz