



The Christmas Seal Sanatorium
– History of the Buildings
- from Tuberculosis Sanatorium to
Museum for Nursing History and
4-Star Hotel

Danish
Museum of
Nursing History





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Front page photo: The open-air shelter at The Christmas Seal Sanatorium. Photo: The Danish Museum of Nursing History

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Preface

Hotel Koldingfjord and the Danish Museum for Nursing History was originally a tuberculosis sanatorium for children, and the buildings tell a long and stirring story of the treatment and nursing care of tuberculosis in the early 1900s.

The sanatorium was established thanks to the new Christmas Seal, which was introduced for the first time in Denmark in 1904. The Christmas seal was a huge success, and the first visible result of the profits was the Christmas Seal Sanatorium in Kolding, an estate-like building with a unique location at the Fiord of Kolding. The tuberculosis sanatorium opened in 1911 and quickly had to expand to meet the demands at a time when tuberculosis was the great scourge among poor people.

The Christmas Seal Sanatorium has been the setting for many children's destinies and for the working life for the many employees, nurses, nursing students, doctors and other professionals who worked and lived at the sanatorium premises. Despite extensive renovations, the buildings still bear an echo of the many hospitalized children, the employees' working conditions, the discipline and the strict hierarchy that prevailed.

It is a privilege to maintain this historical tale of an important public health effort and of all the nurses who made it possible.

Grete Christensen

President, the Danish Nurses' Organization
President, Board of the Danish Museum of Nursing History

Peder Madsen

Managing Director, Hotel Koldingfjord



The Christmas Seal Sanatorium on the Christmas Seal of 1908

It started with a Christmas Seal

In 1903, the post office clerk Einar Holbøll in Copenhagen got so annoyed by the huge amount of Christmas mail that he fostered the idea of a special kind of punishment postage. In order to promote the idea he disguised it as charity: A Christmas Seal to collect money for a tuberculosis sanatorium for children. The first Christmas Seal was launched in 1904 with a portrait of Queen Louise.



The first Christmas Seal 1904 portraying Queen Louise

At the time, tuberculosis was the major killer, and in 1900 tuberculosis caused one third of all deaths in Denmark. It was a poor man's disease, and the only treatment was good nutrition, rest and plenty of fresh air. From the early 1900s, the TB-patients were gathered in large sanatoriums, but they were all intended for adult patients. The country needed a sanatorium exclusively for children.

The Christmas Seal became a huge success, and the Christmas Seal Committee started to plan and build a children's sanatorium. After many hardships with a wet underground and massive budget overruns, the Christmas Seal Sanatorium was inaugurated in Kolding in 1911. A majestic building equipped to set the gold standard for TB-treatment in Denmark.



The Christmas Seal Sanatorium 1911. Photo: Illustreret Tidende 07/02/1911 stating "The new Christmas Seal Sanatorium near Kolding Fjord, the cost of which has attracted so much attention that the timeliness now needs to be examined by a Commission".

At the opening, there was room for 120 children aged 4-15 years, but the sanatorium soon proved to be undersized. In 1917, a pavilion was opened for the youngest children, which today is the setting for the Danish Museum of Nursing History. In 1933 another smaller building was added, which now contains the museum archives. The total capacity of the sanatorium was now 185 beds, but still many admissions had to be rejected.



Ward F1 in the new pavilion with two nurses and small children in 1950. Photo: The Danish Museum of Nursing History.

Tuberculosis treatment

When a child was hospitalized, the cure was initiated with bed rest until the fever was gone. That could take months. Only when the temperature was normal, the actual cure could begin in the form of daily rest in the open air shelter combined with good nutrition and regular exercise.



*Girls in the open air shelter 1939.
Photo: The Danish Museum of Nursing History.*



*Treatment with carbon-arc light.
Photo: The Danish Museum of Nursing History*

Some of the children were treated with pneumothorax, collapse of the infected lung in order let it rest and allow the lesions to heal. Phototherapy (light therapy) was also a common treatment where the children lay below carbon-arc lamps for two hours three times a week.

Every two weeks, the children had an X-ray examination and gastric lavage to examine for the tuberculosis bacillus. Only when the tests had been negative three times in a row, the child could be discharged and go home.

On average, the children were hospitalized for about a year, and the success rate was high - around 85%. Some children, however, were hospitalized for several years, and many children rarely or never had visits from their parents and family. Although the sanatorium made considerable efforts to celebrate birthdays and festivities, it was a lonely business to be a child at the sanatorium.

The Greenlandic children at the sanatorium

During the first half of the 1900s, the incidence of tuberculosis in Denmark decreased. In 1939, the prevalence of tuberculosis was brought down to 3.4 per. 10,000 inhabitants, and Denmark was the country in Europe with the lowest mortality due to tuberculosis. In 1959 when the Christmas Seal Sanatorium closed, the mortality rate in Denmark due to tuberculosis was down to 0.4 per. 10,000 inhabitants.

After the 2nd World War, the sanatorium therefore admitted children with tuberculosis from South Schleswig and especially from Greenland. The many Greenlandic children were a particular challenge. There was the language problem, and the Greenlandic children were even more isolated than the Danish children as they never received visits from home.



The oldest boys lived on the first floor; here a Greenlandic boy sitting in his ward in front of the wash basins. Photo: The Danish Museum of Nursing History.

The Greenlandic children came to Denmark as a result of the Danish effort to track down patients with tuberculosis, which was a widespread disease in Greenland. The X-ray ship "Misigssut" sailed from outpost to outpost where the children were literally dragged through the x-ray machine. If a child was diagnosed with tuberculosis, it was sent to the Christmas Seal Sanatorium in Kolding.

The sanatorium is replaced by the Kolding Fjord School

In 1959, the sanatorium closed. Tuberculosis was now virtually wiped out in Denmark, and there was no longer need for the huge sanatoriums. From 1960 to 1988 Koldingfjord was used by the National Department for the Care of the Mentally Deficient (Statens Åndsvageforsorg).

The many buildings housed various institutions and departments, each with their target group of residents, from the elderly and highly dependent mentally deficient to the young ones who were taught to live a life as normal as possible. The collective name for all institutions was the Kolding Fjord School (Koldingfjordskolen) - the name was painted on a large red portal at the entrance.

In time, the buildings became very run down and the conditions got so poor for the residents that the Kolding Fjord School came under the media spotlight. With the local government reform in 1970, the National Department for the Care of the Mentally Deficient closed down, and the responsibility for the mentally disabled was decentralized to the counties. The residents' situation eventually improved with more human conditions and better housing facilities.

In the 1980s, the large central institutions for the mentally deficient were disbanded one by one, and the Kolding Fjord School finally had to close down. The last occupant and the last employees left Koldingfjord in 1988.

Koldingfjord opens as a hotel - and a Nursing Museum

In 1987, the Nurses' Property Corporation and the Visiting Nurses' Property Corporation bought the buildings and took over the plans for a conference hotel which had been prepared by the Islef Group, a Danish building company. The president of the Danish Nurses' Organization, Kirsten Stallknecht regarded the purchase a sound investment, but she also had a keen eye for the unique location and historical value of the premises.



Hotel Koldingfjord. Photo: Hotel Koldingfjord.

After an extensive renovation, Hotel Koldingfjord opened on April 27 1990. Since then, the hotel has continuously developed its business and today it stands as a tribute to distinguished Danish furniture design. It is rated as a four star hotel, while the conference facilities have the maximum five stars. It is also extensively used by members of the Danish Nurses' Organization as part of their membership benefits.

When the nurses took over the buildings, Kirsten Stallknecht's eye fell on the two pavilions that had been built for the very young children. The idea of establishing a nursing museum began to take shape, and when several hospitals and nursing homes closed during the 1990s, nurses were allowed to collect old objects that would otherwise be sent for destruction.

In 1999, the year of the 100-year anniversary of the Danish Nurses' Organization, the two completely renovated pavilions opened as the Danish Museum of Nursing History, which today is one of the few nursing museums in the world. Here guests can immerse themselves in the history of the nursing profession and rekindle own memories of hospitalization and other meetings with the healthcare system. For nurses, the museum is a unique experience, and it is being used in the education of both nursing students and other healthcare students.



The Danish Museum of Nursing History, the former pavilion for the small children. Photo: The Danish Museum of Nursing History.

Read more – English summary in:

Koldingfjord 1911 – 2011 - Fra julemærkesanatorium til internationalt hotel
Jubilæumsbog.

Downloadable at Koldingfjord's website www.100aar.koldingfjord.dk

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