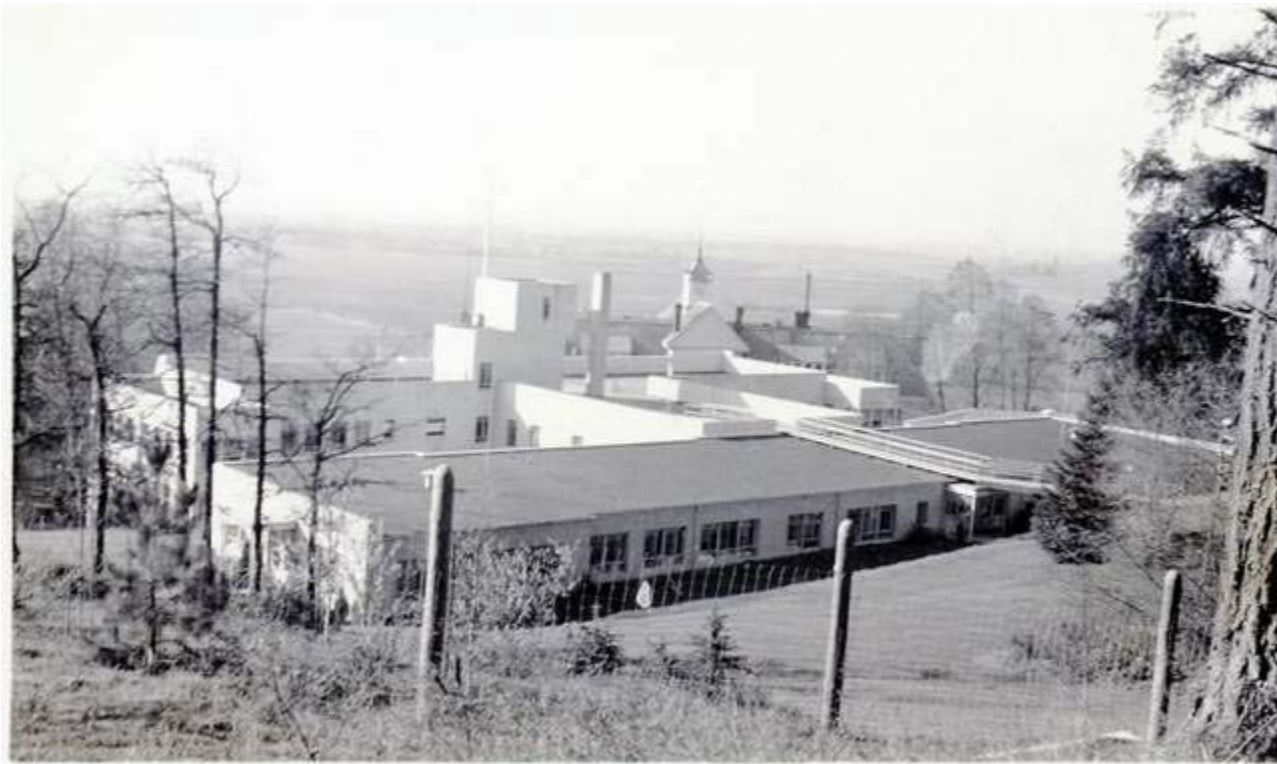


Oregon led the fight against TB with the first State Hospital

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By Amy Vandegrift



This picture from the 1930s shows the Oregon State Tuberculosis Hospital. / Willamette Heritage Center Collection

In 1909, the Oregon legislature joined the fight against a deadly disease that killed thousands of people each year. Many others became sick, were unable to work and needed long convalescence. Oregon established the Oregon State Tuberculosis Hospital. Tuberculosis is a highly infectious disease caused by bacteria and once was a leading cause of death in the United States. It is spread by infected people breathing, sneezing, coughing and spitting on others who inhale the droplets of water that carry the *mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

The hospital was on 149 acres on the present-day site of Corban University. The description in the 1913-14 Oregon Blue Book says the hospital occupied a splendid site commanding a beautiful view of the valley against timbered foothills. There were four buildings, one used for administration, one for an infirmary and two for patients. They were built as the Oregon School for the Deaf in 1894, but it closed and moved closer to Salem in 1897.

Best practices of the day for TB patients were implemented including open-air sleeping pavilions. The TB bacterium is killed by UV lighting. Photographs of the wards show a long row of beds on one wall with the opposite wall of windows that could be opened to let in fresh air. It was known that tubercular patients recovered when they moved to a different environment, given proper nutrition, rest and exercise as well as medical support. Sixty acres of gardens on the site provided patients and staffers with fresh vegetables, fruits, berries and feed for the dairy herd . Greenhouses were constructed in 1922. The gardens later were expanded to 77 acres.

The institution started with a 50-patient capacity. In 1910, it opened with five people plus a small staff. People stayed at the hospital until their disease was in remission and they were well enough to return to their communities. This could take several years. By 1919, the hospital had 150 beds, and 1929, 200 beds. As the medical science expanded the understand TB, new drug therapies were added to treat the disease in addition to surgery. By the mid-1950s, 87 percent of the patients were discharged and able to return home.

As an educational institution, staffers worked to teach residents about TB and its treatment, but more importantly taught prevention and early detection. By the 1960s, the case load of patients decreased and the hospital was closed. Over the 50 years, 8,050 patients were admitted. Most of those patients returned to their communities and to lead active lives thanks to their stay at the Oregon State Tuberculosis Hospital and its staffers.

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