

Oakdale Postcard

Pictured here is a postcard with a photograph of the state tuberculosis sanatorium at Oakdale located just north and west of Coralville. The sanatorium which originally consisted of the three buildings pictured here was opened in February of 1908. It was built by the State of Iowa as a response to the alarming number of deaths resulting from tuberculosis at the time. The facility housed patients infected with the disease and provided treatment for those who had some chance to be cured.

People with tuberculosis came to Oakdale from all over Iowa in the hopes of being cured including the tuberculosis patient who mailed this picture postcard in August of 1912 to a Mr. E.C. Hodges of Waverly, Iowa. Unfortunately, the postcard is unsigned so we don't know who wrote it or what relation they may have been to the recipient but the postcard and the message on the back give us a few clues about the patient's identity. Above the buildings on the left and right the patient has written "men's cottage" and "ladies cottage" respectively. Men and women at Oakdale not only lived in separate quarters but also ate their meals at separate tables only socializing together at special events. "The cross at the right is by my bed," the writer directs indicating the "X" penned over the ladies cottage which tells us that this patient was a woman.

"The white you see is my bed," she continues referring to a small speck of white visible on the porch of the ladies cottage. Exposure to lots of fresh air was part of the treatment of tuberculosis at this time and so patients often spent a lot of time outdoors including sleeping on the large porches around the cottages. In August, the month this patient was writing, sleeping out-of-doors rather than in hot and stuffy rooms was probably welcomed but beds were also lined up on the porches during the winter as well. "The patients...sleep in the open air apartments under enough blankets to keep them warm, which sometimes means nearly a dozen," reported the Iowa City Citizen on February 19, 1908.

This patient goes on with her description pointing out the "X" she has marked over the center building in the photograph. "The middle cross is our dining room. The plants you see is [sic] the garden." Diet was also very important to the treatment of tuberculosis and much emphasis was placed at this time on eating plenty of fresh milk

and eggs. The 280 acre farm that was part of the facility raised its own dairy cows and chickens as well as the fruits and vegetables in the gardens.

Were you or a family member treated for tuberculosis at Oakdale? If so, contribute to the preservation of local history by dropping a note with what you know to us at JCHS, PO Box 5081, Coralville, Iowa, 52241 or e-mail us at leighann@johnsoncountyhistory.org.