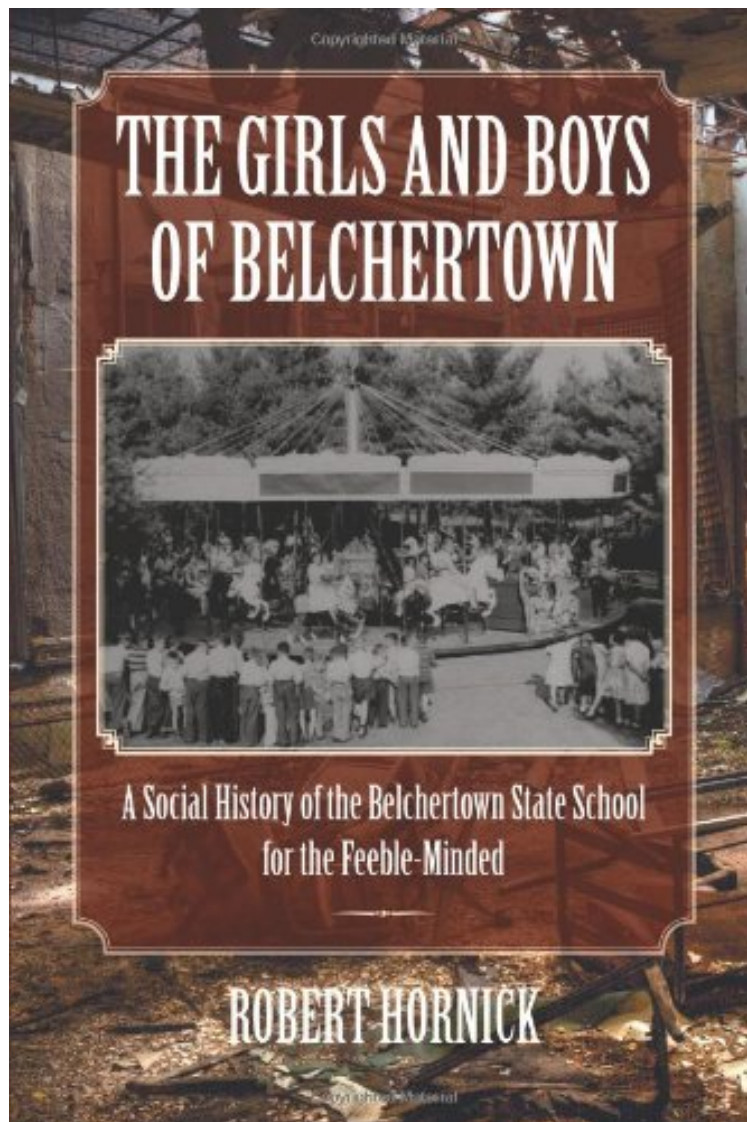


(Download) The Girls and Boys of Belchertown: A Social History of the Belchertown State School for the Feeble-Minded

The Girls and Boys of Belchertown: A Social History of the Belchertown State School for the Feeble-Minded

Robert Hornick

**Download PDF | ePub | DOC | audiobook | ebooks*



DOWNLOAD



+

READ ONLINE

#1119815 in Books Univ. of Massachusetts Press 2012-06-19 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.50 x 6.00 x .501, .83 #File Name: 155849944X224 pages | File size: 60.Mb

Robert Hornick : The Girls and Boys of Belchertown: A Social History of the Belchertown State School for the Feeble-Minded before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Girls and Boys of Belchertown: A Social History of the Belchertown State School for the Feeble-Minded:

26 of 26 people found the following review helpful. Excellent History of Belchertown State School By Sharon

Flanagan-Hyde "The Girls and Boys of Belchertown" is a well-researched history of Belchertown State School for the Feeble-Minded and its relationship with the small Massachusetts town that courted its establishment and served as its namesake in 1922. Robert Hornick carefully chronicles the perspectives of school administrators and staff, the economic interests of townspeople, the school's educational and custodial practices, a shocking exposé of human rights atrocities, and the school's final closure 70 years after its founding. More significantly, he skillfully connects the demise of this particular institution to the attitudes and beliefs that informed broader 19th- and 20th-century U.S. public policies on the education and control of people who were variously labeled imbeciles, morons, and mentally retarded. In 1962, my parents "placed" my three-year old sister Mary Jean at Belchertown State School. Admitted with a diagnosis of severe mental retardation, Mary Jean remained a "resident" until 1978, when she was relocated to a community group home as a result of a class action and reform efforts that eventually led to the departure of the last residents in 1992. Throughout my childhood, every other weekend our family drove four hours round-trip to visit Mary Jean at Belchertown. By unearthing obscure archival records and conducting interviews with now elderly Belchertown State School former residents and attendants, Hornick has made a substantive contribution to the field now called intellectual and developmental disabilities. He animates the historical facts with details that match my childhood memories: Elvis Presley's voice incongruously blaring from the loudspeakers of a carousel on the school's grounds, the intimidating granite steps of the administration building, the one-month waiting period before family could visit a newly admitted resident. In the 1970s, James Shank's six-part series "The Tragedy of Belchertown" in the Springfield Union set off a storm of official inquiries and outrage at the abuse suffered by the school's residents. The stench of urine and feces and the sight of people sitting half-clothed or naked repulsed visiting legislators and fueled calls for increased funding, staffing, and policy reform. These were smells and sights I experienced regularly during my childhood visits. I grew up immersed in the tension between my parents' acceptance of the prevailing medical wisdom that they had no choice but to keep Mary Jean in Belchertown, and their overwhelming guilt that the third of their five children bit her wrists to the bone, constantly beat her head against walls, and slept in a cramped, dirty room with three dozen screaming, violent young girls. Hornick doesn't flinch from these facts and at the same time, explores the actions and decisions of parents, families, direct-care staff, and administrators in the context of the larger social, political, and public policy arenas. Anecdotes from former residents and attendants reveal nuanced and complex relationships. There is incontrovertible evidence that overworked attendants physically and emotionally abused their charges; there are also stories of employees pooling resources to host holiday and birthday parties for residents. In April 1973, a class action on behalf of Belchertown State School residents was assigned to U.S. District Court Judge Joseph L. Tauro. After reading the complaint, Tauro arranged an unannounced visit to the school with his law clerk, the plaintiffs' attorney and a plaintiffs' representative, and a Massachusetts assistant attorney general. After their nine-hour visit, including the building in which my sister Mary Jean lived, Tauro concluded that conditions existed as expressed in the complaint. Hornick includes a quote from Tauro that chills me, because the judge could have been speaking about my sister: "... I didn't think it would be possible for the commonwealth to come up with ... any sort of expert opinion that would convince me that little girls are supposed to drink out of urinals, that there are supposed to be welts all over people's bodies, that there were supposed to be feces all over the floor, that people were supposed to be unclothed, writhing around in obvious pain." Six months after Tauro's visit, the parties signed a historic consent decree. My sister, as a member of the class, will benefit from its provisions for the rest of her life. Belchertown State School is now closed, but its existence continues to affect the lives of countless individuals. Hornick's excellent and engaging history provides a welcomed context for the wide-reaching personal and policy impacts of Belchertown State School.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An important work about one of our 20th century institutions

By AdNet1 Robert Hornick has done an excellent job of presenting this history of the former Belchertown State School in Massachusetts. Like other institutions of its time, Belchertown began with good intentions, but eventually fell into abuse and neglect, a hell-hole for its residents. What I admire about Hornick's work is its even-handedness. He neither exaggerates nor conceals. He is both sensitive and sensible about his usage of the term "retarded." He presents a readable, well-annotated, balanced perspective about one of our important 20th century social institutions. Anyone with a mentally disabled family member or friend, those who work with this population, those who legislate regulations and fund budgets, and those with an open mind will learn from this book.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Institutional history at its best

By Paying Guest Institutional history at its best: the life and death of a concept, "the feeble-minded," and an institution for those referenced by the concept, originally conceived in 1848 to improve the lot of family members often kept like animals with bars and stanchions--as in Robert Frost's "A Servant to Servants." Their educability was a new idea, one which faded with the fears of neighbors--especially the fear of breeding and undermining the race or as it would come to be seen, the gene pool. Occasional irony, as when the legislature debated purchasing the land for the State Farm-School, "The prospect of two cellars full of fresh manure there for the taking carried the day." Law Professor Hornick's account of the legal cases leading to the shutting of the school is precise and intricate, to a layman. The law seemed to reflect the changing ideas of "handicap" and "mainstreaming." The school's college-like campus and farm productivity, as well as production in rugs and scarfs and shoe repair, should impress.

During much of the twentieth century, people labeled "feeble-minded," "mentally deficient," and "mentally retarded" were often confined in large, publicly funded, residential institutions located on the edges of small towns and villages some distance from major population centers. At the peak of their development in the late 1960s, these institutions frequently called "schools" or "homes" housed 190,000 men, women, and children in the United States. The Girls and Boys of Belchertown offers the first detailed history of an American public institution for intellectually disabled persons. Robert Hornick recounts the story of the Belchertown State School in Belchertown, Massachusetts, from its beginnings in the 1920s to its closure in the 1990s following a scandalous exposé and unprecedented court case that put the institution under direct supervision of a federal judge. He draws on personal interviews, private letters, and other unpublished sources as well as local newspapers, long out-of-print materials, and government reports to re-create what it was like to live and work at the school. More broadly, he gauges the impact of changing social attitudes toward intellectual disability and examines the relationship that developed over time between the school and the town where it was located. What emerges is a candid and complex portrait of the Belchertown State School that neither vilifies those in charge nor excuses the injustices perpetrated on its residents, but makes clear that despite the court-ordered reforms of its final decades, the institution needed to be closed.