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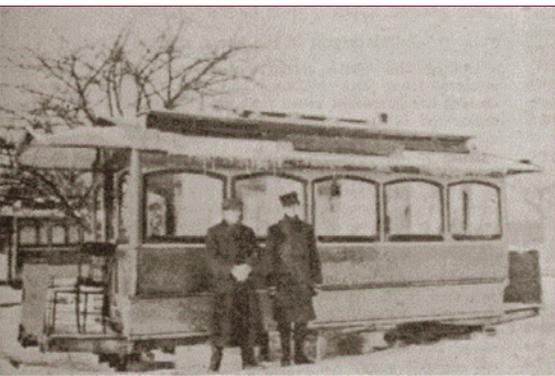
A Century Ago, Fresh Air Camp Opens for Consumptives in Foster

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In June 1903, Rhode Island opened the Pine Ridge Camp for Consumptives in Foster, RI, the first “open-air” treatment facility in the state for those with “phthisis.” Surgeon **WILLIAM HARLAN PETERS, MD**, who began practicing in Providence in 1895, at Rhode Island Hospital and the North End Dispensary, served as superintendent.

There were several consulting visiting physicians and nurses at the camp, treating the 25 to 35 resident patients. The prescription was fresh air, nourishing food and rest.

Pine Ridge was situated on 50 acres of farmland and pine forests, with fresh springs and trout streams. Residents lived in 22 tents, the sides of which were kept rolled up except during storms. An old barn served as a dining



Street cars as living quarters for consumptives, Pine Ridge Camp, Foster, RI.

room, and a woodshed for the kitchen. Residents were expected to pay what they could afford, up to \$7 per week, for this rural retreat. And while the warm days of summer were no doubt pleasant, the winter proved too trying for one gentleman.

The *Providence Medical Journal* Vol. 5 in 1904/’05 carried an article by Dr. Peters on the camp as it sought to



Winter view of a section of Pine Ridge Camp for Consumptives, composed of discarded street cars and lightly built houses, at Foster, RI.

expand and establish winter quarters. Eventually ten pine cabins were built with donations from families who had lost a member to tuberculosis. They had two beds and were heated by coal stoves, which were only lit in the most extreme conditions. Patients were expected to be outside during the winter, on the cabin “piazzas,” talking, reading, and resting, snuggled in woolen, hooded snowsuits, and blankets. At night, the floor-to-ceiling shutters on two sides of the cabin were kept open to allow the fresh air in.

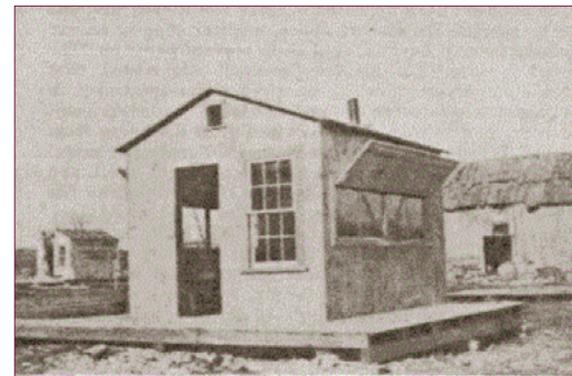
Dr. Peters writes of one patient who arrived on a winter afternoon and left the following morning. “He expected someone to kindle his fire and carry his meals.”

Or perhaps the patient was unaccustomed to breaking the ice in his washstand with a poker and melting it in a saucepan over the coal stove before he could wash.

An administration and recreation building was also erected and the Rhode Island Company donated two unused streetcars, which were transformed into sun parlours and bedrooms. “The consensus of opinion among patients is that they are more desirable than the

ordinary cabin,” Dr. Peters wrote in a *JAMA* article.

In April 1904, he reported that 50 patients were or had been under treatment for periods ranging from two weeks



Cabin at Pine Ridge Camp, Foster, RI.
Cost complete \$150.

to five months; 8 were incipient cases (60 percent cured); 15 were moderately advanced (30 percent arrested), and 36 were far advanced (14 percent showed great improvement).

The following summer 180 applications were filed, many of whom were put on a waiting list as news of the “fresh-air” cure was heralded in local newspapers. ❖