

Emma Pendleton Bradley Hospital opens in 1931

First hospital in U.S. to treat children with mental health, neurological disorders

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The Emma Pendleton Bradley Home, now hospital, opened in 1931, the first facility to treat children with mental health and neurological disorders in the United States. Its unique history is woven into the medical/business tapestry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the story of a seven-year-old girl stricken with encephalitis. **Emma Pendleton Bradley** (1879–1907)



The Bradley family estate on Eaton Street, home to an earlier treatment facility for children in Providence, was purchased by Providence College in 1926.

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was the daughter of Providence business executive and financier **George Lothrop Bradley**, who worked with Alexander Graham Bell to market the telephone, and his wife, **Helen McHenry Chambers Bradley**, the daughter of a Virginia physician.

Prior to the advent of conventional therapies used today, the diagnosis of encephalitis left Emma with multiple disabilities, including epilepsy, cerebral palsy and severe developmental delays. Her parents traveled the world seeking treatment for their only child, who had round-the-clock aides caring for Emma at



Portrait of Emma Pendleton Bradley.
George Lothrop Bradley (at right)



their summer home in Pomfret, CT. The fields of psychiatry and neurology as they pertained to children were in their infancy, and the couple sought in vain. From their futile quest, a legacy was born.

When George Lothrop Bradley died in 1906, his will contained a bequest that the Bradley family estate in Providence, upon the death of his daughter and wife, become the Emma Pendleton Bradley Home for the treatment of children. Emma died in 1907 and Helen Bradley passed away in 1919. The terms of the will stated it would give preference to poor and needy children from Rhode Island, and families were only billed if they could afford it.

In 1927, the Rhode Island Hospital Trust, which managed the family estate on Eaton Street, sold it and purchased 35 acres of woodland along the Barrington Parkway in East Providence. The Emma Pendleton Bradley Home was officially dedicated on April 8, 1931 during a ceremony in the hospital's Pine Room.

Today, the Bradley family rests in peace in the family plot in Swan Point Cemetery – and 91 years later, their legacy continues to evolve in the children's hospital by the riverside. ❖



Archival photo from the 1930s of the East Providence hospital.

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