Information

PENNHURST
STATE SCHOOL

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Welfare
Letter to Parents

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF WELFARE
PENNHURST STATE SCHOOL
SPRING CITY, PENNA.

Dear Parents:

I have prepared this little booklet to assist you in understanding numerous matters related to the Pennhurst State School, such as its location, organization, purpose, program and rules and regulations. While this booklet is prepared primarily for parents and relatives of the children now in the school and on our waiting list, it is hoped that it may likewise prove useful to social and welfare workers throughout the Commonwealth.

It is perhaps appropriate in this open letter to parents to say a few words about the policy of the administration of this institution. Oddly enough in these modern days of psychiatry, there still exists in the minds of many individuals a lingering dread of institutions for the mentally ill, this fear being a heritage from abuses which no doubt did exist in bygone years. But for over a hundred years now, psychiatrists have been treating individuals suffering mental disorders with the same kindness, sympathy, and success as other branches of medicine have been treating disorders of the lungs or stomach. Pennhurst is administered in all its phases with an attitude of sympathy not only for the child but also for the problems of the parents. Not infrequently, the grief of the parent is greater than the unhappiness of the mentally defective child. Every doctor on our staff understands and appreciates the degree of affection which a parent naturally develops for the unfortunate child, and it is our wish to cooperate with parents in the same personal manner as would your private family physician. Furthermore, our extensive experience has taught us to share with you the personal sensitivity you most likely have been caused to feel, due to misunderstanding of the nature and causes of mental deficiency, the wagging tongues of misunderstanding neighbors, or both.

What is mental deficiency, then?

Mental deficiency is a type of human behavior characterized essentially by varying degrees of difficulty in learning, and is due invariably to one condition, namely, an insufficient number of normally functioning brain cells. This diminution in brain cells may have been caused by incomplete development of the brain before or after birth, or by loss of cells in a normal brain due to disease or injury. There are many common medical and surgical disorders which can and do destroy normal brain cells. Brain cells, once destroyed, unlike most other tissues of the human body, will never re-
generate. The treatment of mental deficiency then consists of the education and training of those cells which remained undamaged plus the medical correction of any existing condition threatening the surviving brain cells. A severe and extensive brain damage or deficit is obviously hopeless for training, but the less severe losses often offer considerable hope.

Mental deficiency can thus occur in anyone's child and by no means invariably means that you or your younger is of "bad stock" or is "reaping the wild oats of one of his grandfathers." With the many conditions which can wreck a piece of machinery as delicate as the brain, the real miracle is that we have as many normals as we do in the world.

Thus, if you have left your child at the Pennhurst State School in our care, or are planning to do so, let me urge you to disabuse your mind of needless worry or feeling of parental guilt. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has provided very remarkable facilities of all kinds for the welfare, treatment, and education of your unfortunate boy or girl. If the outlook for the child is hopeless for training, you will be given expert advice to this effect and we shall do all that is medically possible to make him happy and comfortable. And, if the outlook is hopeful, let me say that when you leave your child in our hospital, rather than feel you have sealed his doom, be assured you have probably opened a gate to many opportunities for him. In the following pages, I shall try briefly to set forth a number of them.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

SUPERINTENDENT

Administration Building
Pennhurst State School
(Winter Scene)
Location of PENNHURST STATE SCHOOL

The property of the institution lies in both Chester and Montgomery Counties, but the main body of the institution is situated in Chester County about one mile northwest of Spring City, Pa., being just north of Pennsylvania Highway Route 83. The institution may be reached by rail in two ways: by the Reading Railroad (Philadelphia–Reading–Harrisburg branch), getting off at Royersford, Pa., — this railroad offering more frequent service; or by the Pennsylvania Railroad, the destination being Spring City, Pa. or Pennhurst Station. Taxi service is available from Royersford or Spring City to the institution. There is also a local bus service between Phoenixville, Pa. and Pottstown, Pa. which passes through the institution. The school is very beautifully situated on a large hill about which the Schuylkill River forms a horseshoe bend. The Telephone Number is ROYERSFORD 221.

GENERAL NATURE OF PENNHURST

The Pennhurst State School is a large 800 acre, 2400 bed state-owned and state supported institution devoted to the study, care, treatment, education and vocational training of mentally retarded or defective boys and girls whose parents are legal residents of the eastern half of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The institution is simultaneously a hospital, a school and, in many respects, an almost completely self-operating community. The children at this institution are neither insane nor criminal, although certain mentally defective children may in later years become criminal if their proper placement and management be delayed to long.
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

PENNHURST STATE SCHOOL is owned, financed, operated, and governed by the Department of Welfare of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the offices being located in the capital in Harrisburg. Funds for the institution are ultimately derived from taxation and legislative appropriation and allotment to the Department of Welfare.

THE SUPERINTENDENT administers the institution in all phases of its activity and is responsible to Secretary and other officers of the Department of Welfare as well as to the Board of Trustees of the institution who are appointed by the Governor. He is empowered also to admit or release patients as the occasion may warrant and to make recommendations as to policy and procedure to the Board of Trustees and Department of Welfare for approval.

PENNHURST STATE SCHOOL serves all the counties in the eastern half of the Commonwealth, namely those counties east of the eastern borders of Potter, Clinton, Center, Mifflin, Juniata, Huntingdon, and Fulton counties. All other counties are served by the Polk State School. While counties are no longer financially responsible for their patients at the institution, their Institution Districts or Welfare Agencies continue to be the routes through which patients are customarily admitted to the institution. Each county is allowed to admit a certain quota, or number of patients, to the institution, this quota being based on the relative population of the county as determined by the latest census.

THE DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE of the Commonwealth maintains an agent at the institution, who investigates the ability of parents to contribute to the child's support and who determines what amount a given parent may be able to pay.
Pennhurst

Organization

THE PHYSICAL PLANT

The institution comprises approximately 800 acres of grounds and farm lands, located in both Chester and Montgomery counties, and is divided by the Schuylkill. There are 40 buildings on the institution's property. In addition to the numerous dormitories for the boys and girls, there is a completely equipped modern hospital with wards, operating rooms, pharmacy, x-ray, dental, clinical and pathological laboratories. There is also an administration building, library, laundry, garage, power plant, ice plant, sewage disposal plant, two large and several auxiliary diet kitchens; mattress, tailor, upholstery, woodwork, carpenter, paint and machine shops. The institution, therefore, is to a considerable extent self-supporting, and at present writing the total operating cost per capita is only 67 cents per day.

THE PERSONNEL

Under normal circumstances there are approximately 275 members of the personnel who may be generally divided into three groups, namely administrative, professional and maintenance. All departmental heads are accountable to the superintendent or assistant superintendent who are responsible for the administration of the entire institution. Reports are made in weekly professional and maintenance conferences where matters of policy and practice are discussed and determined.

PROFESSIONAL GROUP

The professional group is composed of the medical staff physicians, director of nurses, dentist and dental hygienists, laboratory and x-ray technicians, dieticians, school principal, some twenty State-licensed teachers, and nurses, attendants, and their respective supervisors, the social service workers, psychological tester, visiting Christian and Hebrew ministers, and athletic directors.

MAINTENANCE GROUP

Departmental heads consist of the assistant superintendent, a steward, accountant, bookkeeper, construction and maintenance engineer, housekeeper, laundry manager, farm manager, storekeeper, and numerous secretaries.

The power plant and adjoining railroad siding is shown above. Pictured below is the professional staff at Pennhurst.
The Patients

PATIENT POPULATION

The patient population is at present approximately 2400 with a waiting list of nearly 1500 due to the fact that the institution is filled to capacity. Boys and girls are about equally divided and live in two separate colonies. Children are admitted between the ages of 6 and 16, i.e., the school age, and while many must of necessity remain institutionalized beyond the age of 16, few remain after 40 years, some other arrangement usually being made with their county for further care. Thus, an opportunity for younger children is made possible.

Funds have at present been appropriated for a building program to meet our waiting list but actual construction must be withheld until the end of the present war.

PATIENT CLASSIFICATION

We do not ordinarily accept or retain patients whose I.Q.'s are above 70, and we urge that such borderline cases be cared for by special classes in their own communities. Our patients present all degrees of mentality, their I.Q.'s ranging from 70 to 0. It is probable that every known cause of mental deficiency is represented at Pennhurst. The children are grouped in various dormitories on the basis of age, sex, I.Q., and physical condition, in the interest of more efficient care and congeniality. At least 90% of these children are perfectly happy the year round.

PICTURED TO THE RIGHT ARE:

Top       Higher grade patients playing volley ball on recreational field.
Center    An outing for girls at the Valley Forge Park Dogwood Festival.
Bottom    Boys playing baseball on school grounds.
Purpose & Program

of PENNHURST STATE SCHOOL

Pennhurst State School is at the same time a hospital and a school, having the dual purpose of providing adequate custody for all patients and of providing all necessary facilities for diagnosis, treatment, education, and training. It is our aim to provide a safe and pleasant home and at the same time try to simulate conditions of the outside world as much as possible, especially for those children whom we hope eventually to restore to society with some measure of self-sufficiency. The entire institution is, in fact, quite comparable to a small city with an adjacent farm.

Approximately one-third of our patients are paralyzed, helpless, and absolutely hopeless for training. For these unfortunates we can render only custodial bed care. In many instances these children could better have been cared for at home and their presence here simply deprives an opportunity for a more hopeful patient on our waiting list. While we therefore discourage the admission of such hopeless cases, every medical and nursing attention necessary is rendered them.

Left  A Winter view of "M" cottage for higher grade patients ... Attendant's living quarters are on the third floor.

Right  Hospital ward for younger children, photographed around Christmas time.
Medical Program

The Hospital

For the hopeful patients each newly admitted child receives the advantages of the following program. Upon admission a comprehensive medical, social and family history is elicited from the parents. Each patient then spends approximately two weeks sojourn in the hospital where physical, neurological, psychiatric, psychological, laboratory, and x-ray studies are completed. On the basis of such studies, the required treatment is prescribed. He is assigned to an appropriate dormitory, and, if educable, is sent to academic school where he may go through the equivalent of the 7th or 8th grade.

The "School"

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT of PENNHURST STATE SCHOOL

While the entire institution in all its varied departments constitutes a school, with every employee acting in some capacity as teacher; the school proper consists of some fifteen or twenty specially trained teachers who instruct the boys and girls in academic, musical, craft, and fine art subjects. Considerable emphasis is laid on weaving, willow craft, sloyd shop work, sewing, and domestic science. The children continue to attend school as long as they are capable of absorbing further training.

Many beautiful and useful articles are made for sale to visitors and relatives; the profit from such sales going to the Children's Amusement Fund, out of which are purchased such little luxuries as Easter eggs, Christmas gifts, party prizes, etc. While all of the various activities of the school cannot be shown here photographically, pictured to the right are classes in singing, grammar, and calisthenics. Craft, basketry, and home economics products are shown on page 17, and the print shop, Bible classes, and Band on page 18.
VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Following his academic training, the Pennhurst Patient may then embark on a program of rotating vocational training. There are some 40-odd livelihoods here, a boy may learn, and some 25 a girl may learn. Card indices showing length of time and proficiency in a given department of the Institution are kept on each patient, and at the end of each period of vocational training, the departmental head, whether farmer, engineer, or tailor, grades him. Ample entertainment and recreation is provided throughout the year, and two religious services are held each Sunday.

Such a program and record system enables us to determine with reasonable accuracy the probable suitability of a given boy or girl for a particular request for outside work parole. If any boy or girl makes good on working parole, he is eventually discharged from our rolls.

The henrery, farm and greenhouse offer three basic vocational opportunities at Pennhurst. Pictured here are a sample of our egg production, a tractor in operation on the farm, and the greenhouse where beautiful flowers as well as vegetable plants are produced in abundance.
The Farm

THE PATIENTS GROW THE FOOD!

The majority of food consumed by patients and employees in the dining room is grown on the school's own farm. Between 35,000 and 65,000 gallons of surplus fresh fruits and vegetables are canned each season for consumption during the winter months. The school has approximately 500 hogs, 3,000 chickens, and a dairy herd of 200.

Above are working patients picking fresh vegetables for the "table" and cannery...and a working patient operating the "corn harvester" in our corn patch. Pictured below is one of the farm buildings...and a patient driving a team, hauling a load of hay.
Harvesting & Canning

at PENNHURST

The school maintains a 16 acre apple orchard, and a number of acres of peach and cherry orchards, as well as several acres of grape vineyard and raspberry patches.

Ripe "Elberta" peaches are being harvested in our peach orchards in the above photograph...and to the right are patients in our girls colony "husking" corn for "table" and cannery. Below is a close-up of a working patient harvesting "Rutgers" tomatoes...and next to it, is a view of our patient operated canning machine in the Pennhurst Cannery.
Research

PROPHYLAXIS and PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is yet an even more consequential role an institution of this type and in this location may play in the interest of public welfare, that of scientific research. The distressing feature of mental deficiency is that most of it should not exist and much of it could be prevented. Better prenatal care, better obstetrics, fewer birth injuries, less prematurity, education against excessively large families, the early treatment of endocrine disorders, the elimination of syphilis, the vaccination against the infectious diseases of childhood, improvement of children's diet, the prevention and cure of meningitis and encephalitis, and public education would undoubtedly reduce the incidence of mental deficiency greatly.

PENNHURST MEDICAL RESEARCH

Our great number of cases and our proximity to one of the world's greatest medical centers render the position of this institution unique from the standpoint of research opportunities. It is the policy of this institution to invite the collaboration of any reputable medical school or hospital in our vicinity in our efforts to combat this pathetic affliction of children and parents alike. And it is our greatest hope that this institution may thus some day become a center for the elicitation, organization, and dissemination of such scientific knowledge as may be required to eliminate mental deficiency.

Shown below is a mass immunization against influenza at the outset of an epidemic. This project arrested a serious outbreak in the girls' colony, which had affected the boys' division the previous week. This medical work was carried out under the direction of the professor of pediatrics of the University of Pennsylvania.

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ADMITTING
A CHILD TO
PENNHURST

Although we have done and will continue to do all in our power to admit emergencies, we invite your cooperation with us regarding unavoidable delays which often occur in even the most urgent cases. At present writing our waiting list is approximately 1500. Recently we have been some what disproportionately populated with hopeless, helpless, and paralyzed children, the bathing and feeding, the medical and nursing care for whom have proved to be an enormous problem. If your child is paralyzed and you have been advised by a qualified doctor of medicine that there is no hope for training, we request you not to urge the admission of this child if he can possibly be cared for at home.

Age Limits—Children are customarily admitted between the ages of six and sixteen, namely the school age. We do not have facilities for the care of infants.

1. Make application for admission through your County Institution District or County Welfare Worker. Most counties have such agencies. These agencies will advise you as to vacancies in the quota of patients allowed the various particular counties at the Pennhurst State School.

They will further aid you in the preparation of formal papers as well as securing the necessary medical and medical examinations by a qualified doctor, and finally, will file application for admission with the superintendent of the institution.

2. Investigators of the Pennhurst State School and Department of Welfare, respectively, will next visit you to be of further assistance and to ascertain the suitability of your child for admission as well as the urgency of the application.

3. Shortly prior to admission, you will be visited or communicated with by an agent of the Department of Revenue, who will explain to you the amount you are legally liable for, and arrange with you as to what you are to pay according to your financial ability. The highest rate is most reasonable, although children of those without income are admitted free of payments.

4. A date will then be set for admission and you will be advised what clothing to bring.

5. There are two types of commitment for patients admitted to this institution, namely the voluntary and the court commitment. The County Institution District or welfare workers will advise you as to which is customary, or desirable.
Rules & Regulations

While it is our policy to preserve to as great an extent as possible the personal and professional touch, rules and regulations are obviously necessary for the efficiency of the institution and the welfare of the patients. Your attention to and cooperation with our regulations are cordially invited.

RULES on Admission

1. PARENTS ACCOMPANY CHILD — Parents or some responsible relative or party are urged to accompany the child on admission in order that an adequate medical history may be taken.

2. DAYS FOR ADMISSION — Except in emergencies patients will be admitted on Mondays and Tuesdays from 9:00 to 11:30 A.M. and 1:00 to 3:30 P.M. Our luncheon hour is from 11:30 until 1:00. Parents arriving at this time may, if they so desire, purchase luncheon at the canteen in the basement of our Auditorium Building.

3. VISITING AFTER ADMISSION — Except in instances of serious illness, there will be no visiting for a period of the first two months following a child's admission. Experience has taught us that this greatly helps the child in adjusting to his new environment and allows the medical staff to proceed with the various studies being carried out on the child in the hospital.

4. YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR — Be sure to ascertain the name of the physician who takes the medical history. He will be in immediate charge of your child and his health and welfare during his institutional sojourn and you will save time and confusion by requesting this physician should you make telephone inquiry regarding the child.

RULES On Correspondence

1. NO ROUTINE LETTERS — While we wish it were possible to write each parent routine letters regarding the child's progress, the great volume of our work renders this impossible. No news may therefore be interpreted as good news. Anything unusual or serious will be immediately reported to you. Your own letters of inquiry addressed to the Superintendent will of course be answered promptly.

2. ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO THE SUPERINTENDENT — All correspondence pertaining to the health, needs or welfare of patients is to be addressed to the Superintendent since all such correspondence from the institution goes out under the Superintendent's signature.

3. Patients are forbidden to write letters for one another.

4. Please do not write to patients other than your own relative.

5. Please do not write letters which will make your child homesick or upset his or her happiness or emotions, and please refrain from sending magazines or other literature on such subjects as love, sex, crime, or horror.

Entrance to one of the boys' cottages.
6. Please obtain permission, in writing, from the Superintendent before speaking or writing to your child about discharge, parole, or vacation. Remember that we have your child's best interest at heart and often there are medical, school, and other reasons why he should best remain at the School.

7. PACKAGES AND FOOD — All packages received will be acknowledged and promptly delivered to your child. Please do not send perishables by mail. The children receive an ample diet of staple food. It is suggested, therefore, that such foods as delicacies be sent or brought.

RULES on Visiting

1. There will be no visiting for the first two months following the admission of a child, except in case of serious illness.

2. There is to be no visiting on legal holidays.

3. Visiting will be permitted at any time in case of serious illness and you will be notified of any critical condition by wire or telephone.

4. The regular visiting days, after the second month following admission, are Thursdays and Sundays from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

5. Please cooperate with us by remaining in the visiting room designated for this purpose and do not ask to visit in the dormitories. We are endeavoring to protect as much as possible the privacy of your child as well as others. Our attendants have been forbidden to give out information relative to the progress or condition of our patients and you are requested not to embarrass the attendant by questioning along these lines. The physician in immediate charge will be glad to interview you concerning any medical problems related to your child. In the event of unusual problems not satisfactorily settled by the physician, the Superintendent will be pleased to see you by appointment.

6. Not more than two relatives at a time are allowed to visit a child who is a patient in the hospital building. Visits in the hospital will be from 9:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. and from 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. in order not to interfere with the luncheon and rest periods.

RULES on Telephoning

1. Please avoid telephoning concerning patients whenever writing would suffice. Besides the present war demands on telephone, the institution covers a large area and not infrequently some delay is encountered in locating the physician by the telephone operator. Moreover, our records on the patient are kept in the Administration building and the physician may need to refer to the records to answer some of your questions.

2. When telephoning concerning patient's condition, request the doctor in immediate charge of your child. This will save considerable time and confusion. If he is unavailable, request the medical officer of the day.

3. If you must telephone, please call between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. When calling over long distance, it is wise to give the long distance operator your name and the name of the patient about whom you are inquiring.
Pennhurst Industries!

The patients of Pennhurst State School under careful supervision produce a variety of attractive handicraft which are available for purchase to visitors and friends. Beautiful basketry, artistic yet practical furniture, hand-loomed and printed cloth are some of the fine products made here at the school.

The photographs portray only a few of the many lovely articles. The good looking willow chair, shopping basket and flower basket were fashioned from willow grown on school grounds. The needle point bench is a fine example of the better craftsmanship. Also pictured is a table setting of food prepared in the home economics class at the school. Woven bed spreads, hand made handbags, and printed table cloths are a few of the many other articles created. Products of Pennhurst Industries are used here in the institution. Rugs and baskets are always in demand in the hospital and the cottages.
Pennhurst Rules --- continued

RULES on Shoes and Clothing

While the Institution itself in many instances provides a number of articles of clothing for the patients, we encourage the parents to supplement these items by donations of clothing to their children. None of our patients in the Institution possess ration books, and when ration coupons are necessary for the purchase of clothing, a letter to this effect should be addressed to the Superintendent.

1. Before admission, a list of needed clothing will be sent you.
2. After admission, you will be notified of additional clothing needed.
3. If you desire to send more clothing, please send washable (cotton) clothing and not silks, rayons or woolens.
4. When visiting, all inquiries regarding clothing, should be referred to the Matron.

RULES on Vacations

1. Vacations are permitted only upon written request to and approval by the Superintendent. Please notify the Superintendent of a proposed vacation at least three weeks in advance.
2. Vacations are not permitted until the child has resided for one year at the Institution.
3. Do not return from vacation any patient who has had or been exposed to an infectious disease while on vacation, without getting a certificate of a qualified physician.
4. The customary times for vacation are the months of July and August and at Christmas time. We do not wish to upset the school or training program for the child, unnecessarily.

RULE on Travelling

All patients must be accompanied by a responsible individual while travelling to or from the Pennhurst State School.

RULES on Funds for Patients

1. Any or all funds sent to a patient should be addressed to the Superintendent of the Institution. You will be issued an acknowledgement of his having received such funds and they will be deposited in the patient's individual account to be drawn upon by the patient as the necessity may arise.
2. Do not present patient with cash when visiting. They are apt to lose it, spend it unwisely, or give it away.
3. PATIENTS' AMUSEMENT FUND—The proceeds of the canteen are devoted to the Patients' Amusement Fund. This fund provides means for their having movies twice weekly, picnics, Fourth of July celebrations, Labor Day events, and other types of entertainment throughout the year.

Four patient activities are shown in the photographs on this page. The Band is one of the most popular and entertaining groups at the school. Bible Classes and Worship Services are a feature of the program of religious education directed by the school Chaplin. Various patients may participate in Tennis under supervision of the physical education department. All institutional printing is produced by the patients, in our own Print Shop. Here PENN HURST INFORMATION was printed on a hand-fed platen "school press", and every word of text was set by hand.
The ultimate object of the education of the trainable patient is that they may become in some measure self-sufficient and self-supporting individuals, dependent neither on their parents or the tax-payers of the Commonwealth. Those who show proficiency in their endeavors at the institution are first paroled. If they succeed on parole, they are then discharged entirely from the rolls of the school.

RULES GOVERNING PAROLE

There are two types of parole: 1. Parole to the parents. 2. Working parole. The latter means that your boy or girl may be provided an opportunity for employment outside the institution in the custody of responsible individuals, where he may earn money, which will be deposited to his account at the institution, and drawn upon as needed.

The photographs on this page are a comparative study of 4 patients of Pennhurst State School. Each panel pictures a boy or girl upon admission to the institution, and to its right, a present day photograph in a parole working situation.
"Pennhurst Information" 

WRITTEN AND EDITED BY JAMES S. DEAN, M. D., Superintendent
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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania . . . Department of Welfare

Design, Photography and Production by Staff Photographer
**Conclusion**

It is hoped that this little illustrated booklet may prove informative and answer many of your questions. For such questions as have not been covered, the proper members of our personnel will be glad to assist you.

Superintendent

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A view of Schuylkill River and surrounding country... from the front of Pennhurst Hospital. Background shows the school farms, where patients work to produce fresh vegetables for the institution's "table" and cannery.

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