



Global Impact of Quaker Mental Health Using Moral Treatment

By 1896, Quaker mental institutions spanned three different continents: the Friends Hospital in North America, the York Retreat in Europe, and 'Aşfüriyyeh, or the Lebanon Hospital for the Insane in Asia. William Tuke's York Retreat laid the groundwork for Thomas Scattergood's Friends Hospital and Theophilus Waldmeier's Aşfüriyyeh.

The impetus to begin the York Retreat occurred after the mysterious death of Quaker Hannah Mills at York Asylum.¹ Infuriated by the horrible conditions of patients and inspired by the Quaker belief that everyone deserved to be treated kindly, Tuke planned a Quaker-run mental institution which opened in 1796.² Tuke's principal philosophy at his new asylum was moral treatment. A novel concept also pioneered by French physician Philippe Pinel around the same time, Tuke's moral treatment involved three key principles, as described in his grandson, Samuel Tuke's *Description of the Retreat*. First, moral treatment discouraged "neither chains nor corporal punishment" unless restraint was absolutely necessary.³ Second, the idea called for "the general comfort of the insane,"⁴ meaning that staff should be treating "patients as much in the manner of a rational being, as the state of his mind will possibly allow."⁵ Third, the philosophy called for patients to be removed from their surroundings and placed in a home-like environment

¹ The Quaker family of Hannah Mills placed her at York Asylum after she exhibited signs of melancholy. Although her family was too far away to visit, nearby York Friends agreed to check in on her. However, the Friends were denied entry, as none of them were blood relatives. Sadly, Mills died shortly after; Charles L. Cherry, *A Quiet Haven: Quakers, Moral Treatment, and Asylum Reform* (Rutherford u.a.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Pr. u.a., 1989), 94-95.

² Cherry, *A Quiet*, 14; Cherry, *A Quiet*, 91.

³ Tuke, "Description of the Retreat," 141.

⁴ Tuke, "Description of the Retreat," 138.

⁵ Tuke, "Description of the Retreat," 158.

where staff could teach patients valuable work habits while also hoping to keep them active and occupied.⁶

In 1799, Thomas Scattergood, a Pennsylvania Quaker, visited the York Retreat while traveling in England. During his stay, Scattergood was profoundly moved by his interactions with the patients, writing in his journal that he and William Tuke “got most of [the patients] together, and after we had sat a little in quiet, and I had vented a few tears, I was engaged in supplication.”⁷ As someone who suffered from depression, the Philadelphia Quaker likely resonated with the struggles of the residents.⁸ Scattergood returned to America in 1800, but his memory of the York Retreat would inspire his future work at the Friends Asylum. At the 1811 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Scattergood approached his fellow Philadelphia Quakers with a proposal for a Quaker-run mental hospital to be built outside of the city.⁹ After four years of planning, the Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason, also known as the Friends Asylum, opened its doors to 19 patients in 1817.¹⁰ Following the practices of the York Retreat, the hospital implemented moral treatment: treating patients with kindness and patience, only restraining them as a last resort, and instilling meaningful habits that promoted growth.

Friends Hospital was not the only psychiatric institution inspired by the York Retreat; Swiss missionary Theophilus Waldmeier opened ‘Aşfūriyyeh in 1896 in Lebanon.¹¹ Although Waldmeier never explicitly said he used moral treatment, he referred to himself as “the Tuke of the Orient” and took inspiration from Tuke and Pinel.¹² People from all across the Middle East traveled to visit the hospital as well as British, French, and African troops.¹³ Similar to the Friends Hospital, ‘Aşfūriyyeh and the York Retreat were deeply interconnected, most notably by the letters exchanged between the two hospitals.¹⁴ But while the institution was founded upon Quaker beliefs, historian Joelle Abi-Rached points out that “the missionary discourse quickly subsided with the death of the founder, supplanted by an anticlerical, secular, and modernizing form of managerial politics.”¹⁵

Ultimately, both the Friends Hospital and ‘Aşfūriyyeh were founded with Quaker beliefs but shifted over time towards more secular scientific approaches to healing.

⁶ “The Female patients in the Retreat, are employed, as much as possible, in sewing, knitting, or domestic affairs; and several of the convalescents assist the attendants,” Tuke, “Description of the Retreat,” 153-155, 156.

⁷ Thomas Scattergood, *Journal of the Life and Religious Labors of Thomas Scattergood, a Minister of the Gospel in the Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, PA: Sherman & Co., 1874), 404.

⁸ Quakers in the World, ed., “Thomas Scattergood,” Quakers in the World, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/145/Thomas-Scattergood>.

⁹ “The subject from the Western and Burlington quarters, respecting a provision for such introduced to the notice of the meeting by reading the reports, it is thought proper to appoint the following friends to take it under further consideration and report to a future sitting,” Cherry, *A Quiet*, 136.

¹⁰ Natalia Gutierrez-Jones and Alison Sielaff, “Friends Hospital Records, 1812-2000,” *TriCollege Libraries: Archives & Manuscripts*, last modified November 2015, accessed June 27, 2023, <https://archives.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/resources/hcmc-1261>; William T. Elkington, Robert H. Chase, and A. G. Scattergood, “Ninety-sixth Annual Report 1913: Friends’ Asylum for the Insane,” 1913, Friends Hospital Records, Haverford College Quaker Special Collections, Haverford, PA, 20.

¹¹ Joelle M. Abi-Rached, *‘Aşfūriyyeh: A History of Madness, Modernity, and War in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), xvi.

¹² Abi-Rached, *‘Aşfūriyyeh: A History*, 4.

¹³ Abi-Rached, *‘Aşfūriyyeh: A History*, 1.

¹⁴ Abi-Rached, *‘Aşfūriyyeh: A History*, 4.

¹⁵ Abi-Rached, *‘Aşfūriyyeh: A History*, 8.