

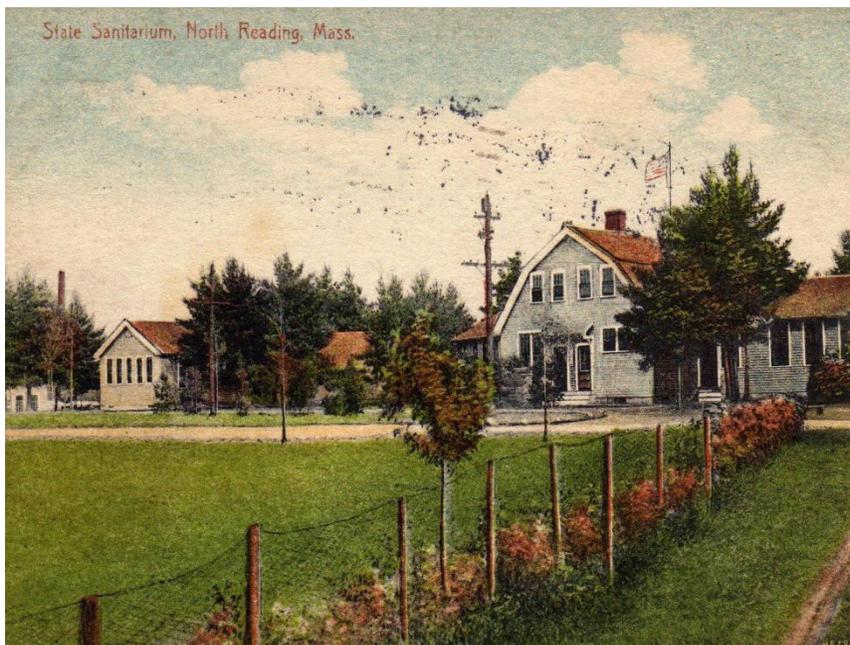
15 Things You May Not Have Known About the North Reading Sanatorium

The Flint Memorial Library hosted a talk about the long-departed sanatorium that was off Lowell Road.



[Les Masterson](#), Patch Staff

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A packed house at the Flint Memorial Library on Tuesday heard about the North Reading Sanatorium that for decades cared for patients with tuberculosis and later cared for mentally ill patients.

Dr. Clarisse A. Poirier of [Merrimack College](#) gave the talk "The Martin's Brook Sanatorium: The History of Care in North Reading and the Commonwealth" that was co-sponsored by the Friends of the [Flint Memorial Library](#), [North Reading Historical and Antiquarian Society](#) and the Mary Rubenstein Legacy Fund.

The event brought out local historians, interested residents and at least two former patients attended the event.

Poirier gave a presentation on the history of the facility and a patient spoke poignantly about her time at the sanatorium in the early 1950s. She also discussed how tuberculosis affected her family. Her mother died from tuberculosis and the former patient spent two stints at the sanatorium because of the disease.

She recently re-read her diary from that time at the sanatorium and spoke positively about her time there.

Sixty years later, the stigma of tuberculosis remains. The former patient doesn't tell friends or family about her previous ailment because she's afraid people will think differently about her.

During the talk, Poirier and the former patient gave a number of facts that North Reading residents may not know:

1. The North Reading was one of four sanatoriums to handle tuberculosis that opened in Massachusetts in 1909.
2. The facility was originally called Martin's Brook Sanatorium.
3. The sanatorium featured 23 structures on 87 acres of land.
4. There was a school for the young patients and a church on the grounds.
5. When it opened, the sanatorium cost patients \$4 a week. Private facilities around the country cost at least double to care for patients with tuberculosis.
6. At the time of the opening and in the coming years, tuberculosis was the biggest killer in the U.S. and around the world. It was worst among people in the prime of their lives, including teens and adults under 40.
7. Doctors initially thought patients were born with tuberculosis.
8. One of the biggest reasons for the tuberculosis outbreak was contaminated milk.
9. One reason the location was chosen for the sanatorium was because of the abundance of fresh air, which was considered a major way to treat tuberculosis.
10. Some of the earliest structures at the sanatorium didn't have walls so patients could enjoy the fresh air. When it got cold or in times of poor weather, staff would put up tarps to protect patients from the elements.

11. The sanatorium was a major employer in the area. The staff increased from 52 in 1920 to 107 in 1930.

12. Patients were split into three areas – positive (those who were contagious with tuberculosis); negative (those with tuberculosis who were not contagious) and down camp (those who were recuperating from their bout of tuberculosis).

13. With fewer tuberculosis cases, the commonwealth transferred the facility to the Department of Mental Health in 1962. The facility was renamed the John T. Berry Rehabilitation Center.

14. The John T. Berry closed in 1995.

15. Many of the buildings were torn down and made way for the Edgewood Apartments on Lowell Road.