

“Finding Missing Ancestors in Institutional Records, Part I:
Hospitals, Asylums and Sanitariums”

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I. HOSPITALS

1. General information:

- A hospital is a healthcare institution providing treatment with specialized nursing and medical staff and medical equipment.
- The term was also used for sanitoriums or asylums for the mentally ill.
- “State hospitals” – historic euphemism for “mental hospitals” or “insane asylums”.

2. History of American Hospitals

- Births, deaths and illnesses mostly occurred at home
- Concept emerged from almshouses, providing care for the ailing poor
- First hospital co-founded by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia in 1751
- Modern concept of hospital emerged after the Civil War.
- Hospitals were historically run by religious or charitable organizations.

3. HIPPA

- Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act – 1996
 - Access to own medical records
 - Permission needed to view your records
 - Upon death – records sealed forever
- Revised in 2013
 - Other restrictions from 1996 Act still apply except
 - Limits period of protection of deceased to 50 years after death
- Even though you meet federal guidelines you **STILL** have to satisfy State and Local Laws.

4. How to find out if hospital records are available

- No law says how long records must be kept - old records are often destroyed.
- If hospital doesn't exist, check state libraries, archives, and local genealogical societies.
- If hospital exists – check website and catalog for digitized records. If there are no digitized records, then you or a representative has to go in person.
- State and hospital rules determine WHO gets access to records.

5. Other records containing medical information

- Death certificates
- Cemetery and burial records
- Court records
- Newspaper articles
- National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers – precursor to VA hospital.

- 1840 – 1880 and 1900 Censuses asked questions regarding persons who were blind, deaf-mute, maimed or crippled.
- 1850 – 1880 Mortality Schedules – deaths within 12 months of the date census were taken listed the causes of death.
- 1880 DDD Census Schedule (Defective, Dependent & Delinquent).

II. SANITORIUMS

1. Is it Sanitorium or Sanitarium?

- Sanatorium definition – hospital for a long-term illness, typically associated with TB or pneumonia. American hospitals based on similar European hospitals.
- Sanitorium definition – spelling variation of sanatorium which is no longer used.
- Sanitarium definition – health resort similar to a spa where people convalesced. Health and healing practices were emphasized. Most famous was the Battle Creek Sanitarium which was based on the practices of the Seventh Day Adventists.
- Today, the spellings are used interchangeably.

2. History of TB and Sanitoriums in the U.S.

- Ancient disease. Extremely contagious. Killed 1 out of every 7 people who ever lived.
- Also known as Consumption, White Plague or the Wasting Disease.
- Historical treatment: rest, daily exercise, dry climate, good nutrition – fresh eggs, vegetables, etc.
- Brought more people to AZ than mining, ranching or farming.
- Private care sanitoriums treated wealthy sufferers – many were like private spas.
- Poor patients were often stigmatized and isolated – “Lungers”.
- 1882 – Discovered illness caused by bacteria. 1943 – The cure (“streptomycin”) was discovered. The cure was first given to humans in 1949.

III. ASYLUMS

1. Thoughts on repulsive words found in historical records

- “Idiot”, “Imbecile” and “Moron” are not euphemisms. They are historic terms used by society AND the federal government.
- We can’t excuse these words. They must be put in the context of the times.
- Definitions have changed throughout time.
- People were judgmental in the past but we should not be. Should not make judgement calls on terms used in the past based on today’s values.

2. Asylum: Definition and History in the United States

- Asylum was originally defined as a “place of refuge”.
- Usually stood for a psychiatric hospital or was used for an orphanage, i.e., “orphan asylum.”
- First asylum founded by Quakers, “The Friends Hospital” in Philadelphia in 1813. Patients were treated by lay persons, not medical personnel.
- Mental illness was thought to be either a punishment from God, a “moral weakness” or a hereditary condition.

- “Moral treatment” - In the first half of the 19th century, treatment was based on the theory that the mentally ill would recover if treated kindly and in ways that appealed to the rational part of the mind - “Kirkbride Plan”. (Did not work with people who had dementia.)
 - In the 1850s and 1860s, Dorothea Dix advocated for states to build asylums based along Kirkbride’s Plan.
 - 1890s – States cut funding to asylums and redefined the term senility to that of a psychiatric problem. Flood of elderly patients went from poorhouses to asylums.
 - 1930s –Asylums received less state funding. More experimental therapies were performed involving the brain, i.e., electric shock therapy or lobotomies.
 - 1950s onward – New medication (chlorpromazine) and community mental health systems returned patients to their families.
3. DDD Schedule – Defective, Dependent & Delinquent
- Supplement to 1880 census.
 - Divided into 7 separate schedules: Insane, Idiots, Deaf-mutes, Blind, Paupers or Indigent, Homeless children and Prisoners
 - Check 1880 census first. If disability is marked, then check for the person on the DDD Schedule.
 - If ancestor was in an institution, they are most likely on the DDD Schedule.
 - Not all disabled people were on the DDD Schedule, i.e., someone who was crippled would not be on the schedule unless they had another disability such as blindness.
4. Women in Asylums
- Many people thought insanity was inherited.
 - Women were thought to be more vulnerable to insanity because they were believed to have more “fragile” natures.
 - Sometimes women were admitted because of stress or misunderstood medical conditions, i.e., post-partum depression.
 - Sometimes women were committed because the husband or family wanted to get rid of them.
 - Sometimes, women were committed because of real mental illness.
5. Information found in Asylum Admission Registers
- While the format differed from location to location, all listed the name of the patient, age, date of admission, how they came to the asylum, original diagnosis, if they were released and when and why.
 - It is a mistake to think that persons committed to an asylum were never released.
6. Cemeteries
- Many asylums, had their own cemeteries for deceased patients.
 - Most patients did not have individual grave sites. If so, they are identified by number only. The institutions did not keep the cemeteries up and they eventually became neglected and forgotten.

- Check asylums to see if they had a cemetery or check the **Asylum Projects**
7. Asylum Picture Post Cards
- Very common and popular in late 1800s and early 1900s.
 - Towns and cities were proud of their institutions. Wanted to promote the town as being progressive.
 - Sometimes you can find out information on an individual from the postcard their family sent.
 - They may be in state historical collections regarding the asylum. OR check eBay.
8. Online Collections
- **Genealogy Trails History Group** (<http://genealogytrails.com>)
 - Run by volunteers. Free of charge. Transcribed records from all states.
 - On Homepage, click “State Site.” Click “Search our Sites”.
 - **Digital Public Library of America** (<https://dp.la>) Use keyword “hospital records” or “medical records”, they city or state
 - **Cyndi’s List** (<https://www.cyndislist.com>) Most records are under collection “Hospitals, Asylums & Sanitoriums” and “U.S. Civil War Medicine & Hospitals”
 - **Asylum Projects** (<https://asylumprojects.org>) Wiki page about asylums. Click on main page link that says “Genealogical Requests”. Also has a Facebook page – compare information and get tips from other researchers.
 - **FamilySearch**, “Medical and Hospital Records”, (www.familysearch.org) Go to Catalog and use keyword “Hospital” or “Asylum”.
 - **Ancestry**, “California, State Hospital Records, 1856-1923” (www.ancestry.com)
9. Tips for Searching Institutional Records
- Remember not to judge historical terms based on 21st century values.
 - Some people were committed to institutions for non-medical reasons.
 - Remember HIPAA regulations when searching for medical records.
 - Know your state regulations for privacy
 - Hospitals don’t have to keep records for a certain period of time. Check the hospital’s regulations.
 - Look for medical information in other documents; death records, pensions, newspapers, censuses, DDD Schedules, etc.
 - Check State Archives, Historical Societies or State Genealogical Societies.
 - Remember the state Department of Public Health website.
 - Check Family Search for state hospital records.
 - Remember state GenWeb sites, Cyndi’s List, Genealogy Trails, DPLA, Asylum Projects.
 - Patients or inmates of a hospital may have been buried on hospital property. Check to see if there is a cemetery associated with the institution. Find A Grave may also be useful.
 - Be patient. Be persistent. Don’t give up!

TERMS & DEFINITIONS –Many of these definitions are not used now nor appropriate in today’s language. However, they were reflective of what terms society used throughout history and are found in historical documents:

Asylum:	Facility specializing in the treatment of the mentally ill. Originally meant a sanctuary or place of refuge. This included sanctuary for criminals, debtors or destitute persons, poor or orphans. NOT EVERY institution called an asylum was for the mentally ill.
Committed:	To place in a mental institution or hospital by a court order.
Consumption:	Tuberculosis.
DDD:	1880 Census Schedule of Defective, Dependent and Delinquent
Feeble-minded:	Senile dementia.
HIPAA:	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Passed in 1996 and revised in 2013.
Hospital:	An institution that is built, staffed, and equipped for the diagnosis of diseases and the treatment, both medical and surgical, of the sick and injured. Sanatoriums or “lunatic asylums” are often referred to as hospitals.
Idiot:	Congenital mental deficiency from birth with no lucid periods. The person can’t attend to his/her own personal needs.
Imbecile:	Persons who have fallen in life into a state of chronic dementia. Can perform simple chores with a limited grasp of ideas.
Inmate:	A resident of any institution.
Insane:	A non-medical definition about someone who exhibits abnormal mental or behavior patterns. Today, it is not a medical diagnosis but a legal definition.
Insane Asylum:	Psychiatric hospital or mental institution for hospitalizing persons who exhibited abnormal behaviors or who exhibited substance abuse.
Institutionalized:	To confine to an institution especially one treating mental illness or alcoholism.
Lunatic:	Before the 1800s – described persons eccentric in their behavior. By 1845 the term was officially used to describe persons of unsound mind. In the 19th century censuses sometimes included idiots and imbeciles. Now these terms are restricted to describing those having mental unsoundness.
Mad:	Formerly a raging lunatic, but nowadays has connotations of being a wildly foolish person.
Mania:	Manic Disorder - a type of emotional disorder characterized by euphoric moods, excessive activity and talkativeness, impaired judgment, and sometimes psychotic symptoms, as grandiose delusions.

Melancholia:	Clinical depression.
Mentally disabled:	Modern term for having a permanent insufficiency of mental power.
Mentally ill:	Modern term for having a temporary, usually treatable, disordered mind.
Patient:	Person residing in a hospital, sanatorium or mental institution.
Sanatorium:	A medical facility for long term illness, usually associated with tuberculosis. (Also spelled sanitarium and sanitorium. Spellings interchanged)
Sanitarium:	A health resort such as the famous Battle Creek Sanitarium.
State hospital:	A hospital run by the state for the “mentally incompetent” or unbalanced persons. Often referred to as a state insane asylum, or state mental hospital.
Tuberculosis:	An infectious disease that can affect any tissue of the body especially the lungs, caused by the organism <i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i> , and characterized by tubercles. Also known as consumption, “the wasting disease” or “the White Plague.”

**REMEMBER: that these descriptions may have had different meanings in the past than their definitions today. While the terms may be disgusting for us to hear now days, they were the historic words used in the past. We can’t judge the past based on today’s values.

If the head of household identified a relative as an imbecile, idiot or lunatic, the terminology was usually a layman’s description rather than an official medical or legal definition.

References and Links to Records

ASYLUMS:

Collections in Family Search:

Georgia	“Lunatic asylum records 1888-1908” Wilkes County, Georgia
Indiana	“Randolph County Asylum Records 1908-1918” “Insane records Miami County, Indiana 1843-1900”
Louisiana	“Records of the insane asylum 1858-1884” New Orleans, Louisiana “List of persons adjudged to be insane by the Civil District Court for the parish of Orleans, and ordered to be conveyed by the Civil Sheriff of the parish of Orleans to the State Insane Asylum at Jackson Louisiana, 1882-1919” “Admission books 1829-1899” New Orleans, Louisiana - Charity Hospital
Massachusetts	“Medical records 1866-1907 Tewksbury, Massachusetts” (Asylum for Chronic Insane) “Inpatient commitments and institutional registers, 1866-1918” Westborough, Massachusetts “Registers of patients in private hospitals, 1843-1917” Massachusetts asylums
Minnesota	“Hastings State Hospital/Asylum Obituary Records”, Hastings, Minnesota
Missouri	“Missouri, Callaway County, medical records 1855-1911”
North Carolina	“Lunacy records, Bladen County, North Carolina 1895-1955”
Oklahoma	“Insane and orphan asylum records in the Tahlequah District 1890-1908”
Tennessee	“Insanity records – Franklin County, Tennessee 1870-1936
South Dakota	“Indian census rolls, Canton Asylum 1910-11, 1921, 1924”
Pennsylvania	“Death records 1866-1902 Philadelphia General Hospital” Philadelphia, Pennsylvania “Finding friends: families, staff and patients at the Friends Asylum in early nineteenth century Philadelphia”
Vermont	“A Record of Burials at the Vermont Asylum: later known as the Brattleboro Retreat 1837-1900”

Collections in Ancestry:

California	“California, State Hospital Records 1856-1923” - Stockton, Mendocino & Sonoma State Hospitals
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Online References to Asylums (non-Ancestry or FamilySearch):

California	“California Memorial Project” - California Department of State Hospitals http://www.dsh.ca.gov/Hospitals/California_Memorial_Project.asp
Colorado	“Colorado State Hospital for the Insane 1930 Index of Surnames” http://www.blacksheepancestors.com/usa/colorado_insane.shtml

Connecticut	“Norwich State Hospital” - Information on obtaining records https://ctstatelibrary.org/RG021_008.html
Delaware	“Delaware State Hospital for the Insane, Surnames, Index of Inmates” http://blacksheepancestors.com/usa/delaware_insane.shtml
Idaho	“South Idaho Insane Asylum, 1930 Index of Inmates” http://blacksheepancestors.com/usa/idaho_insane.shtml
Indiana	“Central State Hospital, Indiana” – (what is in the collection at the Indiana State Archives), https://www.in.gov/iara/2665.htm
Georgia	Graham, Paul K. <i>Admission Register of Central State Hospital, Milledgeville, GA 1842-1861</i> , Baltimore: The Genealogy Company, 2013. “Central State Hospital” - Georgia State Lunatic Asylum (1850 and 1860 census), http://theusgenweb.org/ga/baldwin/csh.html
Kansas	“Topeka State Hospital Cemetery Records 1872-1960” (https://www.kshs.org/p/topeka-state-hospital-cemetery/11317)
Kentucky	“Western Lunatic Asylum – Western State Hospital, Christian Co., KY (http://www.westernkyhistory.org/christian/wsh/)
Louisiana	“City Insane Asylum Record of Patients, 1882-1884; 1888” New Orleans (http://nutrias.org/inv/cityinsaneasylum1_50.htm)
Massachusetts	“Tewksbury State Hospital” – Cemetery Records (http://www.tewksburyhospitalcemetery.ma-vitalrecords.org/)
New York	“Central Islip State Hospital, 1925 State Census”, New York (https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/USA/NY1925Census.CISH.htm) - Stuhler, Linda S., “The Inmates of Willard 1870 to 1900: A Genealogy Resource”, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011. (Willard State Hospital) “Willard Cemetery” - Anyone looking for information on those buried at the cemetery should contact the New York State Office of Mental Health.
Oregon	- State Hospital record books found in the Oregon State Archives
United States	- “List of US Insane Asylums” – from Blacksheep Ancestors (http://blacksheepancestors.com/usa/insane.shtml) - “List of Old Soldiers or military homes before 1930” (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Military_Old_Soldiers_Home_Records)
West Virginia	“West Virginia State Hospital for Colored Insane, 1930 Index of Inmates” (http://www.blacksheepancestors.com/usa/west_virginia_insane.shtml)
Wisconsin	“Clark County Insane Asylum 1930 Index of Inmates” (http://www.blacksheepancestors.com/usa/wisconsin_insane.shtml) “La Cross County Insane Asylum, 1930 Index of Inmates” (http://www.blacksheepancestors.com/usa/wisconsin_insane2.shtml)

Partial List of Sanatoriums in the U.S.:

Arkansas:	Arkansas Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Booneville, Arkansas
California:	Bromley Sanitarium, Sonora, California Paradise Valley Hospital, National City, California Barlow Respiratory Hospital, Los Angeles, California Olive View Hospital, Los Angeles, California
Colorado:	National Jewish Health, Denver, Colorado Swedish Medical Center, Englewood, Colorado National Methodist Sanatorium, Colorado Springs, Colorado
Connecticut	Undercliff State Hospital, Meriden, Connecticut
Illinois	Batavia Institute, Batavia, Illinois Edward Sanatorium, Naperville, Illinois Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium, Chicago, Illinois
Kentucky	Waverly Hills Sanatorium, Jefferson County, Kentucky
Maryland	Maryland Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Sabillasville, Maryland Pine Bluff State Hospital, Salisbury, Maryland Henryton State Hospital, Marriottsville, Maryland Glen Dale Hospital, Glen Dale, Maryland
Massachusetts	Boston Consumptive Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts Cranberry Specialty Hospital, Hanson, Massachusetts
Michigan	Battle Creek Sanitarium, Battle Creek, Michigan
Minnesota	Minnesota State Sanatorium for Consumptives, Walker, Minnesota Glen Lake Sanatorium, Hennepin County, Minnesota
Missouri	Missouri State Sanitarium, Mt. Vernon, Missouri
New Jersey	Deborah Heart and Lung Center, Browns Mills, New Jersey
New York	Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, Saranac Lake, New York River Crest Sanitarium, Astoria, Queens (New York), New York Saratoga County Homestead, Providence, New York Edgewood State Hospital, Deer Park, New York
North Carolina	Halifax County Home and Tubercular Hospital, Halifax, North Carolina
Oklahoma	Enid Government Springs Sanatorium, Enid, Oklahoma
Oregon	Oregon State Tuberculosis Hospital, Salem, Oregon Hot Lake Sanatorium, Hot Lake, Oregon University Tuberculosis Hospital, Portland, Oregon
Pennsylvania	Cresson Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Cresson, Pennsylvania
South Dakota	Sioux San Hospital, Rapid City, South Dakota
Texas	Temple Sanitarium, Temple, Texas
Virginia	Pine Camp Tuberculosis Hospital, Richmond, Virginia Piedmont Sanatorium, Burkeville, Virginia
Wisconsin	Muirdale Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin Pureair Sanatorium, Bayfield County, Wisconsin