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MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL/CYBER LIABILITY PROPERTY/CASUALTY LIFE/HEALTH/DISABILITY

The Leper Boy of Pawtucket

Mass. leper colony off nearby New Bedford, Mass., refuses to accept patient

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

The newspaper headlines in May 1911 called him the leper boy of Pawtucket or Pawtucket's boy leper. His name was Harry Sheridan. He was 15 years old at the time of his diagnosis, arrived at by doctors at the Massachusetts General Hospital, where his father, Edward P. Sheridan, superintendent of the Lumb Knitting Co. in Pawtucket, had taken him for care.

When news of Harry's leprosy spread, parents in the Darlington, Pawtucket school where the boy was a student became alarmed, although Pawtucket physicians said that "no danger of contagion menaces the other pupils," according to one newspaper report. The school was closed for fumigation and then re-opened.

LEPER'S FATHER DEFIES LAW.

Refuses to Surrender Boy to be Confined in Pest House or Hospital.

Special to The New York Times.

PROVIDENCE, R. I., May 7.—Harry Sheridan, the fifteen-year-old leper of Pawtucket, who was spirited from the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston to his father's home in Pawtucket,

Newspaper clippings from May 1911 told the story of 15-year-old Harry Sheridan, the leper boy from Pawtucket, as they referred to him.

closed for fumigation and then re-opened.

When Harry's father brought him home from the hospital, "or spirited him away," as the *New York Times* of May 8, 1911 reported, four policemen were sent to guard the Sheridan home, barring visitors from entering and Harry from leaving.

LEPER BOY PROVIDED FOR AT PAWTUCKET

After failing to get permission for the admission of Harry Sheridan, the boy leper of Pawtucket, to Penikese Island, the Pawtucket board of health has decided to isolate the lad at the detention hospital farm in that city. This building has been used for pesthouse purposes in the cases of smallpox from time to time, but is now unoccupied. The health board takes this action after receiving from Gov. Pothier a communication that his efforts failed. The boy is the son of Edward P. Sheridan of 85 Kenyon avenue and has been at his home ever since the agitation of his case has been under way. The arrangements for the transfer are not yet made, but will be in a few days. In the meantime the home of the boy is under close quarantine, police officers guarding the doors.

Four siblings inside showed no signs of the disease. The article suggested the Boston hospital and Harry's father could be held liable for bringing "a contagious disease into the state." The father promised to keep him isolated, but this was unacceptable to local and state health officials.

The *Times* further reported that the father refused to adhere to the request by city health officer, **DR. B.U. RICHARDS**, after consulting with **DR. GARDNER T. SWARTS**, secretary of the Rhode Island Board of Health, to try and get Harry admitted to the Penikese Leper Colony located on an island

off New Bedford, Mass., and run by the state of Massachusetts, or, alternatively, to house him at the Pawtucket Pest House for the remainder of his life. The so-called pest house on Brook Street had been used to quarantine patients with smallpox and other communicable diseases, but was unused at the time.

Despite his father's reluctance, The Health Department applied for young Harry to be

admitted to Penikese. The state of Massachusetts did not want to set a precedent in accepting out-of-state patients and declined the request, according to an article in the *Boston Globe*. RI Gov. Aram Pothier tried to intercede with Massachusetts officials, to no avail.

Ultimately, Edward Sheridan had no choice. The boy was removed to the Pawtucket Pest House, which was renovated for his arrival. One newspaper reported Harry was sent to the "newly equipped detention hospital on the Pawtucket City Farm where he will probably spend the remainder of his life in isolation."

The account reported the city hired one medical worker to live there, with Harry's parents allowed to visit once a month.

On June 15, 1911, Dr.

LEPER HURRIED FROM BOSTON
Pawtucket Lad Suffered W.th Disease Four Years
A PUBLIC SCHOOL ATTENDANT

Utter Isolation Except From Persons Similarly Afflicted Awaits Young Son of Wealthy Mill Superintendent —Nature of Disease Revealed After Diagnosis by Experts in Massachusetts General Hospital

Boston, May 8.—Four years a sufferer from leprosy, yet in daily attendance at a public school during all that time, Harry Sheridan, the 15-year-old Pawtucket, R. I., schoolboy whose examination by experts at the Massachusetts general hospital revealed the true nature of his dread disease, now faces the fate of his kind.

Virtually a prisoner in the home of his wealthy parents, about which policemen detailed from the Pawtucket force stand guard, the fact of his having been allowed to return to that city at all has aroused the ire of Dr. Richards, the Pawtucket city physician, who is at a loss what to do.

Swarts issued a report on Harry for public health officials. He noted: "the symptoms of the disease probably date back five years," and described the "type of the disease as nodular and tubercular...affecting the nose and the lips and is quite typical in appearance...the leonine expression is present. Lepra bacilli are present in large quantities in secretions from the nose. The hands are slightly thickened." There is no mention or speculation as to how Harry contracted the disease.

Harry lived the remainder of his life, a mere four years,

tending a garden and a chicken coop on the premises. He died on March 6, 1915, at the age of 19, from "laryngitis believed to have been super-induced by leprosy," according to a report in the *Boston Globe*.

Six years after Harry's death, the Penikese leper colony was abandoned, and the buildings and cemetery demolished. Its thirteen patients were sent to a leprosarium in Carville, La., in a sealed-off train, the locale closer than the only other leper colony in the United States, in Molokai, Hawaii. ❖



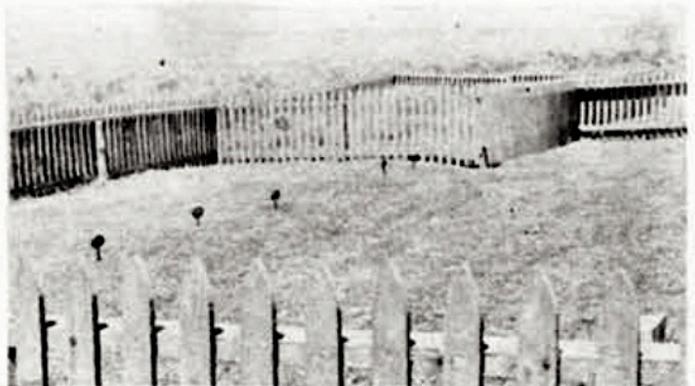
Original farmhouse used by the Agassiz School of Biology, later by the Penikese Hospital as administration building and superintendent's residence. Destroyed by fire in January, 1912.



Second administration building and superintendent's quarters built in 1912 to replace the one destroyed by fire. The annex at the right, added to provide laboratory facilities.



Hospital building (rear view).



Cemetery for leprosy patients.

Photos of the Penikese Island Hospital and leper colony located in the Elizabethan Islands 13 miles off the coast of New Bedford, Mass. It was open from 1905–1921 and administered by the Massachusetts State Board of Charity. The photos were printed in a 1944 report by Herman E. Hasseltine, medical director of the US Public Health Service, entitled: *History of Leprosy in the New England States*.