

Kenilworth Sanitarium

The Kenilworth Sanitarium was the creation of Dr. Sanger Brown (1852-1928), a prominent “alienist” (psychiatrist) and neurologist who had trained in New York and London before coming to Chicago in the 1890s to teach at Rush Medical School.

In 1903, construction began on what was intended to be a state-of-the-art facility for the treatment of mental disorders. Completed in 1905 and taking its name from the nearest train station, this large, handsome, three-story building was situated on ten acres at what is now the 2200 block of Beechwood in Wilmette, its grounds extending back to Indian Hill Road. Patients lived in one of six suites, each of them made up of six to seven bedrooms that were specially insulated against noise. The building boasted such modern conveniences as an elevator, electric lighting, and telephones throughout. Some sections were locked down, with bars on the windows, to keep inmates inside; despite such precautions, there were some escapes, alarming reports of which appeared in the newspapers.

According to an early advertisement, Kenilworth Sanitarium aimed to actively ameliorate the sufferings of patients rather than to supply only custodial care “as a mere asylum.” Prominent Chicagoans declared by a judge to require institutional treatment for alcoholism or other behavioral problems were routinely committed to the facility.

After Dr. Brown’s death in 1928, his wife and son took over its management. At some point* after Mrs. Brown died in 1939, the property was sold and became Maryhaven, a Roman Catholic nursing home and retirement center. After Maryhaven moved to Glenview in the late 1960s, the 1905 building was razed and the land subdivided into lots. Yet still today, many older residents of Wilmette and Kenilworth retain vivid memories of the imposing building with the forbidding reputation that once stood at the Village boundary on Beechwood.

Patrick Leary

*Update, 2019: Dr. Edward J. Kelleher, Jr. (1909-1999) was director and chief administrator of the Kenilworth Sanitarium from 1938 to 1947, after which the sanitarium appears to have become Maryhaven. The doctor and his wife, Dorothy, lived in family quarters on the grounds, later moving nearby to 2007 Beechwood. Dr. Kelleher afterward became director of the Psychiatric Institute of the Circuit Court of Cook County. Our thanks to Dr. Kelleher’s niece, Barbara Nevers, for this information.



Advertisement in the Monthly Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine, December, 1905