

FORM A - AREA SURVEY

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

Form numbers in this area	Area no.
A-0	1

2. Photo (3x3" or 3x5")
Staple to left side of form
Photo number _____

1. Town Northampton

Name of area (if any) _____

Main Complex

3. General date or period _____

1856-1938

4. Is area uniform (explain):

in style? mostly "Elizabethan"

in condition? mostly "fair"

in type of ownership? yes - Comm. of Mass.

in use? yes - institutional, now mostly vacant.

5. Map. Use space below to draw a general map of the area involved. Indicate any historic properties for which individual reports are completed on Forms B thru F, using corresponding numbers. Show street names (including route numbers, if any) and indicate north. Indicate with an "x" existing houses not inventoried on Form B.



DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE
USGS Quadrant _____
MHC Photo no. _____

6. Recorded by Ed Lonergan

Organization Northampton Historical Commission

Date February, 1981

(over)

7. Historical data. Explain the historical/architectural importance of this area.

The Main Complex contains the Administration Building, ten ward buildings, a rear "working" wing and the Main Kitchen. The core of this complex is the original "Northampton Lunatic Asylum", the third State Hospital in Massachusetts. Dating from the late 1850's this original complex is important both for its historical and architectural associations. Historically, the State Hospital has played a major part in Northampton's development during the last 125 years. The Northampton State Hospital was undoubtedly the largest single construction project ever attempted in the region up to that time; moreover its regional and statewide significance is broadened by the fact that it was and remains the only such institution constructed in Western Massachusetts. On the national level, less than forty asylums were in existence at the time of construction here, and the survival of most of the original structure makes it even more important. Architecturally, the "Elizabethan" style is very rare in mid 19th century buildings and gives the original building national significance.

* * * * *

The first hospital for the treatment of the insane in Massachusetts was the McLean Asylum, a private institution which opened in Somerville, in 1818. Before that, those afflicted had been kept in jails, almshouses, or as "shut-ins" at home. In 1832 the first State Hospital opened at Worcester, this was followed in 1854 by one at Taunton.

In 1854 a commission on lunacy was created through the State Legislature. This was to examine the number and condition of all "the insane and idiots" in the state, as well as their present accommodations, and to propose the best plans for their future management. The major recommendation of this group was that a hospital be established in the western part of the state.

Three years earlier a report from several Western Mass. towns, including Northampton had been sent to the State Commission on site selection for the second State Hospital. The report has stressed the area's salubrity of air, water and scenery. This was of importance inasmuch as the State Legislature had instructed that: the site should be in a healthy, fertile and pleasant section of the country and in the midst of a moral and intelligent community. The natural and artificial scenery should be of an agreeable character; the landscape view should be cheering; and the neighborhood should possess attractive objects for the exercise, excursions, and vistas of the patients.*

8. Bibliography and/or references such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.

Annual Reports: 1856-1940 Forbes Library
1945-1970 NSH Library

Daily Hampshire Gazette: NSH listings in index - Forbes Library

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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Office of the Secretary, Boston

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Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

7. That time Taunton had been selected, but now it was to be western Mass's turn.

In July of 1855 the committee on location of the newly created State Commission on Lunacy visited Northampton. The State Legislature had appropriated \$200,000 for the construction of a third hospital for the insane, and Northampton was selected because of the healthfulness of its location, beauty of its surroundings and convenience of access. The site chosen in town was located on the brow of a hill overlooking the Mill River, over a mile west of the center of town. The property sloped north and east from the brow of the hill to valuable meadowland along the river. In this relatively undeveloped, agricultural area the 100 acre homestead and farm of George Ellsworth and 76 additional, adjacent acres were purchased. This would provide the new hospital with the adequate space for a working farm, as well as the necessary privacy. The land was bounded north by the Mill River, south by the highway (Route 66), west by "Rocky Hill" (now known as the "drumlin") and east by farmer Samule Day's property.

The plans for the 250-patients hospital were drawn up by Jonathan Preston, a noted Boston architect. The hospital was conceived of as a "kirkbride"-type of institution", in which activities were separated and no large structures used. The "Elizabethan" style had been chosen to distinguish this building from the "gloomy and prison-like styles" in which public buildings of this type had been built before. The style, named after Elizabeth I, Queen of England during the second half of the 16th century, and prevalent during that period, had been revived in England about 1830. In America, Alexander Jackson Downing had produced designs in this manner in his highly influential pattern books, however, the style didn't actually catch on until the end of the 19th century. Actual buildings in the style from the mid 19th century were rare, and their preservation even rarer.

The cornerstone was laid on July 4, 1856 amidst much ceremony. The address, delivered by Dr. Edward Jarvis, the author of the 1854 report on "Insanity and Idiocy in Massachusetts", gave good evidence of the respected attitude of the day on the insane: "fit subjects for hospital care, either because their diseases were of recent origin and they could be restored by proper means, or because they were excitable or violent and should have the protection and the restraints of a hospital for their own security and for that of the community". Only forty years before there had been only one hospital in the United States devoted exclusively to the treatment of the insane. This had increased to 37 with four others in preparation by 1855. Northampton was selected mostly due to the "healthfulness of location, beauty of prospect and convenience of access."

It was said that "insanity is one of the most curable of severe diseases", but the insane must be removed from the causes of the malady as they cannot usually be healed at home. Thus, hospitals were the proper place for the insane. It was important to detect the disease early as insanity was thought to be most curable in its early stages. "Insanity, like the common evils of life, should be met and removed promptly."

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7. Under the cornerstone were placed: contemporary documents and paper of Northampton (selectmen's report, school committee's report, newspapers, etc.), a copy of Dr. Jarvis' "Insanity and Idiocy in Massachusetts", a copy of the plans and specification of the Northampton hospital, the first report of the Hospital Building Commissioners, and the report of the "Special Committee of the Legislature appointed to inquire into the expediency of continuing the building, 1856". On a silver plate within the box is inscribed:

The Corner Stone of an edifice for the Third State Lunatic Hospital; established under Act of the Legislature of Massachusetts; passed May 21, 1855; Laid by the most worshipful Winslow Lewis, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge, on the fourth of July, 1856, the 80th anniversary of the Declaration of American Independence. Henry J. Gardner, Governor of the Commonwealth. Commissioners, Luther V. Bell, Henry W. Benchley, Samuel S. Standley. **

Stone for the foundation was drawn from Florence by horses, and the lumber, 2½ million feet in all, was obtained from Samuel Day, the West St. farmer and owner of a sawmill, and from Mr. Williams of Ashfield. Six million bricks were required of local brick yard merchants, Potter Nutting and the Day Brothers. Seven thousand casks of lime for the mortar were supplied by the Berkshire Co. Construction contractors and masons were Robert Mayers and Charles Tufts of Boston. They sublet the carpentry to Colonel Coffin, also of Boston.

The central block was four stories high and capped by a cupola "from which the most magnificent prospect in the Connecticut Valley can be obtained." This was intended for the superintendent's residence and business offices, and contained a large central rotunda.

Three-story wings extended from the main building's northern and southern ends, giving a total length of 512 ft. Each wing was composed of three wards, the first parallel to the facade of the central building, but stepped back; the second a continuation of the first, but stepped back to the west again; and the third set perpendicularly and extending westerly. The wings were segregated by sex, with the males in the north wings and the females in the south wing. Each ward had a dining-room on each floor, as well as an attendants room, sittingrooms and rooms with water-closets, sinks and bath. Nearest the main block were rooms where patients might receive their visitors, as well as rooms for the physically ill patients. Each ward has a

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three-story bay or bow window to bring extra light into the corridors, which were also made very wide. The 74 angular points on the building's outline affords ample means of light and circulation of fresh air.

To the rear of the central block was a rear wing, 105 ft. in length. This contained the kitchen, laundry, chapel and a diningroom and sittingroom for the hospital staff.

Dr. William Henry Prince was appointed Superintendent of the "Northampton Lunatic Hospital" in August of 1857, and oversaw the completion of the construction. On July 1, 1858 the first patient was admitted and by October 1st of that year 228 had been admitted. Of these 16 came from the four western counties, and the others had been transferred from the State Hospital at Worcester and the Municipal Hospital in South Boston. Dr. Prince was assisted by a board of five trustees, and had a staff of five salaried employees - an assistant physician, clerk, treasurer, engineer and farmer.

Within a few years the number of patients rose to 400, the original "maximum".

In 1864 Dr. Prince resigned and was replaced by Dr. Pliny Earle. Dr. Earle had formerly been in charge of the private Bloomingdale Asylum in New York, and had traveled widely throughout Europe and America visiting asylums and had published his observations and studies in several books. His "History, description and statistics of the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane", published in 1843, was the first such publication in this country. In 1860 he served as the expert editor for the U.S. Census "Statistics of Insanity", and wrote an introductory chapter on the causes, treatment, and curability of insanity with a special history of the improvements in this country. Dr. Earle's best known work, "The Curability of Insanity", grew out of his experiences at Northampton, and most of it was first published in the Northampton State Hospital's annual reports. This book was the most extensive collection of statistics on the insane in English and demonstrated the complete fallacy of easy curability. Proper methods were given for reporting recoveries, and other useful statistics.

Dr. Earle served at Northampton from 1864 until his retirement in 1885 at the age of 76, and the institution was completely transformed under his supervision. When he arrived the hospital was in debt and most of the inmates were paupers of foreign parentage (predominately Irish). He believed in labor as a "genial, wholesome and curative exercise", and by employing the patients on the farm, in the kitchen and in the shops, he was able to reduce the cost of their support. By 1868 the hospital was out of debt, and by 1885 enough had been saved from the

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7. boarding price allowed by the state to pay \$200,000.00 in expenses for land, buildings and repairs. During this period it was reported that three-fourths of all the work done at the hospital was done by patients.

At the beginning of the 20th century new ideas and new programs were transforming public attitudes towards the mentally ill. The science of neurology had stressed the need for mental hygiene. Non-institutional programs were believed to hold the key to the problems of overcrowding and purely custodial care. Out-patient clinics were set up in several towns and cities in Western Mass. to make contacts easier. School clinics were also begun, as well as home visits by a physician attached to the State Hospital. This physician also helped procure homes to board out patients and probationary periods away from the hospital were established for many patients.

However these advances couldn't stop the ever increasing admission rate. The State Hospital increasingly became an institution for the elderly, many of them in need of constant care. During the first five years of this century two infirmaries were built, one at the end of each wing's second ward. These were attached to the main complex by long corridors. Further increases in the number of patients led to the construction of two new ward buildings, one at the end of each wing's third ward. These were the final ward additions to this complex. Already, attempts had been made to sell the property, because of the age of the buildings and begin anew. Instead, construction was begun in 1925 on a new complex of buildings on the southside of Prince Street.

The construction of the new Memorial Complex brought the hospital population to over 2000. This was quite beyond the capacity of the old kitchen, located in the Main Complex's rear wing. A new main kitchen and diningroom was constructed in the late 1930's to meet this problem. No longer were patients fed in ward diningrooms.

After World War II there were repeated pleas to replace or renovate the Main Complex, now almost a century old. In the late 1950's a total plan of renovation begun with the South Infirmary. This proved to be so expensive, that it was decided to totally rebuild. In 1962 the final drawings were in process for the first building of this proposed 8 to 10 million dollar replacement complex. These plans were scrapped because of the new federal programs oriented towards Community Mental Health Centers.

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7. The hospitals population peaked at slightly over 2500 in the late 1960's and during the 1970's the process of de-institutionalization caused a steady drop in numbers. The Main Complex was closed except for the administration building and main kitchen.

* Hampshire Gazette - August 26, 1851 p.2

** Address delivered at the Laying of the Corner Stone of the Insane Hospital at Northampton, Massachusetts, Edward Jarvis, M.D., Northampton 1856

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