

# South Oaks: The Growth of A Massapequa Institution

By John H. Meyer

A meeting was held on March 1, 1881 at a private home in the small village of Amityville. A group of concerned men met to discuss plans to form "The Long Island Home Hotel for Nervous Invalids." The hand-written minutes of that meeting are bound in a leather jacket and are still legible and clear. Those minutes contained the following entries:

"There is a need of an institution, such as one that the title indicates. And, it should be especially designed for the

treatment, care, and cure of the masses of nervous invalids, including easy access to them personally and their family and friends who may want to prepare to patronize the Home Hotel. The proposal was unanimously agreed upon, not only as a county and state necessity, but also as an urgent benevolent enterprise. It was resolved forthwith, to organize by the election of trustees."

Among the original founders were David S.S. Sammis, Adolphus G. Bai-

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The brick building with its graceful tall columns no longer stands. Assisted living and condominiums have taken its place.  
Photo by John H. Meyer

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ley, Townsend Co., William Blake, Stephen R. Williams, Prince H. Foster and Daniel J. Runyon. A few weeks later on April 12, 1881, the newly formed trustees had a meeting in the Grand Union Hotel in New York City. At this meeting, they agreed to purchase 14 acres of land in Amityville for the purpose of constructing an institution at a purchase price of \$4,200. In 1903, thirty more acres of land was purchased west of the main building. This new parcel of land offered a cedar grove with a brook that ran from the north and west boundaries and flowed south to the Carman River Grist Mill and the Great South Bay. Now, the properties straddle County Line Road and have both Amityville and Massapequa addresses. According to the minutes, the original land was chosen because of its proximity to the nearby Village of Babylon to the east, where several of the trustees were living, and also because of the "healthful nature of the vicinity that included a cooling bay and ocean breezes and the beautiful countryside."

In January of 1882, the Long Island Home Hotel for Nervous Invalids opened with the first patient admitted on Jan. 26. During that first year, 48 men and 59 women were admitted. Nearly all of the patients during those early years were from either Brooklyn or Manhattan, as Long Island in the early 1880s was sparsely settled.

During 1885, further improvements were made to the main building, including renovations that allowed for an increase in patients from 100 to 125. During a meeting of the trustees in 1887, a vote was taken and passed to shorten the name of the hospital to "The Long Island Home, Ltd." In 1889, the hospital began to provide stage service to and from the Amityville Railroad Station. Top-hatted coachmen were assigned to meet the 12:30 p.m. and 2:11 p.m. trains daily.

For the next several years, the facility went through an expansion program. Cottages were built along with a gymnasium that included a bowling alley and a system of baths. The Long Island Home, as was typical of comparable institutions of that time, put aside large areas of their land to use as farmland. On this land, the home grew a good portion of their vegetables for their daily meals and to preserve for winter months. Also, a barnyard was created that included a barn for cows that provided fresh milk and cream for making butter. Chicken coops and sheds with pens for pigs were built in the barnyard. Sheep and wild

geese, pheasants, ducks and rabbits roamed on the wooded grounds and were dressed by the home's butcher. In addition, two greenhouses supplied beautiful flowers year round.

On Sept. 16, 1908, a fire broke out that severely damaged the main building. The fire raged for hours. Members of the Amityville, Lindenhurst and Farmingdale Fire Departments, along with the home's male employees, finally got the blaze under control. The Massapequa Fire Department wasn't organized until the fall of 1909. All of the patients were taken safely from the building and housed in the cottages on the home's grounds. When the building was reopened, it was equipped with the most updated fire warning and fire fighting equipment available at the time.

During the summer months of 1909, the three-story building in the photo was built. The new building with its graceful tall columns was opened "for women only" and named Norton Cottage, after board member, Washington F. Norton. The cottage that no longer stands was located on Loudon Avenue across from the Sunrise Mall, and was later known as Norton Hall and housed offices and meeting rooms for the home's alcoholism department.

As years passed by, Massapequa became the choice town for many families to settle, creating a need for new roads. In 1932, the state condemned seven acres belonging to the hospital, and 381 trees had to be cut down in order to build the continuation of Sunrise Highway. Until that time the concrete roadway ended at about where the present-day Olive Garden Restaurant is located. This is the reason the hospital grounds were on both sides of the highway. At the present time, the former hospital land on the both sides consists of assisted living and condominium buildings.

In 1952, the Long Island Home's name was changed to South Oaks Hospital and was to be a complete psychiatric treatment center. Searle Cottage, a facility for the aged, was renamed Broadlawn Manor Nursing Home.

In January of 1970, alcoholism clinics were started as a community service. A complete drug abuse program was established in July of 1970 for men and women.

South Oaks Hospital has become a huge part of the Massapequa's and the surrounding communities. Support for local organization's fundraising efforts and the providing of South Oaks guest speakers is handled by their Community Relations Department.