

SOUTH INFIRMARY AND BEECH TREE PARK



YOU ARE STANDING at a location near the South Infirmary at the end of the South Wing of Old Main, with its entrance and the fountain to your right. Built in 1903 for 20 nurses and 70 physically ill or frail female patients, the South Infirmary eased overcrowding in the old wards and separated patients with contagious diseases like typhoid, tuberculosis, malaria, and dysentery.

An infirmary for males was added to the north side of the main building in 1905. The North Infirmary accommodated 100 patients. The addition of the two infirmaries increased the length of the Hospital's façade to 800 feet (nearly the length of three football fields, end to end).

These beech trees, now dominating Beech Tree Park, are just a few of the stately trees planted on the Hospital's park-like grounds. Other tree specimens included groves of pines, elms and horse chestnuts. The natural surroundings and the scenic vistas of Northampton, the Connecticut River Valley, and the Holyoke Range were hallmarks of the original asylum design which called for a serene resting spot away from the stresses of life. This environment and the Kirkbride plan for the Hospital's buildings constituted the original intent of Moral Treatment for the patients.



THE THREE-STORY SOUTH INFIRMARY had an airing court to the west with enclosed porches above it. Beneath the trees at the left the airing court walls (constructed in 1872) are visible. The southeast corner of the building contained a conservatory where patients raised plants as therapy.

VIEW FROM THE SOUTHEAST OF THE ENTIRE SOUTH WING OF OLD MAIN (circa 1950s) shows the greenhouse and its headhouse (both constructed circa 1870) to the left, at the end of the wing. It also shows the row of beech trees at the southern end of the wing.



INTERIOR OF THE SOUTH INFIRMARY

The numbers of frail elderly female patients increased in the early 20th century, eventually overcrowding this ward.

Three photos above: Moore & Schuleit Haber. Images of America: Northampton State Hospital (Arcadia Publishing, 2014)



BEECH TREE PARK'S ORIGINAL FOUR BEECH TREES standing in front of Old Main's south wing in 2006, just before the building's demolition in 2006-2007.



THE FOUR BEECH TREES IN 2010 at Beech Tree Park, at the corner of Moser Street and Olander Drive.

Beech tree photos: Tom Riddell

