

History of the Structures and Grounds at Fairhill Center

The United States Marine Hospital (usually known simply as Marine Hospital), located at 12200 Fairhill Road in Cleveland, was built by the United States Public Health Service between 1928 and 1930 on 9.537 acres of land purchased from the Otto I. Leisy Estate.

The Public Health Service had its origin in an act of Congress on July 16, 1798, which authorized the establishment of hospitals for the care of sick and disabled American merchant seamen. America, it was believed, should develop a strong merchant marine to promote commerce and serve as an auxiliary to naval forces in case of war. The first United States Marine Hospital opened in 1804 at the port of Boston. As maritime commerce expanded, additional marine hospitals were built to meet the needs of merchant seamen.

By an act of Congress passed March 3, 1837, the President of the United States was authorized "to select and cause to be purchased, for the use and benefit of sick seamen, boatmen, and other navigators on the Western rivers and lakes, suitable sites for marine hospitals." Such facilities were necessitated by rapidly increasing lake and river commerce. On November 17, 1837, the Medical Board of Marine Hospitals recommended (among others) a site at Cleveland "as it is the terminating point of the Ohio canal, and a central position in its relation to the trade of the lakes, combining to render it a place of great and growing importance."

In 1837, the Federal Government purchased a nine acre tract at the northeast corner of Erie (East 9th) Street and Lake Street (Lakeside Avenue). Following numerous delays, the Marine Hospital was completed and occupied in 1852. The two story stone building was designed by Robert Mills, the preeminent architect of his day (Mills would later design the Washington Monument) and erected by Cleveland architect builder Charles W. Heard. The benefit of marine hospital care gradually was extended to officers and seamen of the Navy and Revenue Cutter Service (later Coast Guard), and officers and crews of the Lighthouse Service. Beginning in 1921, beneficiaries of the Veterans Bureau (later Veterans Administration) were admitted to hospitals of the Public Health Service on a reimbursable basis.

In 1875, the Marine Hospital was leased for twenty years to the City Hospital Association, with the provision that care for sailors be provided at a cost of sixty four cents a day. The Federal Government resumed control in 1895. By 1916, with a capacity of just eighty five beds, the hospital had grown too' small, and its location, with manufacturing plants, railroads, and steamboat wharfs nearby, was deemed no longer suitable for hospital use. That year, Congress authorized the sale of the Marine Hospital; however, the amount (\$400,000) allocated for purchase of a new site and construction of a new hospital proved inadequate. In 1922, the act authorizing sale of the property was amended, designating the entire proceeds for the acquisition of a new site and the erection and equipment of a new hospital. Proceeds from the sale of the old property, purchased in 1837 for \$12,000, more than paid for the \$1.7million cost of the new hospital, including equipment.

The new United States Marine Hospital in Cleveland was part of a major building program conducted under the direction of Dr. Frederick C. Smith, chief of the hospital division of the Public Health Service from 1923 to 1933. During this period, new hospitals or additions were

erected at Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, Galveston, New Orleans, San Francisco, and other ports. The marine hospital at Cleveland was designed under the direction of James A. Wetmore (1863-1946), acting supervising architect of the Treasury Department. (The U.S. Public Health Service was then under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department.) Construction Engineer F. A. Hills, also a Treasury Department employee, supervised its construction. Surgeon W. H. Slaughter was medical officer in charge of the Cleveland Marine Hospital, which continued to serve merchant seamen and veterans at its Lakeside Avenue site during the planning and construction of the new hospital. Slaughter was succeeded by L. P. H. Bahrenburg in 1930.

Built of reinforced concrete, with buff colored brick walls and rusticated granite trim, the hospital consisted of a three story central administration building, an attached four story hospital unit with a capacity of 250 beds, and a two story kitchen/mess unit with a rooftop solarium. A two story brick residence, occupied by the officer in charge, stood immediately west of the administration building. At the rear of the hospital was a grass covered quadrangle with tennis courts rimmed by a series of ancillary buildings that included three story attendants' quarters, two two story nurses' homes, three two story duplex residences for junior medical officers, and two two-story duplex residences for administrative assistants. A one and one half story red brick garage and a two story wood frame stable, erected between 1898 and 1912 as part of the Otto Leisy Estate, were incorporated into the plan, the former for use as an automobile garage, the latter as an auto repair and carpenter shop. (These buildings appear in a 1912 plat map of the site but not in the 1898 Atlas of the Suburbs of Cleveland, suggesting an approximate date of construction.) A small brick service building was added at the rear of the main unit sometime in the early 1930s.

Cleveland landscape architect Albert Davis Taylor was commissioned to lay out the grounds. His plan included a ceremonial forecourt with flagstaff at the hospital's central entrance and a winding entrance drive originating at the corner of Fairhill Road and East 124th Street. The hospital grounds were planted with maples, sycamores, elms, and pin oaks. Taylor's other work included site plans for the Baldwin Filtration Plant, Forest Hills Park, and portions of Lake View Cemetery, all in Cleveland; and for the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

Construction began in February 1928, and the project was slated for completion in September 1929. Owing to labor troubles, however, it was not completed until 1930, a year behind schedule. John Grant & Son of Cleveland was selected as general contractor. On September 17, 1928, union employees of John Grant, together with those of subcontractors J. H. Weise Company and Feldman Brothers Company, called a strike following the importation of non union labor by the Virginia Engineering Company of Newport News, Virginia, the only non union contractor on the job. The deadlock lasted for almost seven months. The Federal Government finally rescinded its contract with John Grant & Son and named the Industrial Construction Company of Lakewood, Ohio, as general contractor. Work resumed on an open shop basis on April 10, 1929, although representatives of the building trade unions continued to picket the job site as work continued.

In June 1929, Surgeon W. H. Slaughter reported to the Surgeon General that the roof of the administrative portion of the main building was ready for slate and that work on the living quarters was progressing rapidly. On July 30, 1929, he reported that practically all exterior brickwork had been completed.

The new Marine Hospital was opened on June 28, 1930. That day, Surgeon General Hugh S. Cumming hoisted the colors in front of the main hospital unit as part of a dedication, in the words of one reporter, "of as great importance to sailors and the Great Lakes merchant marine as the Union Terminal dedication to the railroad world" (Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 29, 1930).

With a staff of fifteen doctors, forty two nurses, and seventy two attendants, the Marine Hospital served merchant seamen, Coast Guard personnel, and veterans. Fifty beds were reserved for psychiatric patients, while the fourth floor of the west wing was devoted to the care of tuberculosis patients, which averaged about twenty five. The hospital also offered outpatient, dental, and ophthalmology clinics.

Probably owing to the Depression, plans for a one hundred bed addition, approved in 1932, never materialized. At the close of the Second World War, the hospital was caring for an average of 267 bed patients daily. But by the early 1950s, that number had declined to 150, and in 1953 Congress voted to close Cleveland's Marine Hospital, along with two others. The staff then counted twelve doctors, two dentists, two dental interns, and forty nurses.

Marine Hospital was closed on June 30, 1953. The buildings and grounds were declared "surplus" and, over the objections of nearby residents, the property was transferred to the State of Ohio for use as a regional treatment center for the mentally ill. (A half dozen other organizations had vied for the property, including Western Reserve University, Doctors Hospital, Polyclinic Hospital, and Columbus developer John W. Galbreath.) The hospital was remodeled to designs prepared by Tichy, Ruzsa, Oley and John F. Lipaj Associates (Cleveland) and reopened in 1956 as the Fairhill Psychiatric Hospital, a unit of the Ohio Department of Mental Hygiene and Correction. About this time the quadrangle with tennis courts at the rear of the hospital was replaced with a parking lot.

In 1973, the main building was remodeled and a new two story addition was erected in front of it to the plan of architect George S. Voinovich. An additional parking lot was built to the east of the hospital, along East 124th Street, an area formerly devoted to lawn and recreational use. The Fairhill Mental Health Center (as it had been renamed) was closed in December 1983.

The former United States Marine Hospital today houses the Fairhill Center. The complex of buildings is significant as an attractive ensemble of Neoclassic style buildings of above average quality. While the main administration building has been compromised by unsympathetic later additions, and three original components of the complex: the brick garage, the residence of the officer in-charge, and one of the administrative assistants' residences have been demolished, the remaining structures are in a good state of preservation. The ancillary buildings retain their original appearance and most original interior features, including hardwood floors, woodwork, and mantelpieces. The generous room sizes of the administrative assistants' and junior medical officers' residences, together with such amenities as front and rear porches and wood burning fireplaces, suggest the possibility that they might again be used for single family housing. Several of these buildings have been restored and are in fact in use as residences.

The former Leisy stable, meanwhile, with its gambrel roof and shingle siding, is notable as a rare survivor. Such outbuildings commonly graced the estates of Cleveland's early industrialists, but few survive today, especially within the city limits. That hospital architect James Wetmore chose to preserve the stable and incorporate it into the campus he planned in 1928 suggests that its quality and utility were recognized even then.

A Note on Otto I. Leisy

Otto I. Leisy (1863-1914) succeeded his father, Isaac, as president of Cleveland's Leisy Brewing Company in 1892. In the late 1890s, he purchased a large tract of land at East Boulevard and Fairmount (later renamed Fairhill) Road from the heirs of Nathan Ingersoll. There, on a picturesque hilltop site overlooking Fairmount Reservoir and Ambler Park, he erected a "Swiss style villa" in 1897 for use as a summer house. Leisy's estate, called "Forest View," appears in the 1898 Atlas of the Suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio. (The area, part of East Cleveland and, later, the Village of Shaker Heights, was not annexed by Cleveland until 1915.)

In 1905, Otto Leisy built a three story brick mansion on the same site. A 1912 plat map shows the Leisy mansion, reached by a winding drive entered at the corner of East Boulevard (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive) and Fairmount (Fairhill) Road. At the rear of the property, the map shows a two story brick auto garage and a two story wood frame stable, with a small tool house sandwiched between them.

Leisy died in 1914 at age 51. Portions of the property were subsequently acquired for use by various institutions, including the United States Marine Hospital, the Sunbeam School for Crippled Children, and East Boulevard School. The Leisy garage and stables were incorporated as part of the Marine Hospital complex; today, only the stable remains. In 1947, the Diocese of Cleveland purchased twenty two acres, including the old Leisy mansion, for the use of St. Ann's Hospital. The Leisy mansion was remodeled for use as a maternity hospital caring for unwed mothers and their babies; "Loretto House" was blessed by Cleveland Bishop Edward F. Hoban on February 22, 1948. A new hospital was completed on the site in 1965, and the Leisy mansion was razed in 1970. In 1973, amid declining birth rates and financial strain, St. Ann's Hospital was sold to Kaiser Permanente.