

Morningside Hospital

By Aurora Siegler

In 1883, Dr. Henry Waldo Coe founded Morningside Hospital in three large houses he privately owned in northwest Portland with the intention of treating mentally ill patients. Over the next twenty years, he operated a number of residential treatment homes, including Mindsease, Crystal Springs, and Mount Tabor.

On June 6, 1900, Congress passed a law that allowed the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of the Territories to contract for the care of Alaska's psychiatric patients. Between 1900 and 1904, Alaskans who needed care were sent to the Oregon Insane Asylum (later called the Oregon State Hospital). In 1904, a private contract was signed between the Office of the Territories and the Sanitarium Company (Morningside Hospital) to care for those patients. In January 1904, Coe moved his first Alaskan patients from the state asylum to Morningside's permanent site, a 50-acre, 350-patient hospital at 10008 Southeast Stark Street.

Between 1905 and 1968, approximately 3,500 Alaskan patients—including many Alaskan Natives—were admitted to Morningside Hospital. Morningside also provided emergency hospitalization services for the Portland area, as well as care for other federal beneficiaries, including veterans.

In 1955, Morningside Hospital became one of the first "open hospitals" in America, which meant that it had "no locked wards." Instead, the staff controlled patient behavior through the use of psychiatric drugs.

Also in 1955, Morningside was investigated by the U.S. General Accounting Office regarding financial practices and patient care. The investigation began after Oregon U.S. Representative Edith Green introduced a bill to transfer the care of Alaskan patients to Alaska. The GAO found that from 1936 to 1953, the hospital had received a net profit of \$671,696 and that owner Wayne Coe (Henry's son) had received a salary of \$443,500. Coe, the GAO concluded, "has diverted substantial sums...for the personal use of himself and his family." The GAO also criticized Morningside's internment and burial practices.

As a result of the investigation, Congress passed the Alaska Mental Health Act on January 18, 1956, granting Alaska permission to construct its own mental health facilities.

Another investigation followed. On June 9, 1957, the *Oregonian* reported that "a house government operations subcommittee decided to carry out a full-scale investigation of Morningside" into the deaths of eleven patients between 1948 and 1955. The findings were inconclusive, however, and no charges were filed. Morningside Hospital received full accreditation in 1958.

Alaska did not renew its contract with Morningside Hospital in 1960, and the hospital's Alaskan patients returned to their home state by 1962. Between 1962 and 1968, the hospital took private patients; by 1964, only 135 people were under its care. Morningside Hospital, which was still privately managed by the Coe family, closed in 1968. It was sold to Lenrich Associates, a private contractor, for the construction of Mall 205.

Sources

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The Oregon Encyclopedia

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