

# PUBLIC HEALTH MATTERS

A NEWSLETTER OF THE  
PUBLIC HEALTH MUSEUM

## MUSEUM TEMPORARILY CLOSED

In the interest of prioritizing the safety of our visitors, staff, and volunteers, reducing the number of people on campus and slowing the opportunity for transmission of the Coronavirus, the museum is closing to the public at the end of business on March 13th, 2020 until further notice. World TB Day, scheduled for March 24th and Public Health Week, scheduled for April 6th-10th have both been cancelled.

Over the next few weeks we will be assessing the situation and reviewing options for when we will be able to re-open to the public. We appreciate your understanding as we do our part to mitigate the spread of the virus in our community.

## BODIES OF INDIGENTS



Historically, mania, melancholia, dementia, idiocy, feeble-minded, and insanity were all terms used to describe an unfortunate class of people suffering from mental illness and disability. This class was often relegated to large state-run facilities that were overcrowded and derelict. Many never escaped their confinement, and upon death the fate of their bodies was left to hospital administrators. What did happen to the bodies of the patients of state-run facilities?

During the 1950s, at the height of institutionalization in the United States, over 550,000 mentally ill patients were under state custody. This peak in the patient population, coupled with neglect, deplorable living conditions, and lack of care resulted in numerous deaths. And with infectious diseases running rampant through state institutions prior to that, more death. What was a hospital administration required to do with the bodies of their deceased patients? In most cases, they either buried them in hospital cemeteries or sold them for research purposes, a more controversial choice.

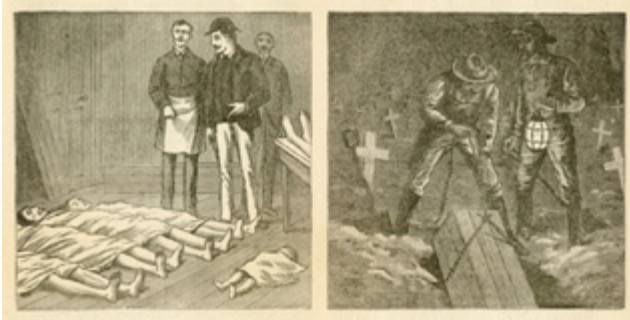
In Massachusetts, the first law regarding the sale of bodies for medical research was passed in March of 1815. The "Sepulchres of Dead" statute laid out the penalty for grave robbing, an issue with which almshouses and hospitals were regularly dealing. Continually refined throughout the 19th

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From the time Tewksbury Almshouse opened in 1854, it was legal in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for state institutions to sell the bodies of paupers to medical schools for research. In the early 1880s, there was a public outcry regarding the conditions of the Almshouse and the disposition of bodies. This led to Governor Butler's famous investigation in 1883.

Courtesy of: Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine

century, the law played an important role in the testimony given by Governor Benjamin Butler against the Tewksbury Hospital administration in 1883.

The next iteration of the statute was passed in 1831 and included a timeline outlining when dead bodies from state institutions could be surrendered to medical schools or medical professionals for anatomical research. According to the law, families had 36 hours from the time of death to claim their loved one's body. Unfortunately, in an age of horse-drawn carriages, families had no feasible way of retrieving the body within the allotted time period.

In 1834, this statute was again altered, this time to include new sections prohibiting the construction of railroads or other roads through cemeteries. The law also prohibited the defacement of any tomb or gravestone. But more noteworthy were the changes to the section regulating pauper bodies and medical research. In the new law, families had only 24 hours — an even more unrealistic period of time — to claim the body.

In 1883 an investigation into the administration of the Tewksbury Hospital was launched and Governor Butler called out the indignation of the practice of selling bodies of deceased patients to medical schools. He took it a step further by attesting that the flesh of these patients was being tanned to create shoes, purses, and the like. Although many of his more heinous claims were unfounded, some of the administrative charges against the hospital were supported by the State Legislature, spurring change in the law surrounding care for the bodies of state paupers.

Some of these changes were reflected in 1891, when the 24 hour rule for claiming a body was changed to 72 hours — a substantial improvement considering advancements in the mail system. Another edit in 1894 set limitations on what bodies could be sent for anatomical research, namely excluding those of soldiers and sailors who served in the Civil War or Spanish-American War.

In 1938 the Massachusetts state legislature approved the creation of a commission to research inmate burials at state institutions. The report stated that there was no official legislation mandating the burial of these patients and the only legislation that existed was for the handling of corpses being sent to medical schools for anatomical research. The commission concluded that there was no clear consensus on burials for patients at state institutions (Tewksbury State Hospital was among the sites that the commission visited) and proposed that legislation be written to create standard practices for patient burials. It does not appear that the commission's proposed legislation was ever passed.

The "Sepulchres of Dead" statute is still in existence, but is known today as Chapter 113 of the General Law. Although some sections have been added, the law remains remarkably similar to the statute from 1894 <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVI/Chapter113>.

*By Ashlynn Rickord Werner, MTS*

### *References:*

Butler, Benjamin F. Argument before the Tewksbury Investigation Committee by Governor Benj. F. Butler, upon Facts Disclosed during the Recent Investigation, July 15, 1883. Printed for the Information of the People by the Democratic Central Committee, 1883, National Library of Medicine, [resource.nlm.nih.gov/101167965](https://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101167965).

Wagner, David. *Ordinary People: In and Out of Poverty in the Gilded Age*. Routledge, 2015.

# RUTLAND SANATORIUM

The Rutland Sanatorium was officially opened in 1898 as the Rutland State Sanatorium by an act of the Massachusetts State Legislature in 1895 that authorized “the immediate construction of three infirmaries for tubercular patients, of 150 beds each; second, for the appointment of state inspectors of health; third, for compulsory registration of cases; and fourth, for giving greater effect to the anti-spitting law.”



Rutland was the first state institution of its kind in the United States and was constructed in an unusual radial-pavilion plan. A rare architectural design, the radial-pavilion plan featured individual ward blocks arranged around a semi-circular corridor with axial office and service accommodations.

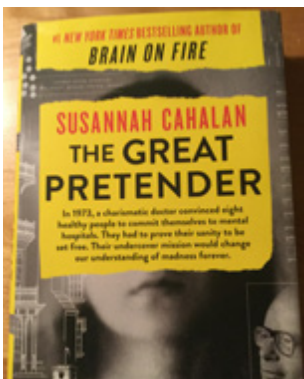
Originally called the Massachusetts Hospital for Consumptives and Tubercular Patients, Rutland operated under a variety of names, including the Massachusetts State Sanatorium (1900), Rutland State Sanatorium (1910), and Rutland Hospital (1963).

The sanatorium operated in the same location until the early 1960s, when the buildings were sold to Becker College. It was then relocated to the campus of the former Veterans’ Administration Hospital near Rutland Center. Renamed the Rutland Heights State Hospital in 1965, the facility closed in 1991 and was demolished in 2001. All remaining buildings were demolished in 2005, save the gate house, wishing well, and an old flagpole. The site, now unoccupied, waits for a new purpose with new construction.

*By Erin Toland*

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## BOOK REVIEW: THE GREAT PRETENDER



How do we define and diagnose mental illness? What is sane? What is insane? Author Susannah Cahalan was nearly committed to a psychiatric ward while suffering from a neurological autoimmune disease. This misdiagnosis prompted her to search for answers to these questions in her new book, *The Great Pretender*.

Cahalan focused on an article that forever changed the process of diagnosing mental health. “On Being Sane in Insane Places” was written by Stanford psychologist David Rosenhan. Published in the journal, *Science*, in 1973, the article details the findings of eight people (Rosenhan included) who went undercover by admitting themselves into asylums.

From there Cahalan embarks on an in depth examination of the Rosenhan experiment and its legitimacy, the history of our mental health care system and how one psychology experiment changed the course of psychiatric medicine. *The Great Pretender* is now available on the bookshelves of the Public Health Museum and is available to interested volunteers.

*By Liz Robinson, volunteer*



## MEET JULIE KINCHLA, PHM VOLUNTEER

Like so many of our volunteers, Julie was looking for an opportunity to use her skills and learn something new after retiring in 2018. She learned of the museum from an article in the Boston Globe some years ago and was inspired to visit. After attending one of our tours, she realized the museum was the perfect place to pursue her interest in medical history while providing a vital service to the community. She was particularly attracted to the hundreds of volumes of medical history books, some published as far back as the 1840s, in the museum archives.



Julie's lifelong passion for books naturally led to a career as a librarian. Having graduated from Simmon's College with a master's degree in Library Science, she was employed for many years as Head of Information Services at Winchester Public Library. Julie also has a bachelor's degree in Sociology from UMass Boston. Prior to her career as a librarian, she worked as a counselor specializing in mental health, substance abuse and crisis management. Her background is a perfect match for the museum.

Julie quickly established a niche for herself by digitizing archival documents into the PastPerfect program. Moving from paper to an electronic system allows for an accurate inventory and quick access to our entire archive. She attends Collection Committee meetings to learn more about archiving and to expand her role in that area in the future. Julie has also expressed interest in becoming a docent. She has spent many hours studying the exhibits, reading scripts, and shadowing experienced docents on various museum tours.

Julie's favorite exhibits are the Nursing Classroom and the Mental Health Room. She is also intrigued by the many antique medical instruments on display and the well preserved WPA murals. Naturally, as a librarian, she has a special affinity for the many primary source documents, ledgers, and reports that detail the experiences of thousands of patients and employees that lived at Tewksbury State Hospital for over 150 years. She especially enjoyed escorting a photography class that was permitted to enter and photograph some of the more historically important buildings on campus, including an insane asylum.

Julie believes there is considerable potential for growth and change at the museum, in part due to its talented and enthusiastic volunteers. In order to increase visitors, she recommends hosting more programs with speakers on important public health issues that concern the community. Julie lives in Arlington, MA and continues to work part-time as a librarian. She enjoys spending time with her family, especially her grandchildren. Her hobbies include traveling, classic movies, and reading.

*By Mary Ferguson R.N., Volunteer*

By presenting biographies of a few of our current volunteers, we hope to demonstrate that our volunteers come from many different backgrounds, careers and experiences, and that each has something unique to offer.

The Public Health Museum is in need of more volunteers to give tours of the museum and in particular our outdoor "Walking Tour," which resumes in May. The Walking Tour has increased in popularity due to our partnership with the Tewksbury Library. Should you be interested in volunteering contact Sandra Price, Coordinator of Volunteer Engagement, [Sandra@publichealthmuseum.org](mailto:Sandra@publichealthmuseum.org). You may also come in for a tour and see our historic exhibits.

*"Volunteers do not necessarily have the time;  
they just have the heart."*

Elizabeth Andrew



# LILLIAN WALD: FOUNDER OF PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING 1867 TO 1940

This article is the second part of a history of Lillian Wald. The first part was published in the [December 2019 issue of \*Public Health Matters\*](#). Archived issues of *Public Health Matters* can be found on the [Museum web site](#).

Within a few years, the Henry Street Settlement became known all around the world for its innovations and successes. Wald hired local women to sew uniforms for the nurses in order to help them provide for their families. She established a childcare center and offered classes for mothers in subjects such as sewing, nutrition, cooking and literacy to help them get better employment. She provided a library and a space for anyone to study. She believed strongly that women should be financially independent of their husbands in order to pull them out of poverty. There were clubs for women, children and fathers in order to build stronger bonds and develop self-help strategies. She built the first playground in the city behind the Settlement used by the children during the day and by night by the adults to hold classes and meetings. She founded two summer camps in the mountains for children to experience country life, as she believed the experience of nature and play to be important to the health and well-being of children. She trained the nurses who participated in the ground-breaking Framingham Community Health and Tuberculosis Demonstration Project (1917-1923), a precursor to the latter Framingham Heart Study.



Wald was skilled in attracting and nurturing social contacts with other organizations that were able to provide funds or assistance to the Settlement. Always a strong advocate for social and political change, she helped found the Women's Trade Union League, the Children's Bureau and the Outdoor Recreational League. She pushed for legislation that introduced free lunch, special education and nursing in the schools; the first in the nation. She supported unions by providing space at the Settlement where workers could organize in favor of better pay and working conditions. She was a leader of the Child Labor Movement that lobbied for federal child labor laws and promoted better childhood education. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) held its first conference at Henry Street. Not surprisingly, Wald was a feminist and a pacifist. She organized marches for women's suffrage and to protest against the United States entering WWI. Wald established the Women's Peace Party and was elected president of the American Union Against Militarism in 1915 which later became the American Civil Liberties Union.

Wald never married but had many close women friends and valued her personal freedom. She was free to travel the world to teach about the Settlement and devote herself to its many important missions. She was influential to many great leaders, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, and had the trust of philanthropists of the day who provided the funds needed to bring about the many social reforms she was passionate about. Her memoirs include "The House on Henry Street" written in 1915 and "Windows on Henry Street" written in 1934. She resigned from Henry Street in 1933 due to failing health after residing there for 30 years. She died in 1940 at the age of 73.

*By Mary Ferguson, R.N., Volunteer*

#### *Additional Reading*

Duffs, Robert. *Lillian Wald, Neighbor and Crusader*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938

Coss, Claire. *Lillian D. Wald: Progressive Activist*. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1989

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# THE PUBLIC HEALTH MUSEUM IN MASSACHUSETTS

## Our Mission

The Public Health Museum is a non-profit educational and cultural museum. The Museum strives to preserve records and artifacts from our nation's public health history; educate the public about the achievements and contributions of public health; and inspire people to build upon the past and continue to advance the future of public health. Our Museum provides a space to explore public health artifacts, inspire future public health professionals, and foster community involvement.

## Our History

Incorporated in 1990 and open to the public since 1994, the Museum has the distinction of being the first of its kind in the nation. Massachusetts has a rich history of leadership and notable firsts in the birth of our nation. In the field of public health, Massachusetts was the first to record vital statistics; the first to implement a sustained board of health; and the first to implement a communicable disease surveillance system, among many others.

## MUSEUM HOURS

Currently closed, see page 1.

~~Wednesdays and Thursdays 10 AM to 2 PM and first Saturday of the month 10 AM to 2 PM~~

## WALKING TOURS

Seasonal (May through October, weather permitting), advanced registration required. Third Wednesday at 6 PM and first Saturday at 10 AM

## ADMISSION

\$5.00 per person for museum  
\$10.00 per person for walking tour

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to others who may be interested in the Public Health Museum.

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