

New Book by Delaware Researcher Details Lives of Patients during Early Years of Delaware State Hospital

NEW CASTLE (Oct. 23, 2019) – “Remembering Farnhurst: Stories from the Delaware State Hospital, 1894-1920,” a new book by local anthropologist Katherine A. Dettwyler, details the early history of the Delaware State Hospital, now known as the Delaware Psychiatric Center.

Dettwyler spent four years transcribing seven State Hospital ledgers that detailed the admission and clinical notes for than 3,000 patients who were admitted to the hospital between 1894 and 1920. During this time, there were few or no options for the care and treatment of people with many different conditions. The State Hospital cared for people with schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorder, traumatic and acquired brain injuries, syphilis, epilepsy, and cognitive impairments. The State Hospital also served people who were deaf, blind, or had Huntington’s disease, age-related senility, pregnancy-related conditions and substance use disorders.

A searchable database of most of these transcribed records – the 2,648 patients who died before 1969, to comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPAA – is available at: <https://farnhurst.weebly.com/the-ledger-project-database.html>.

“Remembering Farnhurst” took an additional four years to research and write, and includes a brief history of the early years of the hospital followed by 186 case studies of patients who were admitted to the hospital between 1894 and 1920.

Dettwyler said the book is an important resource for reducing the stigma often associated with a mental illness diagnosis or from spending time at a mental institution. It also will assist people interested in family history and genealogy to discover what happened to relatives who often simply disappeared from the records. The case studies provide additional insight into the history of Delaware during this time, and include people from all walks of life.

“For too long, the stories of the patients at a State Hospital like Farnhurst were hidden away, lost, forgotten or inaccessible,” Dettwyler said. “My book shows that every patient came from somewhere; they, had meaningful lives before, during and after their time at the Delaware State Hospital. They were real people, each with their own life story.”

Dettwyler, now retired, is the author of the Margaret Mead Award-winning book, “Dancing Skeletons: Life and Death in West Africa,” as well as three other books. She is currently working on a biography of paleontologist/anti-socialism crusader Marjorie O’Connell Shearon.

“Remembering Farnhurst: Stories from the Delaware State Hospital: 1894-1920” (\$38.95) is available on Amazon or directly from Dettwyler by sending an email to xro2581@gmail.com.