

## Hartford Retreat For The Insane

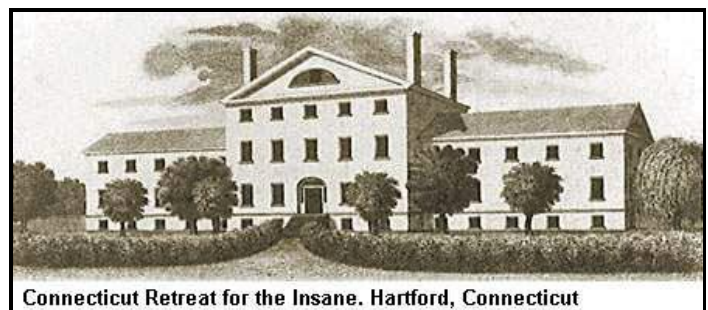
In the early national period, following the Revolutionary War's end in 1783, dependant adults, such as the elderly, disabled, or unemployed, would be cared for by their families within the home. In some towns and cities, the means existed for small almshouses to care for the unfortunate. Communities might also set up programs that contracted out the poor and disabled to labor at whatever tasks they could perform.

The mentally ill could not easily fit into this early American system of family and community care. Options for these individuals typically focused on confinement.

At the outset of the 1800s, during a period of religious revitalization called the Second Great Awakening, concern for the care of dependants became infused with a missionary zeal. The drive to save souls took on special meaning when dealing with the mentally disabled, whose souls, it was felt, would be lost without proper religious attention. Similarly, medical thought on mental illness had begun to shift away from treatment of the body alone.

The Hartford Retreat for the Insane, chartered in 1822, was a prime example of these shifting attitudes towards insanity. The hospital was built in 1823 and was opened to patients in 1824. It was among only four facilities of its kind in the nation and was capable of accommodating 40 to 60 patients who were segregated by 'sex, nature of disease, habits of life and the wishes of their friends.'

Eli Todd was its first director and served the Retreat from 1823 to 1833, setting the tone of care that prevailed throughout the 19th century. Todd represented a generation of transition in mental health.

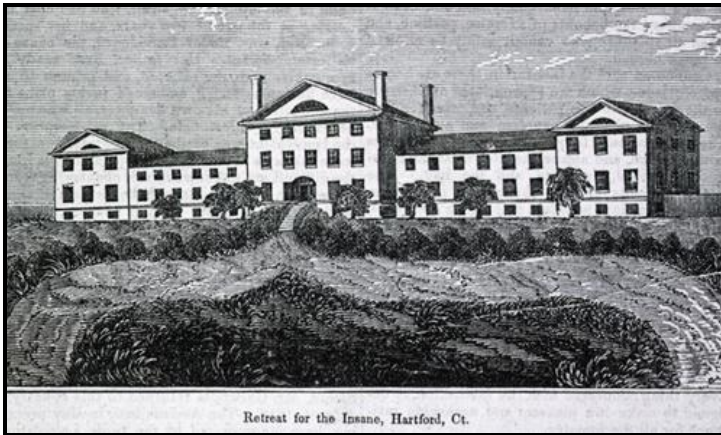


From the time it opened for patients in 1824 to about 1843, the Hartford Retreat was a small, semi-public institution that focused on using a moral curative approach. This included creating a tranquil, kind environment to pacify patients and allow a respite from the hectic pace of the era's social, political, and economic changes. Care givers perceived that through conversation, exercise, relaxation, and above all kindness, patients could be soothed into becoming productive members of society once more.

Shifts in medical thought allowed that mental disorders might well be psychological, and not merely physical, in origin. The Hartford Retreat strove to become a curative, rather than custodial, institution.

In its first 10 years, the Retreat boasted the highest cure rate in the nation and, possibly, the

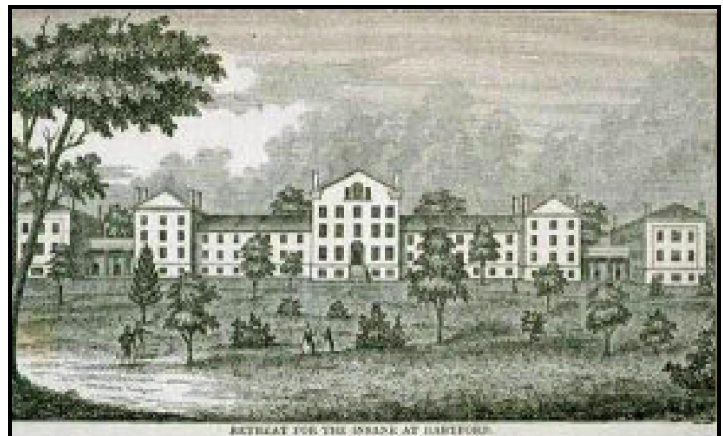
world. Such claims, however, were largely due to the fact that the definition of cured at the time meant a patient had progressed enough to be reintroduced into society; it did not necessarily indicate that a patient's symptoms had ceased.



The number of individuals in Connecticut counted as insane tallied over 700 in 1838, and an increasing number of them were without adequate family care. In the short term, the Hartford Retreat, the only institution of its kind in the state, was expanded and began a much closer relationship with the state as it began to take state-subsidized insane poor as patients.

As the number of subsidized patients grew throughout the 1840s and '50s, the character of the Retreat changed, and so, too, did its financial state. The small, upper-class retreat with 50 beds that Eli Todd had known in the 1820s had become a sprawling institution by the time of the Civil War, and its curative focus had been replaced by a more custodial nature.

The most important change for the Hartford Retreat came in 1868 when the Connecticut Hospital for the Insane opened in Middletown and took in the state's chronically ill and impoverished insane. Relieved of being the sole institution able to assist this population, the Retreat quickly reverted back to an upper-class, resort-like facility.



In the 20th century, the Hartford Retreat incorporated into Hartford Hospital as the Institute of Living and took on a more research-oriented and educational role in the now more advanced mental healthcare field.

*Based on an article by Michael Sturges for ConnecticutHistory.org at [connecticuthistory.org/hartford-retreat-for-the-insane-advanced-improved-standards-of-care](http://connecticuthistory.org/hartford-retreat-for-the-insane-advanced-improved-standards-of-care)*