Timeline of the Mennonite Mental Health Movement

1910: Bethania Hospital in Russia is established as the first Mennonite psychiatric hospital.[1]

1937: Bethesda Hospital, the second Mennonite mental hospital, formally opens in Canada.

October 1937: The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America surveys its member churches regarding the possibility of opening an institution for the mentally ill and determines the level of interest to be insufficient.[2]

June 1942: The first CPS mental hospital unit opens at Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia.

May 1944: The Mental Hygiene Program (MHP) is formed out of the CPS unit at Byberry by Harold Barton, Leonard Edelstein, Willard Hetzel, and Philip Steer.[3]

September 1944: Ralph C. Kauffman, a psychologist from Bethel College, joins Harold Barton from the MHP in leading a conference at Sideling Hill to discuss "Improving Our Contribution to the Patients and the Institutions". Conference participants including Paul Goering, Eugene Weed, Loris Habegger, and Arthur Jost join in recommending surveys to gauge the opinions of Mennonite churches and CPS workers in mental hospital units.[4]

December 1944: On behalf of the General Conference, Henry A. Fast proposes to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) the need for a program of care for mentally ill Mennonites.[5]

February 1945: Robert Kreider, director of CPS hospital units, organizes a symposium titled "Should the Churches Establish and Maintain Hospitals for the Mentally Ill?" in which the majority of participants are in favor of developing a church mental hospital.[6]

May 1945: Robert Kreider writes "The Opportunity of the Church" for the *Anniversary Review* from the Harrisburg State Hospital calling for a Mennonite mental health program on the basis of the CPS hospital experience.[7]

June 1945: MCC appoints P. C. Hiebert, H. S. Bender, and Robert Kreider to form a Mental Hospital Study Committee (MHSC) to assess the need for and practicality of developing Mennonite mental hospitals.[8]

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[1] Vernon Neufeld, ed., *If We Can Love: The Mennonite Mental Health Story* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1983), 19.

[2] Ibid 21.

[3] Steven Taylor, *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 274.

[4] Alex Sareyan, *The Turning Point: How Persons of Conscience Brought About Major Change in the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1994), 192; Robert Kreider, *My Early Years: An Autobiography* (Ontario: Pandora Press, 2002), 367.

[5] Neufeld 32.

[6] Ibid 25.

[7] Titus Bender, "The Mennonite Mental Health Movement and the Wider Society in the United States, 1942-1965," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 29 (2011), 49.

[8] Ibid 33.

December 1945: The MHSC reports a "growing consensus" favoring a Mennonite mental health problem and explores options including psychiatric wards in general hospitals.[9]

March 1946: Bertran Smucker visits Bethesda Hospital on behalf of MCC and reports, "The whole spirit of this hospital is in the tradition of a genuine, warm Christian family in contrast to the harshness of a huge state mental institution."[10]

April 1946: The MHSC's supplemental report recommends the establishment of smaller institutions and greater involvement with the national mental health movement.[11]

October 1946: MCC employee Elmer Ediger proposes that Leitersburg, a MCC-owned farm in Maryland, be considered a possible location for a Mennonite rest home.[12]

December 1946: Elmer Ediger and Arthur Jost meet on behalf of MCC with Harold Barton, William Keeney, and Richard Hunter from NMHF to seek their opinion and advice on the Leitersburg proposal. NMHF encourages the proposed facility to focus more on "active treatment" in place of "custodial care".[13]

January 1947: MCC appoints a committee composed of Orie Miller, Titus Books, Paul Nase, J. Harold Sherk, E. C. Bender, H. A. Fast, and Henry R. Martens. This committee, which eventually becomes Mennonite Mental Health Services, is charged with guiding the planning process for three Mennonite mental hospitals, one each in the eastern, central and western United States.[14]

December 1947: Renowned psychiatrist Dr. Karl Menninger participates in an MCC advisory meeting titled "Homes for the Mentally Ill".[15]

January 1949: The first Mennonite mental hospital in the United States opens at Brook Lane Farm, built on the Leitersburg site in Hagerstown, Maryland.[16]

Summer 1949: MCC opens a service unit at Topeka State Hospital in Kansas, with Ralph and Evelyn Lehman serving as unit leaders.[17]

September 1950: Jacob Goering joins staff at Brook Lane Farm as a psychologist.

February 1951: Kings View Homes formally opens in Reedley, California.[18]

May 1952: Lancaster Conference opens Philhaven Hospital in Lebanon, Pennsylvania.[19]

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[9] Bender 49; Mennonite CPS Bulletin Vol. IV No. 17, page 2.
[10] Bender 48.
[11] Neufeld 34; Bender 49.
[12] Neufeld 34; Bender 49.
[13] Neufeld 34, 58.
[14] Neufeld 36; Bender 50.
[15] Bender 52.
[16] Neufeld 57.
[17] Sareyan 228-9.
[18] Neufeld 77.
[19] Ibid 99.

July 1953: MCC Mental Health Study Conferences in Chicago and Philadelphia reflect on the progress of the Mennonite mental health program and conclude with recommendations for future development.[20]

May 1954: Prairie View Hospital opens in Newton, Kansas.[21]

October 1963: President Kennedy signs the Community Mental Health Act, opening up opportunities for greater access to government funding and recommendations.

November 1956: Penn Foundation for Mental Health is dedicated in Sellersville, Pennsylvania.[22]

September 1963: Oaklawn Psychiatric Center is dedicated in Elkhart, Indiana.[23]

July 1966: The first patients are admitted at Kern View Community Mental Health Center and Hospital, an offshoot of Kings View located in Bakersfield, California.[24]

1968: Prairie View is honored with the Gold Award from the American Psychiatric Association.[25]

1971: Kings View is honored with the Gold Award from the American Psychiatric Association.[26]

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[20] "Mennonite Central Committee Mental Health Study Conference," MCC files.
[21] Neufeld 123.
[22] Ibid 145.
[23] Ibid 163.
[24] Ibid 185.
[25] Ibid 137.
[26] Ibid 92.