

Department History

Excerpts from Langley Porter Institute and Psychiatry in Northern California: 1943-1975 by Jurgen Ruesch, MD; Published by the Friends of Langley Porter Institute; San Francisco, California, 1978



The fundamental and revolutionary changes that took place in psychiatry in the last 30 years have been reflected on a smaller scale in the development of the Langley Porter Institute, which was conceived in the late 1930s; the cornerstone was laid in 1941, and operations began in 1943. But unlike other institutes that had emerged earlier and had been the orderly outgrowths of the psychiatric and medical trends prevailing in the eastern United States, the Langley Porter was tied to the development of San Francisco and the West?

The natural history of the Langley Porter Institute began with its strategic location that gave it a territory of influence ranging from Mexico City in the south to Alaska in the north, and from Chicago in the east to the Philippines in the west.

The Growth of Psychiatry in the Golden State

Early accounts indicate that the insane were placed aboard abandoned vessels lying in the bay. On October 8, 1849, the town council of San Francisco purchased the stranded hulk of the brig *Euphemia* for \$3,500 and placed it under the authority of the captain of police. The city ordinance authorized the captain "to receive at his discretion any suspicious, insane, or forlorn persons found strolling about the city at night." The *Euphemia* continued to serve as a retention facility for the criminal and the insane until 1851; thereafter the mentally ill were confined in station houses, which were to become the first asylums. The records show that inmates who were insane numbered 14 in 1850, 22 in 1851, 34 in 1852, and 65 in 1853.

The Origins and Development of the Langley Porter Clinic

The first attempt to erect a psychiatric hospital in the Bay Area was made in 1913 and a bill to

this effect was passed by both houses of the Legislature. Insufficient funds, however, prevented Governor Johnson from signing the bill. But the idea did not die. In the San Francisco Examiner of November 24, 1916 there appeared the following entry: "At the next session of the Legislature the State Board of Health will propose a bill carrying an appropriation of \$500,000 for the construction and equipment of a state, psychopathic research hospital to be located in San Francisco as one of the Affiliated Colleges group of buildings and to be conducted as an adjunct of the Medical Department of the University of California under the control and direction of the regents of the university.?" References to this and previous suggestions to build a psychiatric hospital reappeared in the Sacramento Bee of January 18 and March 23, 1917. However, these considerations were drowned in the uproar over the American declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917 and the preoccupation with mobilization. It took an additional 20 years and another world war to finally implement the construction of a psychiatric hospital in San Francisco.



Dr. Robert Langley Porter, Professor of Pediatrics and Dean of the School of Medicine of the University of California in San Francisco in the 1930s, had for a long time hoped that a neuropsychiatric institute would greatly improve the scope of teaching and research on the San Francisco campus. In 1937, he wrote to Gordon Sproul, then President of the University of California, that Harry Lutgens, Director of the Department of Institutions, had available some \$5 million for the erection of two psychiatric diagnostic units - one in Southern and one in Northern California. Porter suggested that it would be in the interest of the university to donate, lease, or sell part of the lot that was originally purchased for the College of dentistry in San Francisco for the erection of a psychiatric hospital.

The plan for the first psychiatric institute in California had been cooperatively conceived by Drs. [Robert Langley] Porter, [Aaron J.] Rosanoff, and [Walter L.] Treadway. It was based upon the idea that prevention, teaching, and research in the field of mental disease would be enhanced if the wealth of clinical experience gained from the approximately 29,000 patients than available in the nine California state hospitals could be combined with the expertise of the staff of a medical school. The cornerstone was laid on April 5, 1941, and the institution was named in honor of the Dean of the Medical School who had done so much for its

planning -- Robert Langley Porter. At the dedication ceremonies on February 13, 1943, Superintendent of the Compton Sanitarium, Gleen E. Myers, read the inauguration address prepared by Rossanoff prior to his death in January of 1943. He remarked that the Clinic was to be devoted to the training of physicians, psychologists, social workers, and nurses working in the field of neuropsychiatry; he stressed a goal of developing cooperation between psychiatry, neurosurgery, internal medicine, and pediatrics, a practice which was to be achieved by the incorporation of a neurosurgical service and a child guidance service into the structure of the clinic

During the summer of 1941, Dr. Carl M. Bowman was offered the directorship of the new facility, assuming simultaneously the titles of Superintendent of the Langley Porter Clinic and Professor and Chairman of the newly created Division of Psychiatry in the School of Medicine.

When Ronald Reagan became Governor of California, a task force of experts recommended the reorganization of all the health services in the state under one department. It also was suggested that the two psychiatric institutes, located in San Francisco and Los Angeles, be transferred to the jurisdiction of the University of California. Thus, on July 1, 1973, The Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute, by an act of the legislature and with the consent of the Board of Regents, was transferred to the administration of the University. The Institute retains its name, but within the University is now known as an "organized activity." Its director no longer reports of the Department of Mental Hygiene and is directly responsible to the Chancellor of the University. In his functions as Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry, he reports to the Dean of the School of Medicine.

Department Chairs and Directors of the Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute

- Karl Murdock Bowman, MD (1943-1956)
- Alexander Simon, MD (1956-1974)
- Leon J. Epstein, MD, PhD (interim 1974-1975, interim 1985-1986)
- Robert S. Wallerstein, MD (1975-1985)
- Samuel H. Barondes, MD (1986-1993)
- Craig Van Dyke, MD (1994-2008)
- Renée L. Binder, MD (interim 2008-2011)
- Lowell Tong, MD (interim 2011-2013)
- Matthew W. State, MD, PhD (2013-present)

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