

## BELCHERTOWN STATE SCHOOL TIMELINE

### March 27, 1915

- The Massachusetts Legislature passes an act “that there be allowed and paid out of the treasury of the commonwealth a sum not exceeding fifty thousand dollars, to be expended under the direction of the state board of insanity, with the approval of the governor and council, for the purchase of land for a school for the feeble-minded in the western part of the commonwealth, and for the procuring or making of plans for building thereon, and for the arrangements of the grounds.

### February 17, 1916

- The Massachusetts State Board of Insanity votes to purchase by eminent domain approximately 890 acres in Belchertown. Cost is \$46,800.

### July 9, 1917

- The Massachusetts Commission on Mental Diseases (the new name for the State Board of Insanity) requests that the Wrentham State School start a small farm colony on the site for the new institution for the feeble-minded at Belchertown. Ten male residents of Wrentham and employees Mr. and Mrs. John Hawes, warden and matron, move to Belchertown and begin clearing some of the land and putting in crops which will be shipped to the Wrentham State School when harvested.

### January 17, 1919

- M. J. O’Connor of Northampton is awarded the contract for the erection of buildings at the new State School. The buildings will comprise a dormitory (L), custodial building (K), power station, laundry, storehouse and bakery, service building (Main Kitchen), and there will be 1500 feet of concrete tunnels to connect the buildings.

### March 28, 1919

- The construction of the Belchertown State School begins when M. J. O’Connor arrives in Belchertown with a large force of men.

### March 15, 1922

- Dr. George M. Kline, Commissioner for the Massachusetts Department on Mental Diseases, appoints Dr. George E. MacPherson as Superintendent of the Belchertown State School. On March 24, Dr. MacPherson arrives on the site to assume his new duties.

## November 22, 1922

- His Excellency, Channing Cox, Governor, issues a proclamation opening the Belchertown State School. The school is to care for the feeble-minded in the western part of the state. Belchertown is the third such institution in the Commonwealth, the other two being the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded in Waltham (est. 1848) and the Wrentham State School (est. 1907). On the last day of November, 1922, there were 128 male residents living within the new institution.

## March 28, 1923

- Eighty-seven girls are received by transfer from either Wrentham or Waltham. These are the first females to be admitted to the institution.

## June 15, 1943

- Dr. George MacPherson retires and on July 1, Dr. Henry A. Tadgell is appointed as new Superintendent.

## 1954

- The Belchertown State School Friends Association forms. This organization consists mainly of family members and friends of residents.

## July 31, 1960

- Dr. Tadgell retires and is replaced by Dr. Lawrence P. Bowser.

## May 31, 1963

- Belchertown State School reaches its highest resident population with 1708 people on its census (1571 people in actual residence).

## March 15, 1970

- The Springfield Republican publishes "The Tragedy of Belchertown State School," a six-part article that exposes to the public the dehumanizing, overcrowded conditions at the Belchertown State School.

## April 16, 1970

- Governor Francis Sargent signs into law a study by a special investigative commission of the conditions at the Belchertown State School and the Monson State Hospital.

## April 1, 1971

- Dr. Bowser, in a letter to Dr. Milton Greenblatt, Commission for the Department of Mental Health, announces his plans to retire from State service. Dr. William Fraenkel, DMH Assistant Commissioner, is assigned as Interim Superintendent.

## October 3, 1971

- Dr. Roland A. Nagle is appointed Superintendent.

## January 9, 1972

- Belchertown State School employees are asked to vacate from the nine employee cottages and four homes on campus to provide living space for the residents of the institution.

## February 7, 1972

- The Belchertown State School Friends Association files a class action suit on behalf of the residents of the institution charging that the Commonwealth is providing an intolerable living environment and inadequate rehabilitative services for its residents.

## March, 1972

- The farm operation is phased out.

## June 15, 1972

- Dr. Roland Nagle resigns and is replaced by Dr. William E. Jones who is appointed on November 19, 1972

## May 8, 1973

- US District Court Judge Joseph Tauro, Jr., is assigned as trial judge in the Friends' lawsuit. Brookline Attorney Beryl W. Cohen is council for the Friends and Assistant Attorney General Terrence O'Malley has been appointed council for the State.

## November 13, 1973

- The Consent Decree, an agreement between the parties to the class action suit is signed. The decree requires that Belchertown State School implement changes in the physical environment and rehabilitative services and develop a community based service system.

## May 3, 1977

- Custodial Building K (for males) is demolished.

## July 19, 1978

- A Personnel Decree is signed adding 365 direct care positions.

## November 27, 1979

- Custodial Building A (for females) is demolished

## January, 1984

- The Massachusetts Legislature votes to appropriate funds for the construction of homes located in the community for individuals with mental retardation through this action, 133 Belchertown State School residents will be placed into this housing.

## January, 1986

- Dr. William E. Jones resigns and Dr. Joan Pine is appointed as Interim Superintendent. She is officially appointed in September, 1986.

## September, 1987

- The first homes for Belchertown State School residents open in Westfield. Thirteen residents move to their new homes located either on East Mountain Road or Western Avenue.

## March 7, 1989

- Department of Mental Retardation Commissioner Mary McCarthy announces the phase down of the Belchertown State School at a press conference held in a Commonwealth Community Services' home in Amherst. The phase down will be completed by December, 1992.

## February 11, 1990

- Dr. Joan Pine accepts appointment as Assistant Commissioner for the department. Teresa O'Hare is appointed as Interim Superintendent.

## December 23, 1992

- The last remaining resident leaves the Belchertown State School.

## December 31, 1992

- Formal closing ceremonies are held in front of the Administration Building. The keys to the property are transferred to the Massachusetts Division of Capitol Planning and Operations.