Researchers missing or forgotten ancestors using asylum records

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Family history’s surprises

- Once you start digging into your family history be prepared to uncover black sheep, family skeletons and secrets...

These may include ancestors suffering mental illness or those taken into care...

The mentally ill in NSW - 19th century

- Early colonial governors could make orders to detain ‘lunatics’/mentally ill. This was later devolved to police and magistrates.
- Prior to 1811, when Castle Hill opened, if a person was declared insane he/she was held in a gaol.
- Writ de lunatico inquiendo – as in case of John Macarthur - generally only applied to the better-off colonists (those with assets).
- Friends or relatives could petition the Governor to have a person declared insane. That person’s assets would be transferred to someone else until he/she recovered. The person granted trusteeship of the estate was responsible for the care of his/her care.
Understanding the terminology

- The term ‘asylum’ is not limited to a place or institution for treating the mentally ill.
- The government and private organisations established ‘asylums’ to care for the aged, infirm, destitute, those born with disabilities or otherwise unable to care for themselves... and those who have been forgotten.
- Asylums were also established by government and private organisations to care for children where were orphaned and placed or taken into care, for example the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children.

Access to patient identifying records

- Accessing patient identifying records from mental health facilities and government asylums in NSW
- Records that are more than 110 years old
  - Records created more than 110 years ago are open to public access.
  - Researchers can access the records at the Western Sydney Reading Room.
- Records that are less than 110 years old
  - Patient identifying medical records created less than 110 years ago are closed to public access.
  - Researchers must obtain the permission of the NSW Health Department before accessing these records.
- Note: The records of the Liverpool Asylum are open to public access

Reasons for admission into an asylum

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Death in the family
- Orphaned
- Birth of a child
- Postpartum depression (Maternity blues, or baby blues)
- Death of a child
- Desertion of husband
- Disability from birth
- Climacteric (menopause)
- Move away from family
- Unemployment
- Destitution and poverty
- Heredity
- Age
- Infirmity
- Alcohol
- Physical impairment
- Accident
- Religious mania
- The list goes on...
Tracing the missing or forgotten
• Signals for the family historian:
  • Unexplained and/or extended absences away from the family
  • Gaps in employment
  • Gaps in the births of children
  • Links on the family tree who mysteriously ‘disappear’, or
  • Silence when a ‘family name’ is mentioned.
• Finding the answers:
  • Family stories and documents
  • Death certificates
  • Newspapers
• Going to the official records:
  • Typical records
  • Related records

Using official sources

Until the latter part of the 20th century, institutional care in specialised hospitals was the primary places of care for the mentally ill. From the 1970s onwards, this progressively gave way to a focus on community-based care, and greater use of psychiatric units in general hospitals.

Government mental health facilities
• 1811-25 Castle Hill
• 1825-38 Liverpool
• 1838+ Tarban Creek (Gladesville)
• 1848-56 Convict, Lunatic Invalid Establishment, Parramatta
• 1849+ Parramatta
• 1856+ Bayview House Tempe
• 1868+ Darlinghurst Reception/Admission Centre
• 1871+ Newcastle (originally Watt Street public asylum)
• 1877-84 Cooma
• 1878+ Callan Park
• 1888+ Rydalmere
• 1895+ Kenmore
• 1911+ Stockton
• 1925+ Bloomfield
• 1909-14 Morisset Hospital for the Insane 1915-22 Morisset Hospital/Morisset Hospital
• 1915-22 Broughton Hall
Recent transfers to State Records

- There have been recent transfers of records from the following mental health facilities
  - Kenmore Hospital
    - Patient medical records, 1895+ (NRS 17418) (Records are still being transferred)
  - Bloomfield Hospital
    - Case files, 1925+
      Tip: You will need to obtain permission from Health to access records that are less than 110 years old.

Mental health facilities: typical records

- Control records
  - Indexes
  - Registers of patients and admission books
  - Registers of discharges removals and deaths
- Case papers/medical case books/admission files
  - Case papers
  - Medical case books
  - Admission files
    Tip: Not all these categories of records have survived
- For further information about the key records at State Records NSW see Archives in Brief 85 - Mental health facilities - Patient records (available online)

Related records – for further research

- Supreme Court of New South Wales - Lunacy Jurisdiction (1879 - 1955); Protective Division (1955 - 1998) Equity Division Protective (1998 - )
- Master in Lunacy (1879 - 1955); Master in Protective Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court (1955 - 1972); Protective Office (1972 - 1983)
- Inspector General of the Insane (1876-1917)
- Intestate Estate Files
- Convict Branch of the Police Department
- Police Department
- Police Gazettes
- Corrective Services
- Attorney General’s Department (Inquests)
- Colonial Secretary’s records
  Tip: For details of the records go to State Records Archives investigator or use the new Search.
Colonial Secretary’s records

- Colonial Secretary’s Papers (CSP), 1788-1825
  The index and digital copies of the CSP are available free of charge on Ancestry. The index to the CSP is on State Records’ website.
- Colonial Secretary’s Correspondence, 1826+
  Tip 1: Consult for documents, including warrants, relating to those admitted to mental health facilities (asylums). These can be located by going to the indexes and registers
  Tip 2: A quick way into the post 1826 Colonial Secretary’s correspondence is to consult the indexes compiled by the late Joan Reese. These are available at State Records’ reading room.
- Special bundles such as:
  - 1869, 1872 Parramatta Lunatic Asylum — List of convict inmates, noting any deaths 1870–72 [X644; Reel 2389]
  - 1874 Powers of judges to sign certificates of lunacy in absence of Governor (4/810.1)
  - 1879–83 Convict returns — pardons, tickets of leave, deaths, absconded, lunatics and invalids [4/844.1; Reel 2283]

Asylums for the infirm and destitute

- State Records holds records of the following State managed infirm and destitute asylums:
  - George Street Asylum, Parramatta
  - Hospital of Consumptives, Waterfall
  - Lidcombe State Hospital and Home
  - Liverpool State Hospital and Home
  - Macquarie Street Asylum, Parramatta
  - Newington State Hospital (closed 1964)
  - Rookwood Asylum (later Lidcombe State Hospital and Home)
- State Records does not hold any records of inmates at Hyde Park Asylum.
Surviving records

- Most surviving records of asylums only provide brief details of the inmate’s admission and discharge. Many records are incomplete.
- Typical records:
  - Registers of admissions and discharges
  - Admission cards
- Access to patient-identifying records
  - Patient records created by the Liverpool State Hospital and Home, 1890-1959, are open to public access.
- All other records are closed to public access for 110 years
- For further information see Archives in Brief 86 – Infirm and destitute asylums Archives in Brief 87 Liverpool State Hospital and Home (both available online)

Children in care

What happened to the children?

- Custodial style residential institutions were regarded as the best means of providing care and protection for destitute and abandoned children for most of the 19th century.
- The orphan schools were the first government-run institutions set up on this model.
- Large-scale institutional care for children questioned in the 1870s.
- "Boarding-out" children in private homes introduced after 1881.

For more information See State Records’ Archives in Brief 59 – Childcare and protection and Archives In Brief 66 – Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children (both online on State Records’ website)
Other asylums

- Sydney Benevolent Asylum – Index to Admissions and discharges
  - Index of the inmates of the Asylum was compiled by Heather Garnsey and Martyn Killion. The database contains over 78,000 records - listing of Asylum inmates between 1857 and 1900
- Penrith Benevolent Asylum - Penrith District Dispensary Register
  - There is a transcription of the Register compiled by Helen Castle at: http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hcastle/registers/registers.htm

Other references and websites

- State Records: http://www.records.nsw.gov.au
- Penrith District Dispensary Register (Penrith Benevolent Asylum) http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hcastle/registers/registers.htm

Public Record Office of Victoria (PROV)

- Online guides to Victorian records
  - PROVguide 23: PROV's Digitised Records and Online Indexes
  - PROVguide 59: Mental Health Records
  - PROVguide 71: Inquest Records
- Hospitals for the mentally ill include: Ararat, Ballarat, Beechworth, Bendigo, Collingwood, Cremorne, Kew, Royal Park, Sunbury, Sunnyside, Yarra Bend.
- Access: only nineteenth and some early twentieth century records currently available
Queensland State Archives (QSA)

- Online guides to Queensland records
  - Brief Guide 26 –Guide to Dunwich Records
  - Brief Guide 39 –Insanity/Mental Asylum Records
  - QSA holds two types of Mental asylum records
  - Public Curator Insanity Files
  - Goodna (now Woogaroo) Case Books
  - 100 years access for mental hospital records
  - QSA also holds records of Eventide Home Sandgate, residential care facility
  - QSA website: http://www.archives.qld.gov.au

Tasmania’s Heritage

- Formerly Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT)
- Select the Search the Archives Collection at: http://search.archives.tas.gov.au/default.aspx?search=1 for Hospital Records, including Royal Hobart and Royal Derwent hospitals
- Online indexes
  - Inquest Records, 1828-1930
  - Wills and Letters of Administration, 1824-1989
- Access: Hospital records open after 75 years

State Records of South Australia (SRSA)

- Search for details of the records held by SRSA using the "Search Collection Catalogue" option at: http://143.216.32.50/archivesrsa/t1tbmain.asp?MainURL= t1tdui.asp&FunctionName=SSASABKWDSCH
- SRSA holds Adelaide and Parkside Lunatic Asylums, later Glenside Hospital records. These include Admission books for the Colonial, later Adelaide Lunatic Asylum, 1846-1902
  - Tip: SRSA holds card indexes to Destitute Asylum Admissions 1870-73; 1881-1924 and Royal Adelaide Hospital Admissions 1842-1904 (not available online).
- Access: Records are open after 100 years
State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA)

- Mental Health institutions include: Fremantle Asylum, Claremont Hospital, Lemnos Hospital, Whitby Falls, Heathcote Mental Hospital and Greenplace Hostel.
- No indexes or digital images available online.
- Access: Many of these records are restricted access records. Permission to access these records may need to be obtained from the Health Department.

Northern Territory

- Archives Navigator is the online access point to the Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS) Archives Management System at: https://navigator.nt.gov.au/t1tmain.asp
- NTAS website: http://www.artsandmuseums.nt.gov.au/ntas#1JZr9o7XimAn