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### Westport Infirmary to Close Door After Century of Service

The Westport Infirmary will close its doors Friday. The two-story structure located on Drift Road, overlooking Noquochoke River has been used by the town to house its needy for more than a century.

The earliest records available mention inmates admitted in 1841. The first list of inmates was prepared by John G. Gammons, keeper of the almshouse, in 1857. In that list are the names of a half dozen admitted in the decade from 1841 to 1850 and several more admitted in the early 1850s.

Three women who entered in 1841 were still on the list for 1878 when the first of the three died at 74. The second one passed away after spending 56 years at years at the institution. She was 98.

### Children Housed

The list compiled in 1898 still contained the name of the third woman who had entered in 1841.

Included in the lists of inmates were many children ranging in age from 3 weeks to the early teens. They were usually accompanied by their mothers and in one case by both mother and father.

These family groups usually stayed from six months to two years before the children were placed in foster homes or left to live with relatives.

The average number of inmates when records were first kept was around 30 with 60 to 100 persons receiving partial support each year outside of the almshouse.

The requests for outside aid became so prevalent that the Overseers of Poor in 1879 included this notation in their report: "With many persons receiving aid out of the almshouse, the evils of pauperism seems to have become chronic. Some work a little through the Summer, when they can get a job that suits them, relying upon receiving help when worst comes to worst."

### Number Dwindled

The number of inmates dwindled rapidly after the turn of the century and for several years now has averaged only three. Since early Spring only one person has been quartered there. During the 115 years the infirmary was in use more than 15 keepers, or superintendents, as they were later called, were in charge for periods of varying lengths. The institution served other purposes in those early years. Apparently one of its uses was as a penal institution. There are several instances where men were sentenced by the police court to serve time for drunkenness there and one notation shows a man serving three months for neglect of family

Remarks entered by the keeper in the register in 1859, commenting on some of his charges, named one who lived and died a bachelor, worth about \$2,000, in his best days; a second man was described as a once wealthy man who lost his money by drinking and forgery, while a third was described as an old bachelor who loved rum better than food.

A study of the records discloses that the almshouse also doubled as an inn. The earliest mention of travelers seeking shelter was in 1866 and from 1870 to 1880 nearly 500 travelers were admitted for a night's lodging. They came from all over New England and Canada.

Around 100 of these transients gave their residences as England, Ireland, Scotland and Germany. Travelers were listed by name, residence, height, complexion and color of hair and eyes.

### Lodged Tramps

Another activity of the institution was lodging for tramps. They numbered about 40 each year until the turn of the century when they dwindled rapidly away. Tramps were lodged in what was known as the tramp house, a room in the wagon shed, with barred windows and a heavy oak door.

Records show they were expected to do some work the next morning in payment for meals and lodging. Most of them did but occasionally a notation read, "ran away in the morning."

With the advent of Old Age Assistance and Aid to Dependent Children and more enlightened treatment of unfortunate persons, help is being given without suffering the stigma of pauperism.

Westport is following a definite trend of towns throughout the State since more and more each year are disposing of their infirmaries. In many places they are being turned into homes where the aged may live in quiet dignity and where the words of the old poem, "Over the hills to the poorhouse," are no longer a grim reality.