

## **The Future of the Clock Tower at Worcester State Hospital?**

Rising proudly from a wooded hilltop overlooking Lake Quinsigamond, the soaring stone Clock Tower at Worcester State Hospital is a pre-eminent Worcester landmark. Visible for miles around, it can be seen by travelers on the major thoroughfares of Route 9 and Interstate 290, on MBTA and Amtrak rail lines, by collegiate rowers on Lake Quinsigamond, patients in doctors' offices at UMass Medical Center, and by those looking out toward Worcester from nearby towns. Not only is the Clock Tower an unusually fine piece of High Victorian Gothic style architecture; not only does it help us locate our geographic position; it tells us who we are. In addition to its architecture and its landmark qualities, the Clock Tower is an important physical reminder of the outstanding role that both Worcester and Massachusetts have played in the history of the care of the mentally ill in the United States.

The Clock Tower building was built as the administration building, and the centerpiece, of a large Kirkbride-plan hospital opened in 1877 to relieve overcrowding in the original 1833 Summer Street asylum, which was later demolished. Designed by Boston architect George Dutton Rand, it was recognized in its day as one of the most exemplary hospital projects in the United States. As a nod to its significance, plans for the new building were published in 1876 as a two-page spread in the prestigious architecture journal *American Architect and Building News*, at a time when one-page illustrations were the norm. Built during a period when cities like Worcester were feeding the country's industrial might and the growing reputation of the United States abroad, not only the high style of the architecture, but also the superb quality of the building materials and construction of this monumental hospital complex were clearly expressions of pride. Constructed of local stone, it is a handsome example of the stonemason's art. Costing more than \$1 million, this was the most expensive public project that the state had ever undertaken up to that time.

Located in a park-like setting, away from urban crowding and pollution, the new hospital was built on the Kirkbride Plan, which was accepted as the most advanced design for mental institutions of that time. Both the design of the building and its pastoral setting were intended as therapeutic – offering a pleasant and tranquil environment that would play an important role in a cure. With wings extending in stair-step fashion back from the turreted central administration building, the complex provided individual dormitory segments, each with a family-like common area. Large windows provided views to the landscaped grounds, where patients were intended to have regular access for exercise and the enjoyment of nature.

Upon the urgings of Horace Mann and Dorothea Dix, the original State Lunatic Asylum at Worcester (now Worcester State Hospital) was established in 1830 and opened in 1833 as Massachusetts' first public hospital for the mentally ill. One of the first state-operated mental hospitals in the country, it became a model for the humane care of the mentally ill.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Worcester State Hospital superintendents, staff, and those they trained, played important roles in shaping the direction of mental health care in this country. The asylum's first superintendent, Dr. Samuel Woodward, an instrumental figure in the then new field of psychiatry, was also a founder and the first president of the organization that would later become the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Eight more physicians who had trained or were otherwise associated with Worcester State Hospital followed Woodward as president of the APA during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. From 1895 to 1902, Dr. Adolph Meyer, one of the most influential figures in psychiatry during the late-19<sup>th</sup>-early-20<sup>th</sup>-century period, served at Worcester State Hospital. There he established a laboratory where he produced some of the country's earliest detailed psychiatric patient case histories – embracing combined biological, psychological and social data. In 1900, the first Registered Nurse in the United States, Linda Richards, established a specialized nursing school at the hospital to train men and women as nurses to staff the growing number of mental hospitals throughout the Commonwealth. According to tradition, Sigmund Freud on his only visit to the United States to give a series of lectures at Clark University, visited the institution in 1909 and kept up correspondence with hospital staff. Worcester State Hospital is also significant as the birthplace of the practice of pastoral training, which is still the pre-eminent model for the clinical training of theological students, developed here between 1924 and 1932 by Rev. Dr. Anton Boisen and his colleagues.

In the wake of the “deinstitutionalization” of mental facilities the late 1970’s or early 1980’s, the 1877 hospital complex was closed and for many years was left largely vacant and unused. A section of the sprawling building was destroyed by a disastrous fire in 1991, but fortunately, most of the Clock Tower building and substantial other portions of the complex survived. Yet, they were again left vacant and unused. In 2006 the site was selected as the location for a new mental health facility and in 2008 demolition of most of the remaining hospital buildings began.

Preservation Worcester has worked for years to preserve this imposing 19th century Victorian hospital complex. It was first listed on our Most Endangered Structures list in 1995. Since that time, hospital buildings, including the Clock Tower, have been listed seven times – including the 2011 list.

State and national preservation organizations have also advocated for the preservation of Worcester State Hospital’s Clock Tower. A notice that the building was threatened with demolition appeared in the November/December 2009 issue of *Preservation* magazine, a publication of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 2010 it was also named to the Endangered list of Massachusetts’ statewide preservation organization, Preservation Mass.

Since 2006, when the hospital site was chosen as the location for a new mental health facility, Preservation Worcester, the Worcester Historical Commission, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, representatives of the City of Worcester, and concerned local citizens have worked actively with the Massachusetts Department of Capital Asset Management (DCAM), the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to assure the preservation of the Clock Tower and the smaller 1886 infirmary, the Hooper Turret. Without the advocacy of Preservation Worcester and these other organizations, the Clock Tower building and the Hooper Turret would not be standing today.

A reuse study carried out for the state in 2007 indicated that, as a package, development of the Clock Tower, Hooper Turret, and the Hale Building, a former nurses dormitory, could be feasible if certain criteria were met, including the use of Historic Preservation Tax Credits. At that time, the Worcester State Hospital complex, listed on the National Register as a historic district in 1980, was believed to qualify for the credits. However, in 2008, because demolition to make way for the new complex left only the Clock Tower and the Hooper Turret standing, the National Park Service determined that the structures do not qualify for the tax credits.

On December 5, 2011, the DCAM issued a Development Options Study Update on the Reuse & Redevelopment Feasibility of the Clock Tower Building. That study concluded that redevelopment of the Clock Tower is not commercially feasible. The previous fallback position of preserving the Clock Tower as an architectural monument is no longer being considered a viable option and DCAM is moving forward at full speed to demolish the structure in anticipation of the scheduled opening of the new facility in 2012.

The building needs repair and seismic stabilization for the state to give its approval for the building to remain standing when the newly constructed complex opens. New seismic building code regulations have brought the estimated cost of simply stabilizing and mothballing the building to about \$12 million, much higher than previously believed.

A key Worcester landmark, the Clock Tower at Worcester State Hospital is an irreplaceable physical reminder of the role that both Worcester and Massachusetts have played in the history of the care of the mentally ill in this country. Next to H. H. Richardson’s New York State Asylum in Buffalo (1869-1870), it is perhaps the most significant remaining example in the nation of a monumental Kirkbride hospital tower. It is, without a doubt, the most outstanding surviving example of monumental High Victorian Gothic style architecture in the city. The demolition of this iconic building would represent an irreplaceable loss to the historical memory and the architectural heritage of both Worcester and the Commonwealth.