

The Jackson Sanatorium Training School for Nurses

The Jackson Sanatorium Training School for Nurses was established in Dansville in 1902 and was fully accredited by the New York State Regents two years later. The school operated successfully until about 1915 when the institution went into bankruptcy.

Although the school was short-lived, it was recognized as a quality training program and offered specialized training in hydriatics (water cures), massage, and the nursing of convalescent and neurasthenic (fatigued and/or depressed) patients. Several graduates of the Training School for Nurses went on to distinguish themselves in the field of nursing and medical administration.

It is not coincidental that a nurses' training school in Livingston County was established here, given Dansville's national reputation as a place for health and wellness. After all, Dansville was the location of the world's largest water cure. It was also where Granula, America's first cold breakfast cereal, was invented, and was the town where Clara Barton founded the first chapter of the American Red Cross.

The 20th century ushered in an era of change as the Jackson Sanatorium was experiencing declining business. Labor-intensive water cures and health resorts in general suffered amid economic distress. As a means of survival, the institution transitioned away from the stringent dietary restrictions and somewhat radical methods of the mid- to late 1800s established under Dr. James Caleb Jackson, the original owner. His son, Dr. James H. Jackson, branched out and embraced more mainstream medical practices and developed the three-year nurses' training program, which prepared graduates to become registered nurses in an effort to meet the demand of the expanding hospital systems in the U.S.

Some practices at the Jackson Sanatorium (renamed the Jackson Health Resort) did not change, however. Exercise, healthy dietary choices, cultural entertainment, and intellectual stimulation were still promoted as keys to wellness. Dr. James H. Jackson emphasized that student nurses must not only be capable of caring for the sick but also be qualified to teach them how to stay healthy - a fundamental philosophy passed down from his father.

Bankruptcy of the Jackson Health Resort ended the nurses' training school but did not end the story of the institution. During World War I, the U. S. Army leased the facility for use as a hospital. The Jackson staff was discharged and the patients were released. A large contingent of Army officers, staff, and Red Cross nurses began arriving November 21, 1918, just ten days after the war ended.

The hospital treated several hundred soldiers. This time period coincided with the height of the Spanish Influenza epidemic and Dansville was not immune to the virus. More than 1,000 residents were infected and several citizens and health workers in the community died as a result. In addition to taking care of sick soldiers, the Army doctors and nurses from the hospital also provided assistance to the Dansville community. By 1920, the hospital closed and the military vacated the property. The remaining veterans were transferred to VA hospitals. The Jackson Health Resort buildings were in rough condition and then eventually sold. The legacy of promoting health and wellness was left to the next generation of owners.

(By Amie Alden, County Historian, 4.2020)