

## Blistering, bleeding, ice cold baths: The 'moral' treatment of patients in America's first 'progressive' private asylum founded 200 years ago

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- Philadelphia Quakers founded in 1813 the first private mental hospital in the United States, The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason
- This was in response to the way mental institutions at the time were treating their patients by allowing visitors to pay to watch them restrained behind bars
- The Quaker asylum practiced a progressive method of care that came to be known as 'moral treatment', but some of its manifestations could be cruel

By [JORDAN GASS-POORE FOR DAILYMAIL.COM](#)

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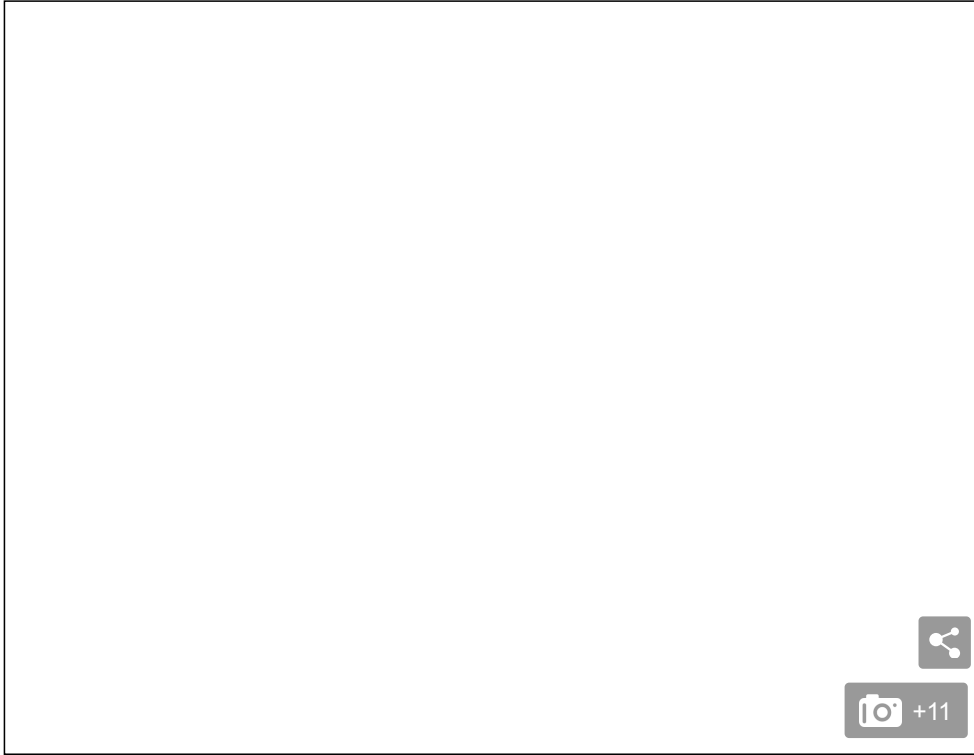
For a shilling or two, those in the 18th-century could visit Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane to gawk at patients restrained with shackles and iron collars in underground basement cells. Once inside, the public teased, mocked and sometimes even objects at the patients, who would react violently.

Mental institutions worldwide allowed public visitors to watch patients dispersed in cells as a means of raising hospital income. This became a circus-like tourist attraction for government officials, the wealthy and educated classes, who supported the hospitals. The highest traffic was seen during the Easter and Christmas holidays, where swarms of people came to be 'humbled', as one

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century visitor to London's Bethlem Royal Hospital, more commonly known as Bedlam, described their experience. This may have been great entertainment for some people but not for the Quakers.

These public displays offended the moral sensibilities of the Quakers who preached that God dwells within every person, regardless of mental illness. Unlike their contemporaries who saw insanity as a form of demonic possession, the Quakers believed that those with mental health problems could be cured if treated with respect, equality and love.



Philadelphia Quakers founded in 1813 the first private mental hospital in the United States, The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason, now called Friends Hospital

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**The Quakers, shown in this sketch during a religious meeting, believed that those with mental health problems could be cured if treated with respect, equality and love**

It was this belief that led the Philadelphia Quakers on March 15, 1813, to found the first private mental hospital in the United States, The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason. Although the asylum was just 12 miles away from Pennsylvania Hospital, they hoped their progressive treatments would set them in a world apart from the hospital.

Four years later the institution admitted its first patients, most of whom were diagnosed with mania, defined at the time as 'full derangement of the understanding'. Other patients were locked up for a range of conditions, including alcoholism, dementia and incontinence. But due to the asylum staff's lack of medical knowledge and subjective nature of its records, it's difficult to form a complete picture of the patients.

To care for these 'deranged' individuals, the Quakers began practicing a progressive method of care that came to be known as 'moral treatment', which eschewed corporal punishment for patients and advocated treating them with respect, so, they laid the foundation for modern psychology in the country. But asylums still followed some horrific medical conventions of the day: they dumped ice water onto patients and repeatedly shocked them – once they worked out how to use the electrical machine.

In the 18th century, patients with mental illness were often housed in jails and almshouses. When dedicated settings like Pennsylvania Hospital did exist, they provided little care and frequently used physical coercion, including chains to restrain

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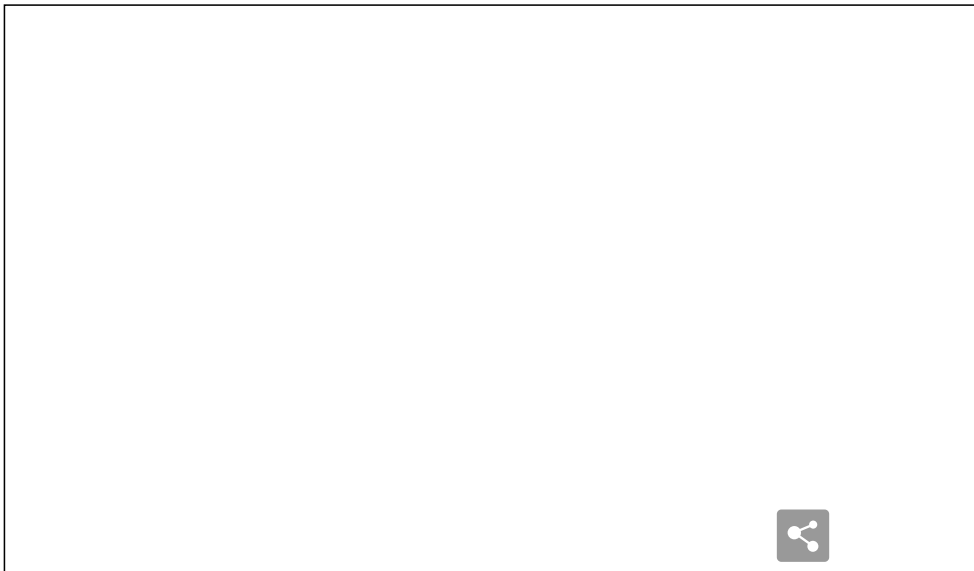
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patients, said Dr David Roby, who worked at the asylum, now known as Friends Hospital, and serves as a member of its foundation.



The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason practiced a progressive method of care that came to be known as 'moral treatment', but some of this treatment's manifestations could be cruel



This graph represents the number of patients that were at the asylum between 1817 and 1834

About 10 per cent of all admissions in Pennsylvania Hospital were for mental illness, said Dr Roby, and treatment was 'certainly a very different thing than the "light in all people"' belief the Quakers shared.

Treatments once considered state of the art and now considered horrifying – blistering, electroshock therapy and cold-water baths – were commonly used at Pennsylvania Hospital and other psychiatric hospitals worldwide to treat a variety of maladies. And although The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason sought to provide compassionate care for its patients, staff were often above using these experimental treatments on patients who were incontinent or manic.

'They still used fear as a method of treatment to some degree,' said Sarah Hays with Haverford College, which houses the asylum's archive.

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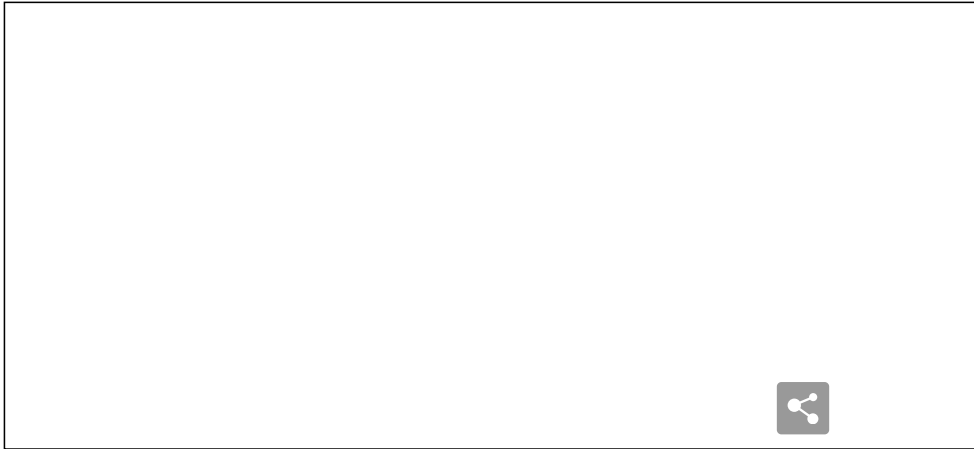
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At The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason, family, friends and staff were the only people allowed to visit the patients, known only in records by their first name and surname initial to protect their privacy. Walking the asylum's halls during the 18th century visitors may have found some patients' shaved heads dotted with small, raised pustules. These were caused by plasters made from dried-up bodies of Spanish flies. Doctors worldwide believed this treatment would 'burn out' illnesses, Horowitz said.

This treatment was carried out by the asylum's first superintendent, Isaac Bonsall, who despite his lack of medical training administered the blisters on patients like 'Penelope N', who was admitted to The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason on October 11, 1822, for unknown reasons.



**The asylum was run by Isaac Bonsall, who despite his lack of medical training administered treatments, including blisters, bleeding, cold baths and electroshock therapy on patients**



**Blisters were caused by plasters made from dried-up bodies of Spanish flies (the animals are shown in this sketch). Doctors worldwide believed this treatment would 'burn out' illnesses**

When Penelope N's mother protested that she didn't want the asylum to shave her daughter's beautiful hair to apply a blister to her head, Bonsall replied scathingly 'if [she] wished no means to be used for her recovery [she] had best fit up at their house and secure her there.'

Medical therapies, such as blisters, were part of Bonsall's vision for an asylum to cure patients suffering from a variety of mental illnesses, and was meant to bleed out the excess blood causing a patient's insanity as well as distract them from their 'disordered' thoughts.

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Bonsall's attempts to cure patients extended to the use of electricity to treat insanity. He received an 'Electrical Machine' in 1817, but couldn't operate the unusual device until an acquaintance taught him three years later.

As soon as the Electrical Machine started working, Bonsall started to use it on the patients at The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason, Horowitz said. He began with the class of patients who caused the asylum the most trouble: 'Nathan Y', who was incontinent, and 'Benjamin W', who was admitted for an unknown reason.

Presumably, the patient held on to the Electrical Machine's glass column as the metal arm with a thin rod attached made contact with the rotating cylinder. The intensity of the shock depended on the vigor with which the handle was turned.

Bonsall forcibly performed electrical therapy on Nathan Y to prevent him from soiling himself, after he confiscated his pants and forced him to wear a petticoat. While Bonsall's treatment worked for a little while, it didn't prove to be a lasting solution. Nathan Y spent three years at The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason before dying in a fever epidemic, uncured.

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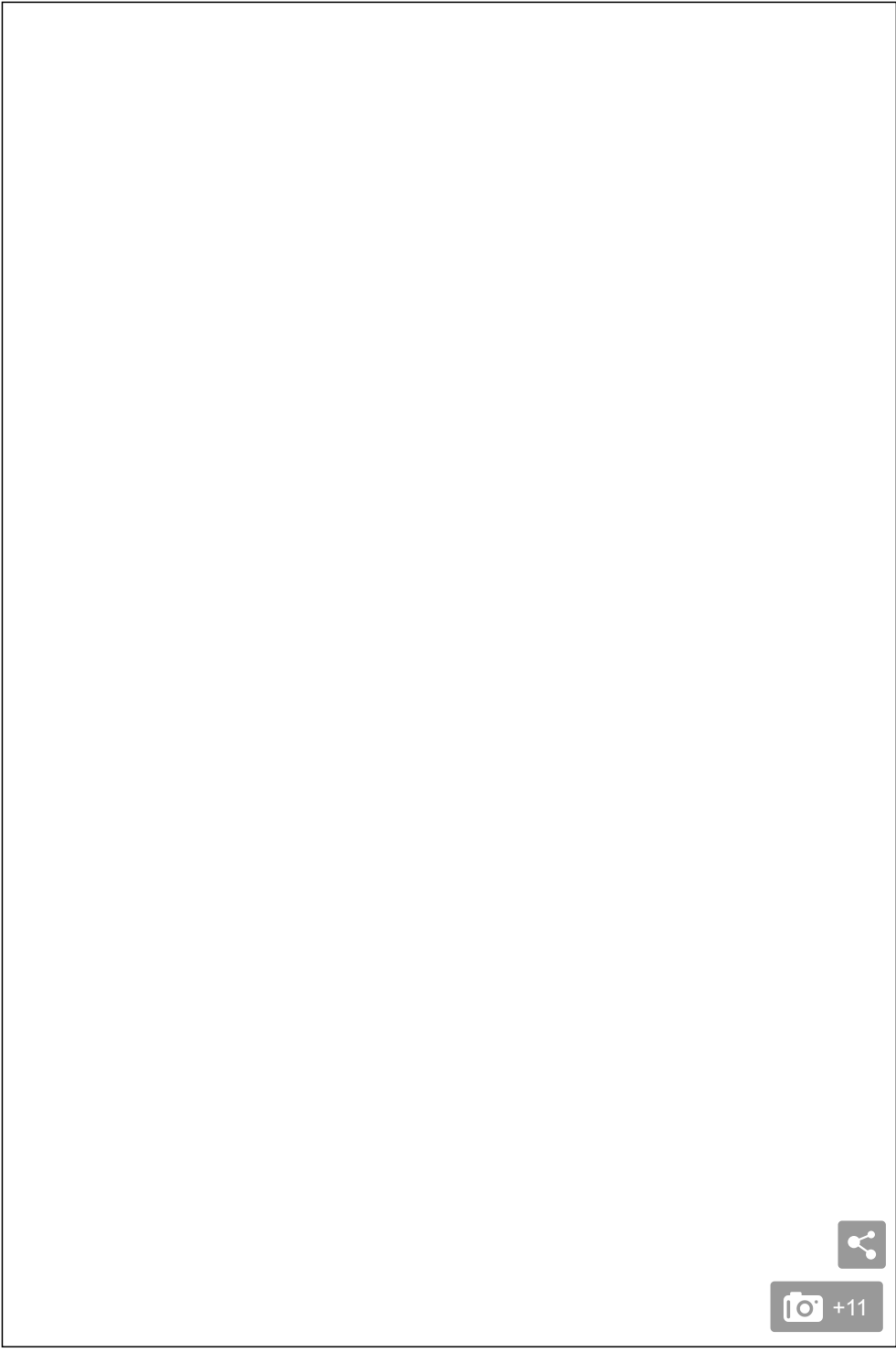
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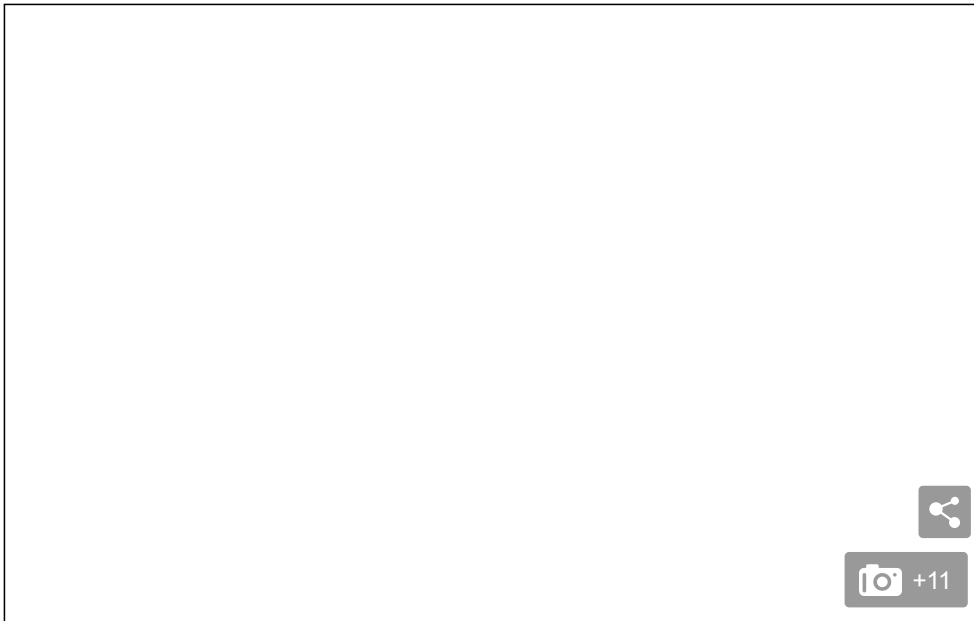
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His attempts to cure patients extended to the use of this 'Electrical Machine' to treat insanity





**This graph represents the number of patients who died while living at the asylum between 1818 and 1834. Causes of death ranged from weakness from over-excitement, to tuberculosis, epilepsy, pneumonia, stomach cancer and being aged**

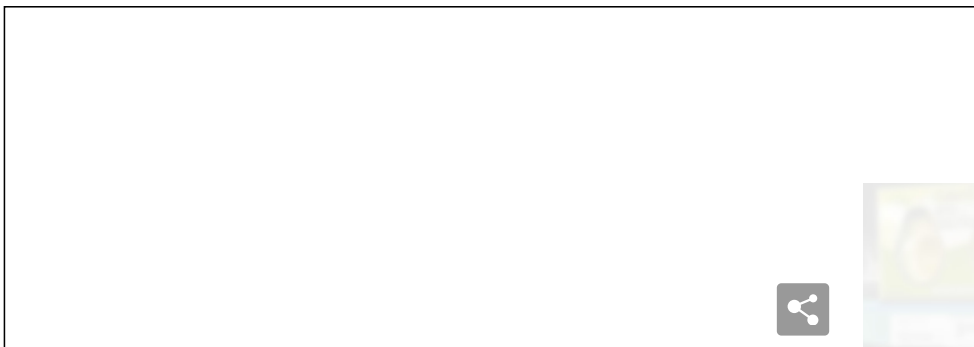
Benjamin W, on the other hand, was excited about the possibility of electrical therapy to treat his unspecified illness and asked for the device to be tried on him. Afterward, he insisted that the shocks given to him were not harsh enough to help him, although Bonsall 'thought...his countenance looked better'.

For the next few months, Bonsall recorded shocking patients every few days. But he stopped mentioning the Electrical Machine in his day book shortly thereafter, despite his evident enthusiasm for the device. This may have been because the machine broke and no one knew how to fix it, Horowitz said.

The Electrical Machine fit into the experimental nature of the early asylum. If something didn't work the asylum's staff moved on to another model. But one part of the patients' treatment that's never changed is the asylum's refusal to restrain patients like they did at Pennsylvania Hospital and other mental institutions.

Instead, The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason gave each patient a private room with a window. Giving them all access to fresh air and light fit in with Quaker ideas about equality, Horowitz said.

'They thought it would help keep their heads clear,' she said.



**Occupational therapy was a crucial part of the asylum's moral treatment. Bonsall had patients work on the asylum's farm and the women cook because it couldn't afford n**

Such treatment was already a popular concept in Europe when Thomas Scott was a travelling Quaker minister known as the 'mournful prophet' because he su



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from depression, visited The Retreat at York, Dr Roby said. This Quaker hospital treated its mentally ill patients with 'respect and compassion'. He was so deeply moved by the encounter that, as he later wrote, he 'vented a few tears', said Alyson Ferguson with the Scattergood Foundation.

Scattergood brought the concept of moral treatment back to Philadelphia and became one of the founders of The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason, which now sits on 100 acres overlooking the scenic Tacony Creek. He died of typhoid fever in 1814, never seeing the fruits of his labor.

Philadelphia Quakers were concerned about its members who were mentally ill and started The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason as a way to help them regain control of themselves, Dr Roby said. The asylum's connections with the community, religious oversight and occupational therapy became part of its unique take on moral treatment.

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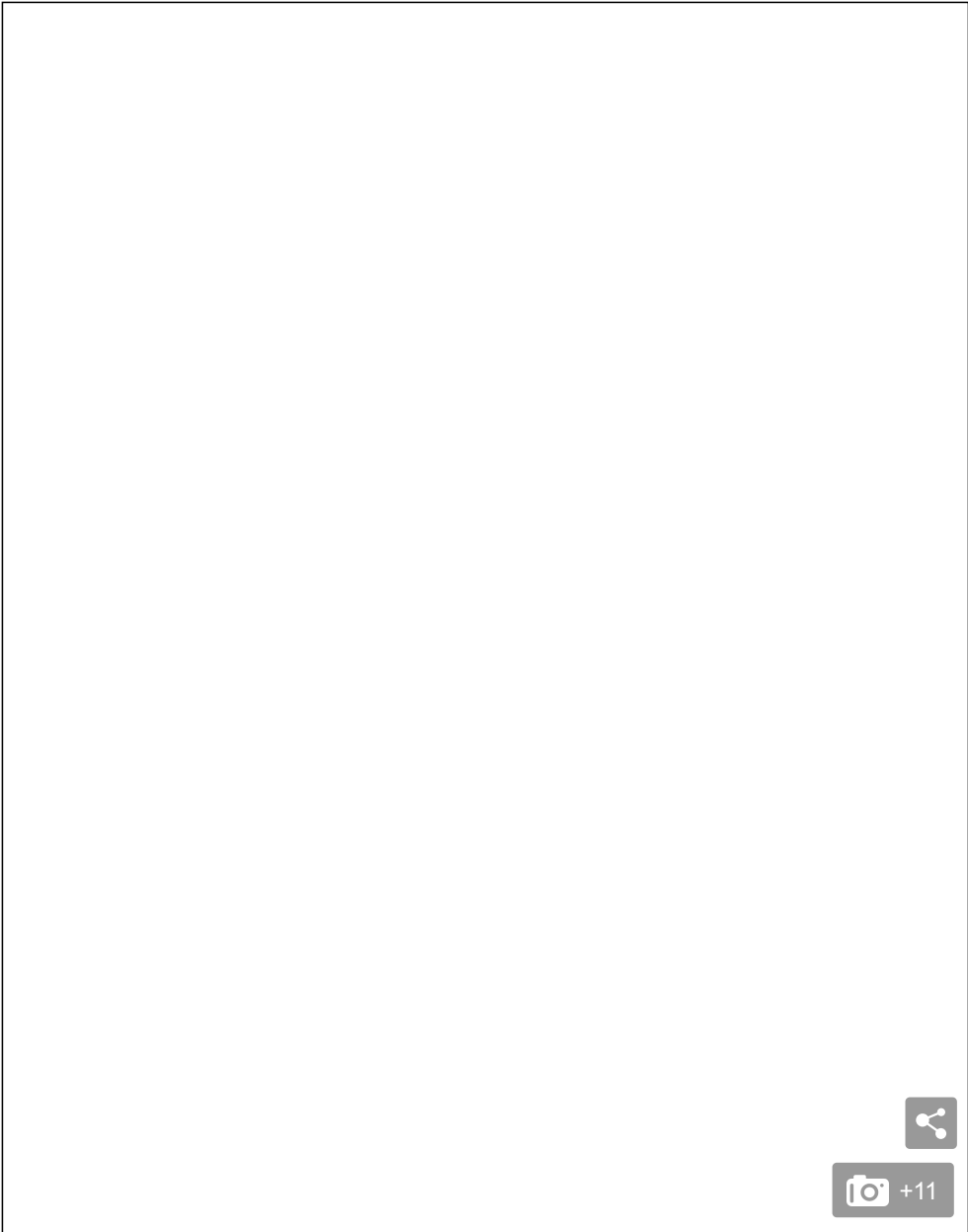
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**Thomas Scattergood, a travelling Quaker minister who helped found the asylum, visited The Retreat at York and brought its concept of moral treatment back to Philadelphia**



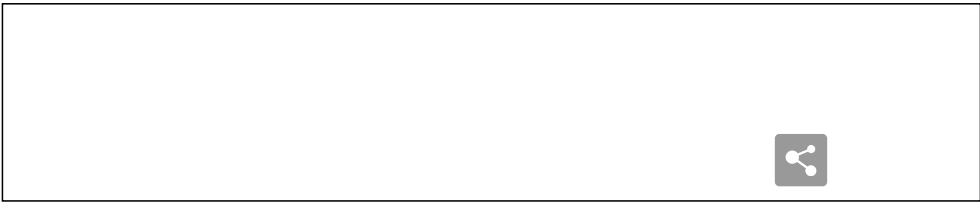


**The Retreat at York was a Quaker hospital that treated its mentally ill patients with 'respect and compassion'**

In 1834, The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason extended moral treatment to patients who were not Quakers, mainly in an effort to raise asylum funds. But just because the asylum needed money doesn't mean staff wasn't picky about who they wanted the institution to serve. Quite the contrary. They only wanted to serve people who could be cured and discharged, which, to the founders meant those who had only recently gone insane. Their preference fit into contemporary medical theories about insanity, Dr Roby said.

Nevertheless, The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason was unable to avoid chronic patients with a wide variety of mental health issues and did its best to care for them all, Dr Roby said. Some of these patients couldn't control their bodily functions, others were violent. A patient referred to as 'Samuel S', for example, said the devil told him to kill Bonsall's wife Anna.

'Samuel left the hospital improved, although not all the way cured,' Horowitz said.



**The asylum's records mainly comes from Bonsall's day book, where he wrote about his experiences with patients: 'Peirce has scarlet fever or something resembling it which has laid her up in consequence of which the care of the female patient has devolved on my wife and daughter neither of whom are well'**

To aid their recovery, Bonsall required patients to integrate with the asylum community, an essential part of moral treatment at The Asylum for Persons of the Use of Their Reason. The institution was meant to replicate the feelin at home with a family. Bonsall reinforced this by referring to patients and st family' in his day book and allowed only those who were well behaved to ee dinner table. This was supposed to help patients 'recognize their own reasonableness', Horowitz said.

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Occupational therapy was also a crucial part of moral treatment. Bonsall had the male patients work on the asylum's farm and the women cook because the institution couldn't afford to hire anymore staff, said Dr Roby. Apart from the financial benefits to the asylum, this work was supposed to help the patients recover. The founders thought work would help the patients focus on something other than their mental illness. Then, as now, patients were allowed to stroll about the wooded grounds and work in the greenhouse.



Due to Bonsall's lack of medical knowledge and the subjective nature of his day book, it's difficult to form a complete picture of the patients. He wrote about his observation of one patient, who 'Resumed ploughing among the corn and working in the garden with a hope of doing a great deal but had to quit before noon on account of rain much of which fell in the course of the day which made it a favourable [sic]...'

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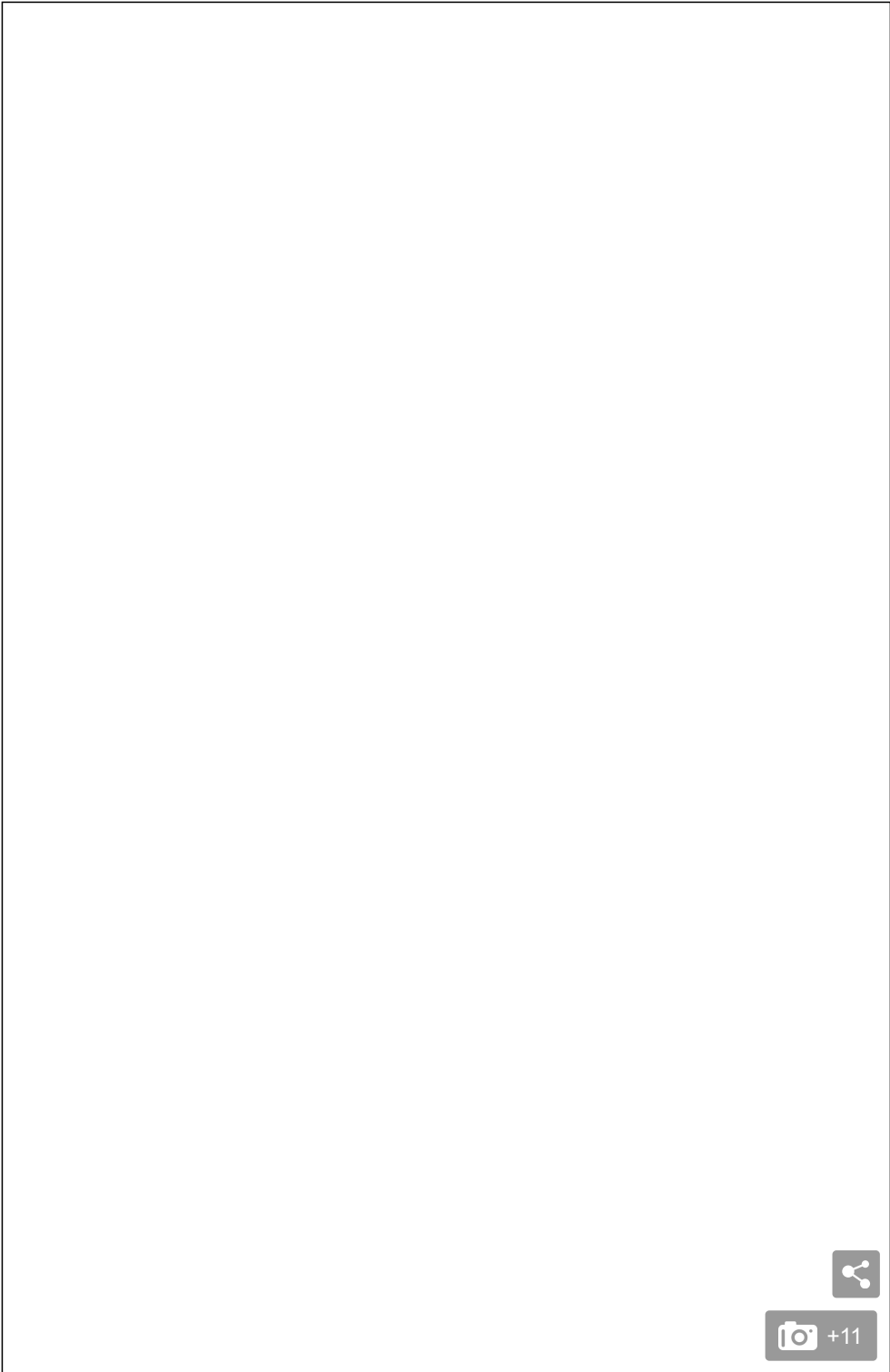
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Then, as now, patients could participate in art classes or visit the gymnasium building (both pictured)

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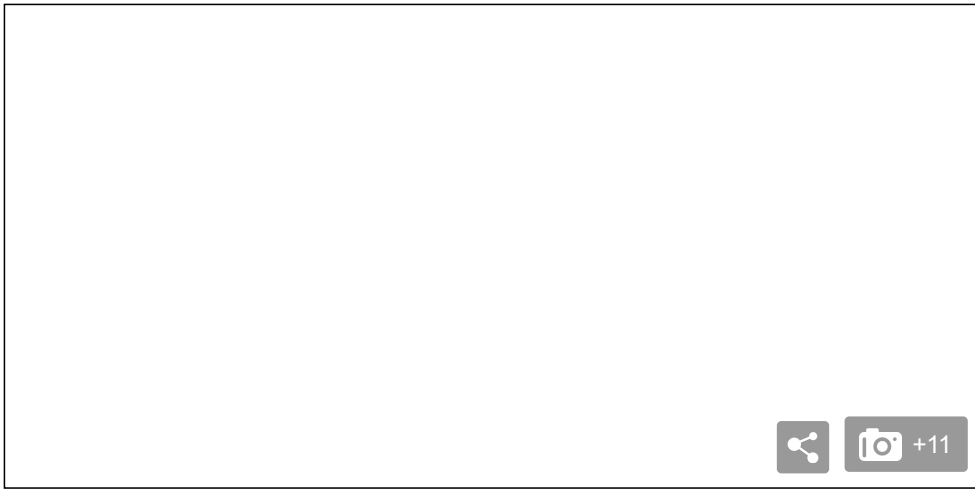
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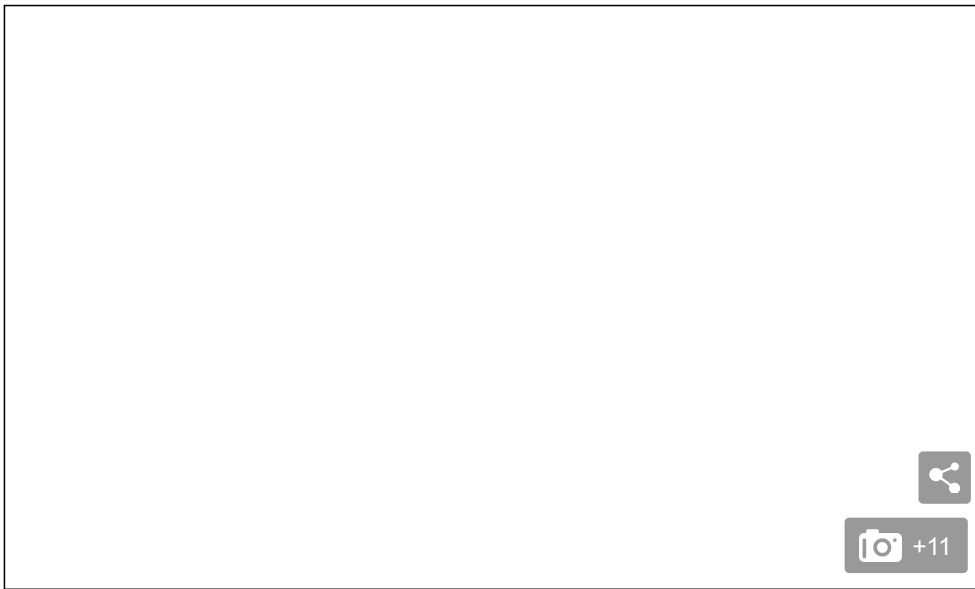
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The original main building, Scattergood Hall, now houses administrative offices. Its original design was a faithful copy of the hospital in York



Now called Friends Hospital, as many as 192 patients currently reside in rooms on the 100-acre campus, designated a National Historic Landmark

The original main building, Scattergood Hall, now houses administrative offices. Its original design was a faithful copy of the hospital in York. As many as 192 patients currently reside in rooms on campus, designated a National Historic Landmark.

Now called Friends Hospital, the influential institution is celebrating 200 years of patient care this year. And although it's a modern institution, the hospital is still operated according to Quaker principles. The moral treatment today means involving patients in decisions about their care and forbids the use of punishment as therapy, Dr Roby said. The Quakers played a significant role in the development of the humane treatment of the mentally ill in the United States, he added.

'The Quakers didn't believe you should hurt people and we still don't believe today,' Dr Roby said.

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▶ Rande Gerber spotted out in New York City... just days after an interaction with a 'freaking out' Pete Davidson in daughter Kaia's apartment

▶ Orlando Bloom gets into a playful screaming match with fiancée Katy Perry's relatives during a raucous game of Taboo

▶ Nina Agdal wows in bikini during trip to 'paradise' with beau Jack Brinkley-Cook and his mom Christie (and even serves as their photographer)

▶ Jennifer Lopez cuts a boss look in black Chanel belt as she and Alex Rodriguez shop for commercial real estate in LA

▶ Bindi Irwin 'grateful' to be home for New Year with her 'beautiful family' after celebrating Christmas with fiancé Chandler Powell in the US

▶ 'I bounced back quickly': Zac Efron opens up about his brush with death after contracting dangerous infection while filming in Papua New Guinea

▶ 'Utterly dismayed' John Cleese leads tributes to Monty Python musician and comedian Neil Innes after his death aged 75

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▶ California girl? Australian model Tammy Hembrow uses Americanisms like



**TODAY'S TOP VIDEOS**



## Ken je Abby van NCIS nog? Neem diep adem voordat je ziet...

Story-Daily.com

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## Letters and Numbers host Lily Serna welcomes her first child - as the mathematician cheekily announces 'one final addition before the year is out'



The 33-year-old mathematician, who is best known for co-hosting SBS game show Letters and Numbers, announced the happy news in an Instagram post on Tuesday

**TV&Showbiz**

▶ [property developer boyfriend David Grievson as they enjoy a romantic trip to Barcelona](#)

▶ [Lucy Hale slithers in snakeskin patterned coat as she rehearses for Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve hosting gig alongside Ryan Seacrest](#)

▶ [James Packer cracks a rare smile as he jokes around with a female friend during a wintry holiday in Aspen with girlfriend Kylie Lim Day out](#)

▶ [Georgina Rodríguez puts on a cheeky display in the pool after jet-ski ride on Dubai holiday with Cristiano Ronaldo... after denying they secretly married](#)

▶ [Kendall Jenner shows her spiritual side in 'Jesus Is King' sweatshirt on one year anniversary of Kanye West's Sunday Service](#)

▶ [Lizzo teases her cleavage in leopard Savage x Fenty robe... after clapping back at a body-shaming troll on Twitter The Truth Hurts artist](#)

▶ [Inside Zac Efron's trip from hell: How the Hollywood star, 32, went from being welcomed by locals in Papua New Guinea to contracting a deadly infection](#)

▶ [Gigi Hadid sends fans wild as they speculate she is back together with Zayn Malik after model shares snap of herself cooking one of ex's mother's recipes](#)

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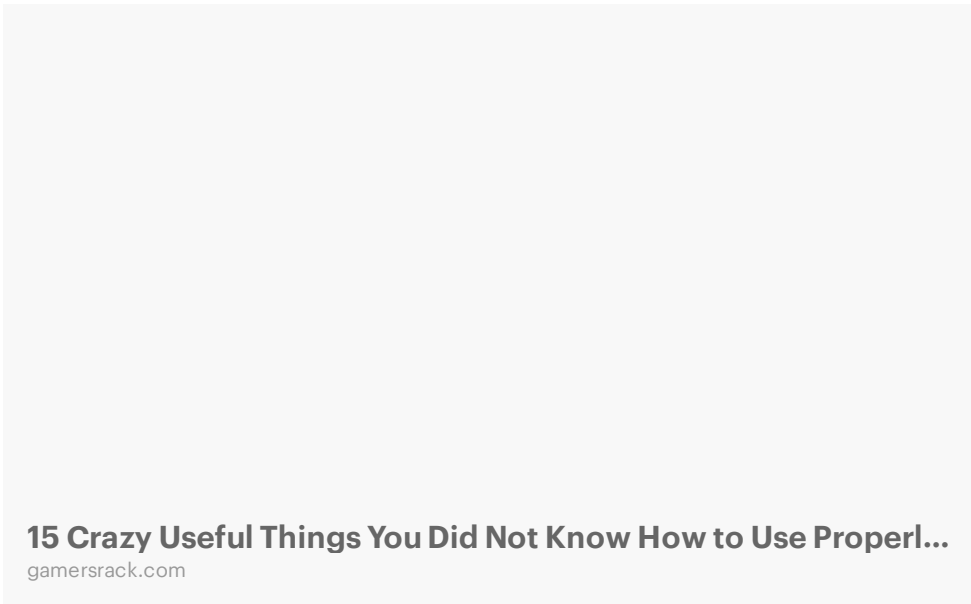
**TODAY'S TOP VIDEOS**

## Davina McCall's £100k Drop 'axed from Channel 4' after nearly a decade following huge £900k prize fund cut

[MTV&Showbiz](#)

## 'No big parties for me': Elyse Knowles reveals her bohemian New Year's Eve plans with boyfriend Josh Barker after

[MTV&Showbiz](#)



15 Crazy Useful Things You Did Not Know How to Use Properl...

gamersrack.com

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## Will you find riches in the stars? With the key 'money planets' Pluto and Jupiter meeting three times in 2020, astrologer OSCAR CAINER warns it could be a stormy 12 months for our finances



OSCAR CAINER: As powerful astrological events paint a stormy financial picture, it's important to find ways to navigate the waters so the strong winds don't set you adrift in the wrong direction.

[MTV News](#)

▶ [Channing Tatum split](#)

▶ [Kanye West completes a year of Sunday Services in LA's Skid Row neighborhood ... where he defends T.I. and says he has 'vision' for homeless problem](#)

▶ [Kelly Rowland is casually stylish in white sweater and knit pants as she runs errands in Beverly Hills](#)  
The Destiny's Child singer

▶ [Jessica Simpson hits the slopes with daughter Maxwell and brother-in-law Evan Ross during family trip to Aspen, Colorado](#)  
Hitting the slopes

▶ ['I nearly burst into tears': Fatboy Slim became emotional listening to his viral Right Here, Right Now remix that samples Greta Thunberg](#)

▶ [Kris Jenner is picture perfect wearing a vibrant green gown for dinner with Corey Gamble in St. Barts](#)

▶ [Disney star Devan Leos avoids jail in attempted murder case in LA over car incident with man in 7-Eleven parking lot](#)

▶ [Kylie Minogue enjoys a break on Rottneest Island as she glams up for a photo shoot... after starring in a \\$15m Tourism Australia campaign](#)

▶ [Eyes on the prize: Rafael Nadal jets into Perth for the inaugural ATP Cup... after a brief honeymoon with wife](#)

**TODAY'S  
TOP VIDEOS**



## Wife Claims "That's Not My Husband" After He Undergoes 2 Day Makeover

BrainSharper



## European Tourist Traps to Avoid

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Greta Thunberg dismisses idea of	Sir David Attenborough praises Greta	Two acrobats fall in front of children in	Victim is carried on stretcher following

▶ furniture shopping with fiancé Alex Rodriguez in Los Angeles

▶ Topless Chloe Green displays her yoga skills with a headstand on a paddleboard... as she shares cryptic caption on getaway without Jeremy Meeks

▶ Teddi Mellencamp enlists the help of her social media followers to choose a name for her unborn baby girl  
Options included Shay, Presley and Selena

▶ Tori Spelling looks like BFFs with her husband's ex Mary Jo Eustace in selfie... years after cheating scandal: 'I never thought this pic would happen'

▶ Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker writers weren't trying to 'sideline' Rose Tico... after fans speak out about Kelly Marie Tran's beloved character

▶ Sir Tom Jones, 79, admits he eyes up women in their thirties but confesses 'it's mostly the grandmothers who fancy me'

▶ Mariah Carey braves the snow for a spot of shopping at Louis Vuitton in Aspen with her beau Bryan Tanaka

▶ 'Oh God!' You star Penn Badgley accidentally lets slip that psychotic stalker Joe Goldberg WILL return for a third season of hit Netflix show

▶ Mark Wahlberg's wife

### MORE TOP STORIES

**TODAY'S  
TOP VIDEOS**

▶ Jenna Dewan flaunts her burgeoning baby bump and gets flirty in animal print to promote her new show

The 39-year-old beauty rocked the bright outfit

▶ Rooney Mara teases potential involvement in film adaptation of *The Silent Patient* as she carries a copy of the popular book in Los Angeles

▶ Anthony Joshua shows off his sporting prowess as he goes jet skiing off the shores of Barbados during festive break... weeks after huge boxing victory

▶ Vanessa Hudgens is a candid cutie as she enjoys the holidays in Switzerland... after announcing 2020 clothing line and album on Instagram

▶ Tammy Hembrow showcases her sensational figure in a skimpy bikini top and matching pants as she enjoys an idyllic Bali getaway

▶ Victoria Beckham is praised by close pal Eva Longoria as they spend Christmas together... amid claims her fashion empire is battling huge debt

▶ James Packer and girlfriend Kylie Lim trudge through the snow in Aspen as they enjoy a quiet Christmas with friends  
Mariah Carey's ex

▶ Suki Waterhouse is in high spirits as she steps out WITHOUT an engagement ring after Robert Pattinson proposal rumors

▶ Disney actor Stoney Westmoreland, 49, who is accused of trying to have sex with a 13-year-old boy, claims the judge in his case has a

**TODAY'S  
TOP VIDEOS**