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Dr. Samuel B. Woodward: A 19th Century Pioneer in American Psychiatric Care

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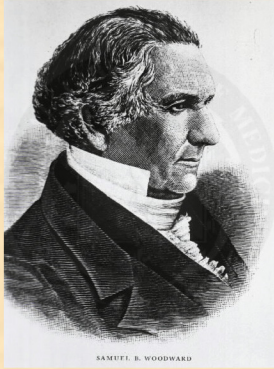
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Dr. Samuel B. Woodward: A 19th-Century Pioneer in American Psychiatric Care

Lamar Soutter Library University of Massachusetts Medical School



Samuel Bayard Woodward
1787- 1850

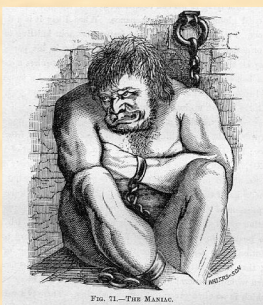
- ▶ Born in Torrington, Connecticut on June 10, 1787; son of a physician
- ▶ “Commanding” appearance: 6’ 2 1/2”, 260 pounds
- ▶ Appointed as Superintendent of the Worcester State Lunatic Hospital in 1832
- ▶ Father of 10 children
- ▶ Survived smallpox 3 times!

- ▶ In 1844 chosen president at the first meeting of the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane (later the American Psychiatric Association)
- ▶ Other activities: Social reformer, general practitioner, prison physician, secretary of Conn. State Medical Society, Conn. state senator, surgeon in the militia, Justice of the Peace, medical examiner for Yale Medical School
- ▶ Retired in 1846 after 13 years as Superintendent
- ▶ Died January 3, 1850 in Northampton, Mass., of a stroke

Treatment of Insanity in the Early 19th Century

Traditional Approach:

- Afflicted usually confined in jails, houses of correction, poorhouses
- Believed to be caused by demoniacal possession resulting from a compact with Satan
- Believed to be a punishment inflicted on an individual for his sins



“Mania” by Charles Bell, 1806

Woodward Embraced a New Approach:

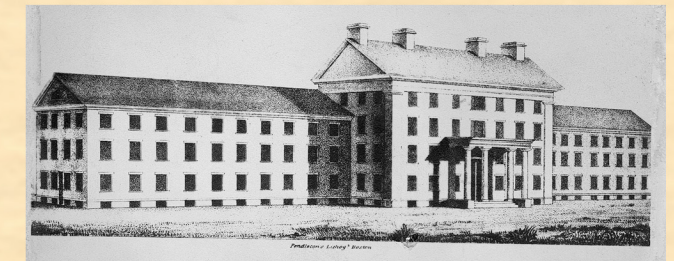
- Believed in “moral therapy”
- Mental illness was a somatic disease that was curable
- Kind, compassionate, individualized care
- Patient respected as a human being
- No threats of physical violence; infrequent use of restraints
- Relied heavily on drug therapy
- Occupational therapy, library, religious exercises, games
- “Curability statistics”: between 82 and 91 percent
- Many former patients wrote to him or visited him

Worcester State Lunatic Hospital Annual Report, 1839

“If there is any secret in the management of the insane, it is this; respect them and they will respect themselves; treat them as reasonable beings, and they will take every possible pains to show you that they are such; give them your confidence, and they will rightly appreciate it, and rarely abuse it.” -- Samuel B. Woodward

Worcester State Lunatic Hospital: A Model for the Country

The crowning achievement of Woodward’s career was his tenure at the State Lunatic Hospital. Although not the first state-supported hospital in the U.S., Worcester became a model for the care and treatment of the indigent mentally ill. By 1844, Woodward was considered a leading expert in the burgeoning field of psychiatry and his hospital a phenomenal success in the recovery of patients once considered incurable.



Worcester State Lunatic Hospital 1833

Hospital or Warehouse?

Eleven years after coming to Worcester, Dr. Woodward became concerned when the Massachusetts legislature proposed expanding the hospital. He felt that the expansion was not as much a testimony to his successes as it was a means to “warehouse” the increasing number of citizens diagnosed with mental illness. Woodward realized that an association of superintendents from the country’s asylums would not only provide for greater legislative clout but would also serve as a means to discuss mutual successes and concerns. From this idea, the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane was formed in 1844. Woodward was elected to serve as the first president. This first U.S. professional medical organization went on to become the American Psychiatric Association.

Excerpt from Case Report

“Mr. ... is in our wing, without chains, associating with our better class of patients, as yet perfectly quiet and peaceable. We well know that the public opinion is very decidedly against ... Mr. __. I found ..., Mr. __, an active, intelligent, artful man, of good natural powers, but very ignorant; more—looked upon as a demon, in fact, been exhibited as a show to the gaze of the vulgar and the abuse of all who felt disposed to provoke or irritate him. The only law that he has known has been the law of force . . . I determined to try the law of kindness, which in an experience of eight years in the ‘Retreat’ and Connecticut State Prison, have found the most effectual control for moral and mental alienation. . . . It is difficult to tell how any man would conduct himself who had been immured in a dungeon twenty years of his life. When he took his seat at our table the first time, he told us that he had not done so before for twenty years ...”

Collected Writings III, Woodward, Essays & Addresses, 1833
Letter to Horace Mann, Esq. from Woodward

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