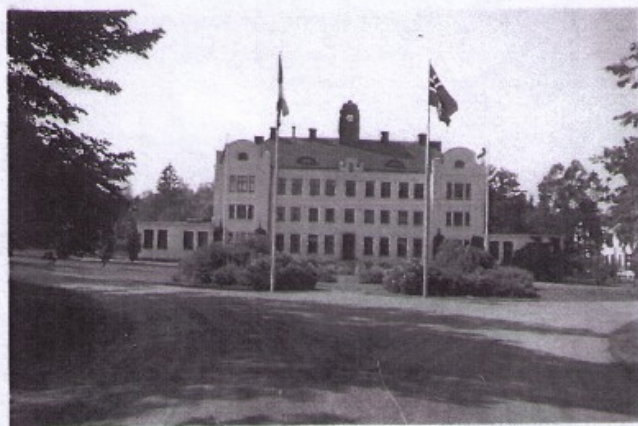


# S:ta Gertruds Hospital

A society within a society.



Welcome to  
**The Museum of Psychiatry**  
Gertrudsvik  
**Västervik**

### At the turn of the last century

the governors of västervik fought the same problems we face today – employment opportunities had to be created and tax revenue increased. When the board of medicine looked for new places to build a state-owned, so-called mental hospital, or asylum, the towns governors worked hard to bring it, to Väster-vik. "You could say that it was the most important thing that happened the town in modern times, and that's when the changes started for real, when they decided on this town for its locale. There came a lot of people to Väster-vik, so this meant a major upswing for the towns commerce." As said by Elof Persson, renowned caretaker, union chairman and City council president, who started working at Västerviks Hospital in 1911. (Source: The book, "Stapelstad" by I. Ahlstedt and L. Glemme)



Västervik. Hospitalet från flygplan.

### The construction started in 1907

after the town had donated an area, scenic and isolated, 4 kilometers north of the town, and the Swedish government granted them about 3 million SEK for the construction of the hospital. It ended up being about 50 buildings erected, 23 gazebos, 12 agricultural structures, accommodations for the staff, a water tower, to mention a few. The hospital became its own little community, and the area was enclosed with high fences.

### **The catchment areas of the hospital**

were in the provinces of Kalmar and Blekinge, Västernorrland (130 locations) aswell as Västerbotten and Norrbotten (110 Locations). The hospital was able to house 800 patients in the early days, but had to expand as demand increased. At its peak, the hospital housed 1500 patients.



**The picture above show patients and 2 nurses, around 1910-1920.**

### **On January 29 1912, the first patient arrived**

It was a 24 year old factory worker from Västervik, that had been sick for 3 years, and accomodated in a cell at the poorhouse. He had become ill "When he caught a cold as he was distressed at sea". Later, more patients arrived, from other hospitals, poorhouses and retirement homes. Those who suffered from mental illnesses in those days, often had it rough. A lot of sick people were mistreated, and were hidden away in their homes, in outhouses, farmhouses and basements, as it was often considered disgraceful to be afflicted by mental illnesses. There were also no decent treatment methods. The state decided to build several new hospitals in the country, to establish better and more humane care for the thousands who were sick.

### Being a patient

The newly arrived who were severely ill, were picked up at the station at Jenny – a district outside of Västervik itself. There they were picked up by horse and carriage, escorted by a länsman (Police) and an attendant (Staff at the hospital)



Interior from Dept. 4, 1938.

**The person first had to take a bath**, his personal belongings were taken and cared for, he was weighed and measured, where after he went to bed in the admissions department. Bed rest was deemed to be strengthening and calming. Work and other occupations were also considered an important form of treatment, and those who could and wanted to participate in various different work. The men handled the agriculture, forestry and different crafts, while the women worked in the kitchens, did the laundry, baked, and sewed. The hospital benefited greatly from some patients, who saw themselves as employees, rather than patients. One patient, for example, asked for a yearly summer holiday from his stoneworking in order to pick, and sell, berries.



**The hospital was divided** into a male side, and a female side. Here you can see the promenade, "the exercise yard" of the womens department 9. In the background you can see a so-called "Sun tent".

### **Another treatment method,**

was "longbaths": Where the patient had to lay in a hot bath for a couple of hours to several days, depending on what was considered appropriate. The rationale was that a hot bath made you calm and tired. There were also a few sedatives, but they had their fair share of negative side effects. At the Museum of Psychiatry you will get to know more about Insuline treatments, shock therapy and lobotomy. When new medication, Hibernal for example, was introduced in the 1950's it helped a lot of patients. And the practice of lobotomizing patients ceased. Many could be discharged from the hospital, exercise yards were torn down and they started with more modern treatments, like group therapy.



### **Being part of the staff**

The medical staff was called "the attendance". Male members of staff went by the name "attendants", and females were "nurses". Some of the attendants had a past in the military, as guard officers and as police officers. At the hospital, a military style of discipline was used. The staff had to wear uniform at all times. In the picture to the left you can see an attendant in winter uniform. The personnel lived in the hospital area, with their own accommodations, or in the wards. In the early days, the staff had to apply for furlough in order to leave the hospital area.

**The attendants could be issued all manner of work.**

A lone attendant could be left to tend to a ward of 40-50 patients, while the remaining attendants labored outside. An attendant should not only have to tend to the patients, but also perform agricultural work, act as handymen, gardeners, ditchdiggers and hauling coal from freighters in the docks.



As the hospital worked like a small society, there had to be functioning agriculture, forestry, gardens with greenhouses and orchards, lumberyards, saws, Machinery with boiler and turbine rooms, waterworks and watertower. There were kitchens, bakeries and laundryrooms, who served the patients aswell as the staff. The piggery was a model house, with about 150 pigs. The slaughtering of the animals was done at the hospital. A joinery, a painters shop, tailor shop, weaving hall, cobbler, upholsterer, bookbindery, brushmaker, fire department, masons and stoneworkers, nightguards and doormen, were available aswell. Designated so-called "economipersonal" managed the operation, with the help of attendants and patients. They also had their own church, priest and cemetery. A place to dance, a ballroom, library and a field for sports, were later added. In 1934 St Gertruds athletics club was founded. However they lacked a school, midwife and a place to buy alcohol.



**It was uncommon for the chronically ill to receive visits from their next of kin.**

Many patients had not seen their place of birth since their internment. A man asked his doctor if he could return home and look after his cabin, but was told that there wasn't enough gasoline for that purpose, due to the current crisis. He took the matter into his own hands and fled, but was taken into custody, and placed in a detention center in Ishult. Two attendants came by car (!) to pick him up. And, understandable, his comment was "So now they've got gas, the bastards!". There was a nurse who could not forget a women, who, when hearing praise about the weather, exclaimed: "The sun shines for those who are outside, but not for us within...."



## **The Museum of Psychiatrics**

is since 2002 housed in a former ward from 1911, that was restored to its original condition. There's an elevator to the first floor.

**The museum is run by The Museum of Psychiatrics Support association**, which is a nonprofit association founded in 1989. All work at the museum is nonprofit, even the guided tours. The council of Kalmar account for the premises. Membership in the association is open to anyone. The annual fee is 50 SEK for a single person, and 75 SEK for families. The fee is deposited at Bankgiro (5741-8337). Don't forget your name and address!

**If you'd like a guided tour as a group**, even if it's outside of our regular business hours, contact the museum via telephone (0490-86572) during our opening hours. We can not, however, offer guided tours outside our opening hours between 14/6-31/7, outside of special circumstances. We're usually open a couple of weekends per year, in may of this year, we were open during "Turista hemma" (Tourism at home) a local event that show the many activities the town has to offer. These weekends are often advertised in local newspapers.

Read more about the museum on our website [www.psykmuseet.se](http://www.psykmuseet.se) there you'll also find travel directions.



## **The museum of Psychiatrics**

### **Opening hours:**

**Thursdays 14-17**

**Closed on weekends.**

### **Entrance fees:**

**Adults: 30 SEK**

**Children: Free.**

A more in-depth chronicling of the hospital can be found in the book "Sankta gertruds Sjukhus—ett samhälle i samhället" (Saint gertruds hospital – A society within a society" written by the study circle "Gräv där du står" in 1989. It's available for purchase at the museum for a 100 kr. There are also art posters available, depicting the administration building (The so called "Ettan"), done by the artist, Benny Ekman, who currently lives and operates in Väster-vik. The posters are sold for 50 kr.