

Psychosocial Aspects of Names of Retirement Facilities

GARY S. FELTON

THE LIVING PLACE for the aged or recently retired person always has been a major problem for immediate relatives as well as for the retiree. In the United States, this concern dates from the introduction of the almshouse, a heritage from the British workhouse system. As a Parliamentary measure designed and instituted to cope with the distressing, burgeoning problems of pauperism and mendicancy, the first workhouse was established in 1697. Facilities of this type were developed throughout Great Britain and achieved considerable success. Subsequently, facilities resembling the workhouses were established in the United States, initially appearing in New England.¹

For decades, relegation to the almshouse, poorhouse, or poor farm, as this institution variously was termed, served as the procedure by which aged dependents were cared for. Until the early twentieth century, these institutions were accepted as necessary. Many of them were decent, but grim conditions characterized numerous others as they were dangerous firetraps or installations of extreme filth and gross neglect; all degrees of morality existed among the inmates. In addition, there was limited social interaction and little opportunity to foster meaningful human relationships.^{2,3}

Residents of the almshouses were admitted selectively on the basis of how destitute they were; although these units accepted the aged, not all habitants were aged. Inmates comprised the "...insane, feeble-minded, and epileptics; blind and deaf mutes; sufferers from chronic diseases; persons with criminal records; prostitutes; mothers of illegitimate children; orphans and deserted children," and were "...a catchall for the dregs of society, where anything may go and live in comparative idleness."¹

Administrative handling of the almshouses frequently was inconsistent, ranging from efficiency to wastefulness, or from sympathetic treatment to marked in-

¹ Estelle M. Stewart, *The Cost of American Almshouses*. Bull. No. 386. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, (June) 1925.

² *Homes for Aged in the United States*. Bull. No. 677. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1941.

³ M. Wax, "The changing role of the home for the aged," *Geront.*, 2:128-133, 1962.

humanity. The real purpose of the almshouse — “to provide refuge and care and a fair degree of comfort to the old and infirm”² — had not been realized. It had become a place for confining the aged. This installation was financially underwritten as public charity and always had been viewed by the general public as a final, desperate resort, whose painful social stigma was to be avoided at all cost.¹⁻³

In the early 1920's, the almshouse began to disappear. This reflected an increasing recognition by the public that the unregulated gathering together of people from so many different health, age, moral, and psychological stations was socially undesirable and psychologically detrimental to the many persons involved. States systematically began to farm out the feeble-minded and epileptic person to condition-specific institutions. In addition, the Federal Social Security Act implemented further the existing procedure of removing the young from almshouses and placing them in foster homes. This same legislation, in providing federal-State allowances for the aged, permitted former, elderly inmates of almshouses to live either independently or under the watchful eyes of relatives. Thus, one major, early living facility for the aged, the almshouse, dissolved in the face of legislation and its own internal disquietude.²

Old People's Homes

The other major facility for handling the aged was the old people's home. This living unit actually dates from the late 1700's, although no substantial number became apparent until a century later. Some of these homes were charitable institutions, the resident not being required to contribute financially to the operation. Others were supported by private philanthropy. Residence in the homes was non-stigmatizing. This was evidenced in that homes frequently would provide lodging to guests who financially were well positioned and could afford to live elsewhere, but preferred companionship offered in the home.^{2,4}

The conditions of living for the aged were being improved vastly in comparison with earlier farming-out procedures experienced with almshouse institutionalization. Nevertheless, there still remained a psychological stigma attached to one's being exiled in an old age home. Environmental, physical, medical, social, and moral conditions had improved greatly over earlier offerings to the aged; to the aged themselves, however, the psychological implications of such exile were unchanged, for, in essence, the old age home still was separated from the community at large. Psychologically, the old age home symbolized the final putting out to pasture of aged persons in what were often dingy, unattractive, or cold places which provided little activity. It meant, to these persons, a rejection by relatives or society, and justifiably allowed them to develop feelings of alienation, isolation, demoralization, dissatisfaction, and low-level self-esteem.¹⁻⁴

Retirement Communities

During the late 1930's, several new types of living units were developed. These entailed individual dwelling units in apartment buildings, colonies in separate cottages, and clubs founded on the cooperative method.² Such advancements probably

⁴ *Care of Aged Persons in the United States*. Bull. No. 489. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, (Oct.) 1929.

contributed theoretically to the later-appearing retirement communities, to be discussed. The developments in the national picture of housing for the aged remained at this level of activity until 1954, when the first retirement community was opened.⁵ This innovation is the third important turning point in the sequential development of retirement housing, as it has assumed major social and psychological significance. Views that the elderly should be farmed out to a rest home yielded to a growing recognition, from all quarters, of their having feelings as well as important psychological crises to cope with when, at retirement age, they suddenly move away from the desk and find themselves back on the porch. That the aged need active socialization began to be recognized and accepted, as was their need to participate in a vital and moving community. In the early 1950's, notable changes began to emerge in societal attitudes toward retirement, the retiree, and the aged, as employers, relatives, and numerous agents of the community increasingly came to play a major role in the growth of retirement facilities*.⁵⁻⁸

The most recognizable outgrowth of this change in attitude has been the retirement community. This living complex, which has emerged throughout the United States, often is replete with social programs, planned activities, and recreational, cultural, educational, medical, psychological, religious, and burial facilities. Such developments are highly diverse in type, size, and operational format, and generally are satellites to urban areas.^{5,7}

The philosophy underlying the purpose of the retirement community is that activity for the aged is the key to success. If the retiree remains socially, psychologically, and physically active he spends little time brooding over such concerns as alienation by an indifferent young society, bitter loneliness, loss of self-reliant individualism, hypochondriasis, and death. Compatible companions and warm, accepting friendships are available, and through repeated mutual reinforcement provide a vital, involved, community of the aged. Helplessness, dependence, invalidism, etc., ascriptions so frequently given to the aged person by both the young and old, are concerns which find no significant role in the active retirement community.^{5,7-9}

* The term retirement facility is used here in the generic sense and refers to all kinds of living units for the aged or retired, whether single or multiple dwelling. Retirement community refers to the major land-tract developments, often incorporated cities of 1,000 or more persons.

⁵ T. B. Lesure, "U.S. retirement cities," *Travel*, 123:36-40, (Mar.) 1965.

⁶ J. Tuckman and I. Lorge, "Attitudes toward old people," *J. Soc. Psychol.*, 37:249-260, (June) 1953.

⁷ The family: a place in the sun. *Time*, 80:46-48, (Aug. 3) 1962.

⁸ R. Ginzberg, "The negative attitude toward the elderly," *Geriatrics*, 7:297-302, (Mar.) 1952.

⁹ I. Rosow, "Retirement housing and social integration," *Geront.*, 1:85-91, 1961.

Name Types

Traditionally, the retirement facility has been labeled a *home*. Analysis of the listings of the first national directory of homes for the aged (1929)¹⁰ reveals that the entire cataloguing, with some exceptions, contains bleak names which refer to age, destitution, friendlessness, homelessness, indigence, invalidism, infirmity, or physical disability. A limited few suggest a glimmer of positive outlook, as with Sunshine Home, Jackson Friendly Home, Sunnyside, Rochester Friendly Home, House of Hope, and Benevolent Home. Two names refer to old age euphemistically – Eventide Home, and Sunset Home Society.

Findings similar to the above emerge from a review of the second national directory of homes for the aged (1939).² There is a small increase in the number of names which suggest a favorable or positive outlook.

An evaluation of the third directory (1965)¹¹, the first publication to include the retirement community, presents a striking change from the earlier editions. One finds the usual designations, namely *retirement, rest, memorial, boarding, old people's, soldiers', guest, county, and senior citizens' home, or home for the aged or home for the elderly*; there is also use of the terms *manor, residency, hotel, and lodge*. With increasing frequency, however, two major changes are occurring among the names. First, colorless names conventionally applied to multiple-unit, single dwellings are being replaced with more attractive ones. This is reflected, in part, in the growing use, for single dwellings, of the names *cooperative, town-house, ranch, park, center, haven, or towers*. Similarly, emergence of the multiple dwelling complexes known as retirement communities has been accompanied by more appealing names, such as *villa, resort, village, estates, acres, city, farms, apartments, gardens, colony, gables, palms, and homes*. These terms were not used to identify retirement facilities 25 years ago, and reflect, in part, the broadened attitude toward retirement and the living facility for the aged.

¹⁰ *Directory of Homes for the Aged in the United States*. Bull. No. 505. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, (Nov.) 1929.

¹¹ G. Stromme, ed., *Retirement Facilities Register*. Studio City, California: Active Retirement Executives' Association, 1965.

Name Content

Customarily, the retirement facility has been named for one of seven groups: 1) religious organization, 2) private or corporate organization, 3) fraternal organization, 4) military service affiliation, 5) nationality group, 6) racial group, and 7) occupational group.^{2,10,11} A review of the most current listing of retirement facilities provides the following categorization.

*Religion.** Nearly all major religious groups support or sponsor a retirement facility. Thus, the retiree can live with Baptist (Baptist Home), Methodist (Methodist Retirement Community), Presbyterian (Presbyterian Retirement Village), Catholic (St. Mary's Catholic Home), Congregational (The Congregational Home), Episcopalian (Episcopal Home for the Aged), Jewish (Hebrew Home for the Aged), and Lutheran (Salem Lutheran Home) brethren. Similarly, he can retire in the company of members of the Christian Science (New Haven Home for Christian Scientists), Evangelical (Elim Covenant Home of California), Quaker (Friends Retirement Home), or Assembly of God (Assemblies of God Retirement Project) followings, and diverse reform (Hungarian Reformed Church Apartments) and Church of Christ (United Church of Christ Home) groups.

Private organization. The majority of facilities is named for a private or corporate agency and the name used in this case suggests nothing more to the reader. For this particular group, there is little to be discussed beyond providing examples of the different names used: Tidevue Estates, Venice Beach Hotel, and Flint Senior Citizens' Housing.

Fraternal organization. Numerous national fraternal organizations sponsor retirement facilities for their members. They can go to the Alabama Masonic Home, the California P.E.O. Home, the Eastern Star Home, the Odd Fellows Home of California, the Soroptimist Village, or the Indiana Knights of Pythias Home. Also,

* In the seven sections to follow, names are presented which, on first reading, would immediately indicate what kind of person the facility serves. There are facilities, designated for or sponsored by specific organizations, whose names do not identify the place with the organization. These names have been excluded from the present discussion. Only one exemplary name is offered for each sub-group being reviewed.

provisions are made for members to live in the Kiwanis Manor, the American Legion Mountain Camp, the B.P.O.E. National Home, the Shepherds Home, or the King's Daughters and Sons Home.*

Military service. Although there is a limited number of facilities for military personnel, all branches of the service are cared for. The veteran can go to the Michigan Veterans Facility, the Ohio Soldiers and Sailors Home, or the Air Force Village Foundation.

Nationality. Provisions for the aged or retired of a particular nationality group are offered by the California Home for the Armenian Aged, the Christian Community Center for Old Swedes, the Scottish Old People's Home, the General German Aged People's Home, or the Danish Home for the Aged. Other facilities are available to the elderly who might wish to join fellow countrymen at the Victoria Home for Aged British, the Scandinavian Home, the Icelandic Old Folks Home, or the Leif Erikson Number 1 Norway Center.

Occupation. There is considerable diversity in the kind of occupational groups which care for their retired and aged members. This can be dichotomized into facilities sponsored by unions and those of independent workers. Union membership makes eligible for the aged, housing such as Teamsterville, the Carpenters Home, the Musicians Club of America, the Sheet Metal Workers International, the S Elect Homes [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers], the Actors Retirement Home, or the Firemen's Home. For non-union workers, there are such facilities as the Physicians Home, the Birmingham Teachers Club, the Salvation Army Residence, the Presser Home for Retired Music Teachers, and the Homes for Retired Ministers.

Race. This category relates to the several retirement facilities available to Negroes, exemplified in the name Layton Home for the Colored Aged.

A table summarizing the statistical breakdown of the above seven categories is offered as follows and provides a picture of the changing relationships among types of retirement facilities.

* National promotional associations also provide retirement housing for members or subscribers, namely the W.C.T.U. Home for Women, and the Four Freedoms House.

Content of Names of Retirement Facilities

	1929 ^a		1939 ^b		1965 ^c	
	no.	per- cent	no.	per- cent	no.	per- cent
Religious organization	560	42.3	592	41.5	1,069	38.8
Private or corporate organization	480	36.3	468	32.8	1,475	53.5
Fraternal organization	117	8.8	141	9.9	107	3.9
Military service affiliation ^d	64	4.8	36	2.5	21	0.8
Nationality group	39	2.9	37	2.6	25	0.9
Racial group	22	1.7	50	3.5	13	0.5
Occupational group	11	0.8	72	5.0	45	1.6
Miscellaneous groups	30	2.3	32	2.2	0	0.0
	1,323	100.0	1,428	100.0	2,755	100.0

^a See reference 10.

^b See reference 2.

^c See reference 11.

^d Does not include Veterans Administration Hospitals.

Psychological Implications

"In all our newer nomenclature we are continually trying to find milder names for disagreeable things, by which we may seem to soften the harsh facts of existence. But a change of name usually indicates something more than a desire for euphemism. It has usually been with a genuine desire to make the almshouse into a real home for worthy poor people that a change of name has been adopted. With a less offensive term has usually come a milder and kinder management."¹²

Nested among the terms discussed previously, one increasingly finds a newer phrasing with several psychological implications. There is a large number of references to leisure, as exemplified by the name Leisure Life Village. Also, there are numerous references to security, as offered by the frequent appearance of the word haven (Happy Haven Home, or Rest Haven Home), and to companionship, exemplified by Friendship Home or Friendly Valley. Many allusions to old age appear in rather euphemistic phrasing,

¹² A. Johnson, cited in Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

as with Golden Age Estates, Halcyon Apartments, Harvest Time Homes, Eventide Home, Sunset Home, Superannuate Homes, Tranquillity Gardens, Twilight Haven, and Senior Village.

In addition, one frequently finds reference to rejuvenation as with Youngtown, New Horizons, Sierra Dawn Estates, or Sunrise Apartments. The concept of positive striving is symbolized in such names as Community for Positive Living, Progressive Senior Citizens Home, Advanced Living, Best-of-Life Park, The Evergreens, Linger Longer Retirement Home, or Holiday. Favorable outlook is signified by the repeated occurrence of names which utilize the word sun or variations thereof: Sunnyside Manor, Sunshine Terrace, Suntown, Sun City, or Sunny Acres Villa.

Finally, there are numerous glimmers of a desire for an idealized setting, as with Dream Village, Dreamland Villa, Garden of Eden, Isle of Paradise, Care Free Place, and Shangri-La Estates.

Thus, areas of concern to the aged, namely security, leisure, companionship, fantasy, rejuvenation, striving, and the psychological meaning of the retirement years clearly are referred to in naming many facilities, particularly the retirement community. The varied programs available in retirement communities provide, in some way, for an underscoring of each of these considerations

Summary

A direct measure of attitudes toward the aged and the retired has been traceable through an evaluation of the names of particular facilities which, through history, have been allocated to or provided for the aged. Societal attitudes have changed and matured considerably from the early attitudes favoring relegation of the indigent or infirm aged to the almshouse. Drifts of indifference to the aged, on the part of younger members of society, gradually were altered by currents of legislative concern for *other* inmates of the almshouses and, eventually, through the Federal Social Security Act. This legislation allowed further nurturing of the vast system of homes for the aged, destitute, handicapped, friendless, and homeless. Nevertheless, in spite of major achievements in effecting societal recognition of the psychosocial needs of the aged, the identification labels attached to such facilities still reflected a relatively bleak, cold picture.

It has been only within the past 13 years, with changes in societal attitudes toward the aged, that more colorful and appealing names of retirement facilities increasingly have replaced the lack-luster terms customarily used. Although not strictly limited to the growth of major aggregate units as retirement communities, the majority of such names obtains from these living complexes, as it is they which more than other kinds sponsor the new view toward active retirement. Accompanying this move toward sponsoring active retirement, one finds several major psychological themes underscored by operations at the facilities and reflected in names given to the living units.

Unchanged over a period of nearly one-half century is the particular content of names given to retirement facilities. Although certain name categories have changed proportionately during this period, names still are arranged into groups based on religion, private or corporate organization, fraternal organization, military service affiliation, nationality, race, and occupation.

Conclusions

With the emergence of changing attitudes toward retirement and the retiree, names given to living facilities – particularly retirement communities – increasingly have been characterized by more color and appeal. In addition, many names relate to areas of concern for the retiree, such as security, leisure, companionship, fantasy, rejuvenation, positive striving, and the psychological meaning of the retirement years. The overall change in attitude would seem to signify to the retiree a recognition that his activity potential and social involvement are of deep interest to others.

Mt. St. Mary's College
Los Angeles