

# Fresh air and sunlight for good health



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IN THE 1930S AND 40S, BABY CAGES WERE HUNG OUTSIDE APARTMENT WINDOWS SO THAT INFANTS LIVING IN CROWDED CITIES COULD GET MORE FRESH AIR AND SUNSHINE



This home in Raleigh, NC, like several homes in the area, contains a consumption porch. These second floor porches allowed people who were suffering from tuberculosis to push their beds out onto the porch at night to sleep outside. It was believed that the fresh air helped improve the condition of people with this illness.



All photos c. 1940 from the Connecticut State Library State Archives

Children take advantage of the 7, 100-foot beach that made Westerford a perfect place to get the strong sunlight and ocean air believed necessary to treat tuberculosis.

by Ann Harrison and Mark H. Jones

"The ideal places for treatment of these cases are mountain tops above the cloud lines, and ocean beaches. Connecticut has no mountain tops above the cloud lines, but she has more than a hundred miles of ocean beach."

Such was the argument made by the Connecticut State Tuberculosis Commission in a 1912 report titled "Why Connecticut Should Have a Seaside Sanatorium."

The General Assembly first heeded the pleas of doctors to address tuberculosis on a state level in 1907. It took years of success in Europe of seaside sanatoria before Connecticut invested in the idea. Connecticut made its first appropriation toward fighting the tubercle bacillus in 1910. At the time, tuberculosis killed 252 of every 100,000 people living in the state, making it the leading killer in the state early in the century. After it came cancer and heart disease, which followed with their own specialty hospitals.

By 1934, thanks largely to state intervention and better knowledge of the safe handling of food, tuberculosis killed fewer than 50 of every 100,000. While this rate was favorable compared to adjoining states, it still meant that "about one funeral out of 20 in Connecticut (was) caused by the tubercle bacillus," according to a 1934 report of the State Tuberculosis Commission.

Though pulmonary tuberculosis—affecting the lungs—is now more commonly known, bone and glandular tuberculosis were also widespread, particularly in children, during the early 1900s. The latter form of the disease was characterized by rotting of the bones, enlargement of the glands, and chronic inflammation of the abdomen. Exposure to sunlight and the wet winds of the seashore was thought to alleviate these symptoms, based on the success of heliotherapy, or sunbaths, at facilities in Europe.

When Tuberculosis Commission members, including Chairman Dr. Stephen J. Maher, a New Haven physician, began hearing of success in Europe with exposure not only to ocean air but to strong sunlight, they began searching for a new location in Connecticut to treat children with bone and glandular tuberculosis. The Sea Seaside was established in 1913 in Niantic at the former White Beach Hotel. It had two and a half acres of land and 47 feet of beach.

# Sun & Sea

## Harnessed to Fight TUBERCULOSIS

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, TB patients who could not afford to leave home for a sanatorium tried to achieve the benefits of rest and open-air living, as this woman did by sleeping in a tent on the roof of a New York tenement. The snow mimicked the mountain air of many sanatoriums. (Courtesy of the Chest Collection, Bellevue Hospital Archives)



Some TB patients sought the benefits of sleeping in the open air while living in their homes. This patient's bed was raised off the floor, and she was able to sleep with her head out the window. (Courtesy of the Chest Collection, Bellevue Hospital Archives)

