The Genesee County Home and Willard State Hospital

Katie Bonk, Genesee County History Department
Laura Dumuhosky and Jill Feine, Richmond Memorial Library

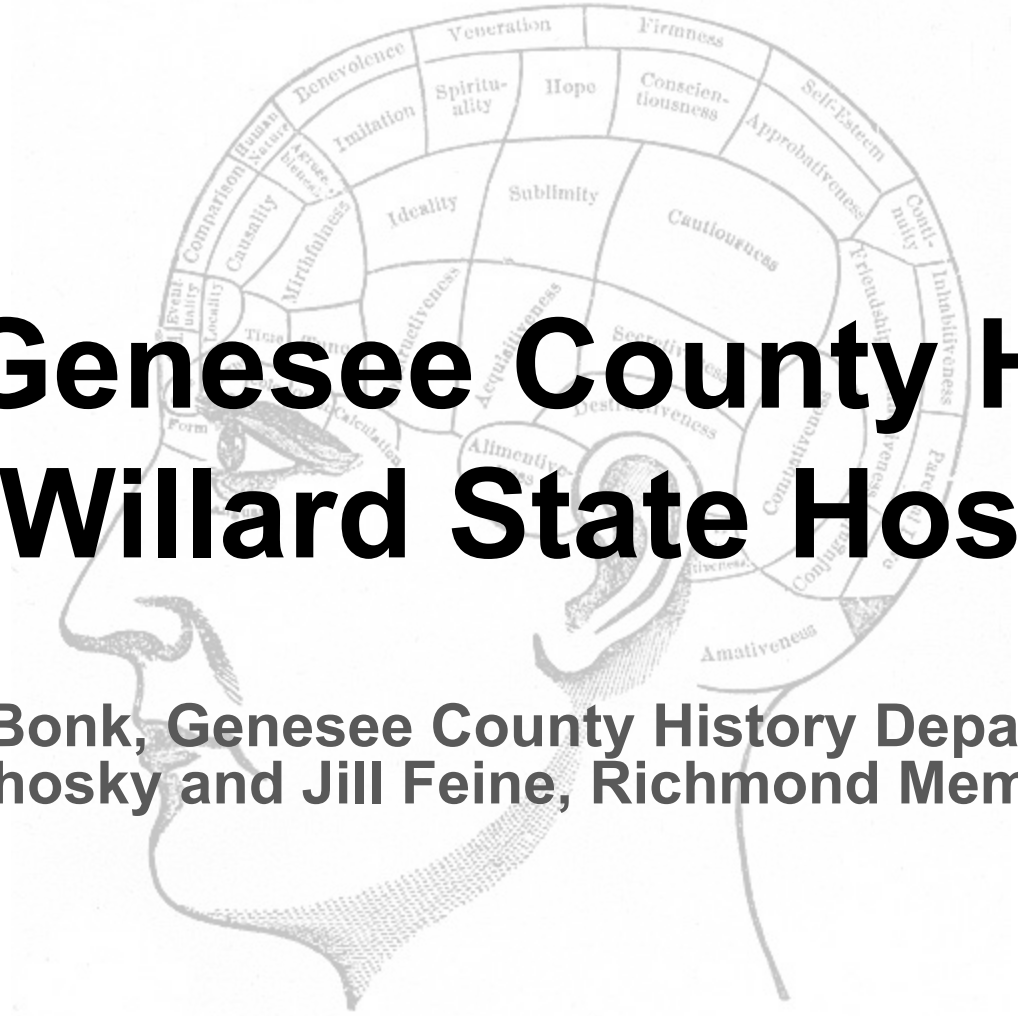


Fig. 6. The Phrenological Organs.

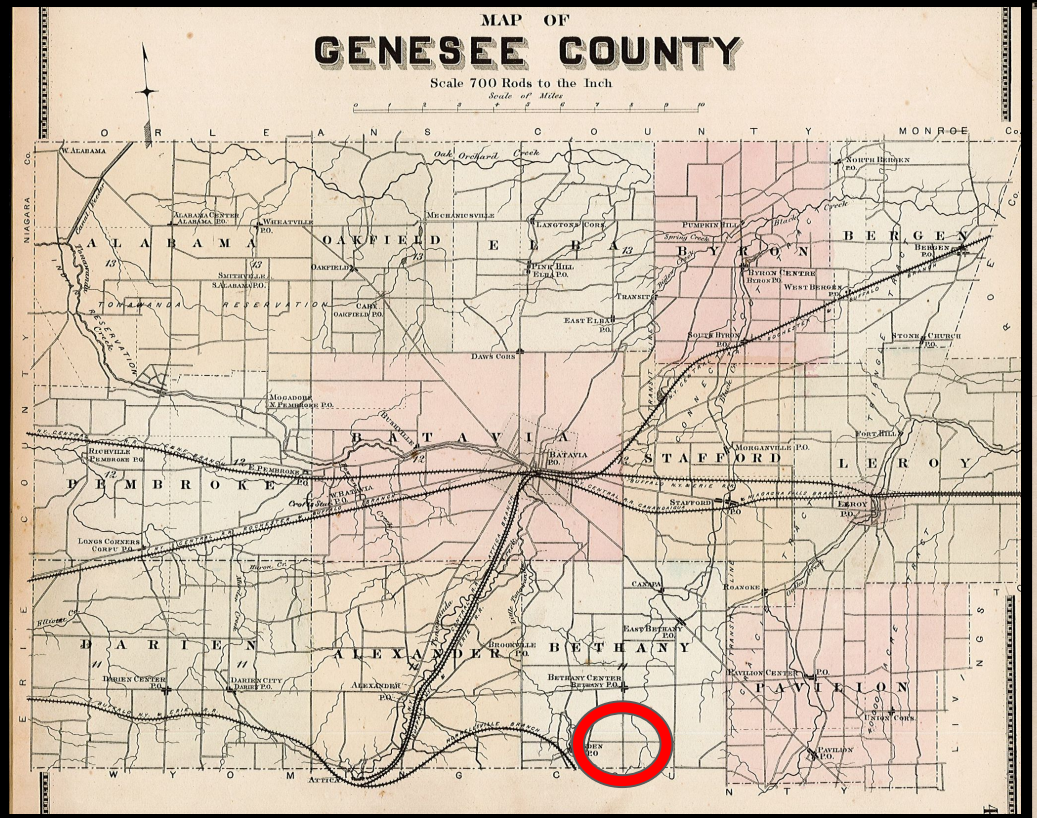
Before We Begin...

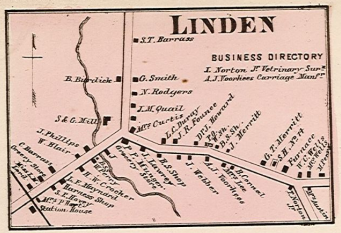
The topics discussed in this presentation may be upsetting to some folks. The language used to label those with mental illness has been kept intact to stay true to the language used in the time periods we are focusing on.

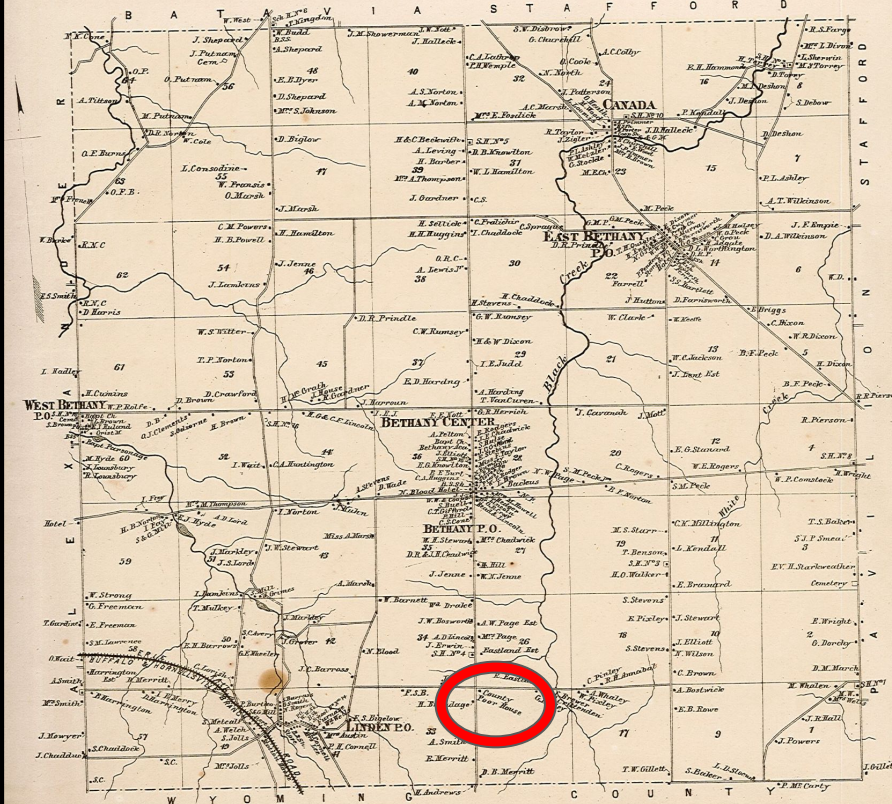
1967



Genesee County Poor House







Maps from an 1866 Atlas

Genesee County Home - History



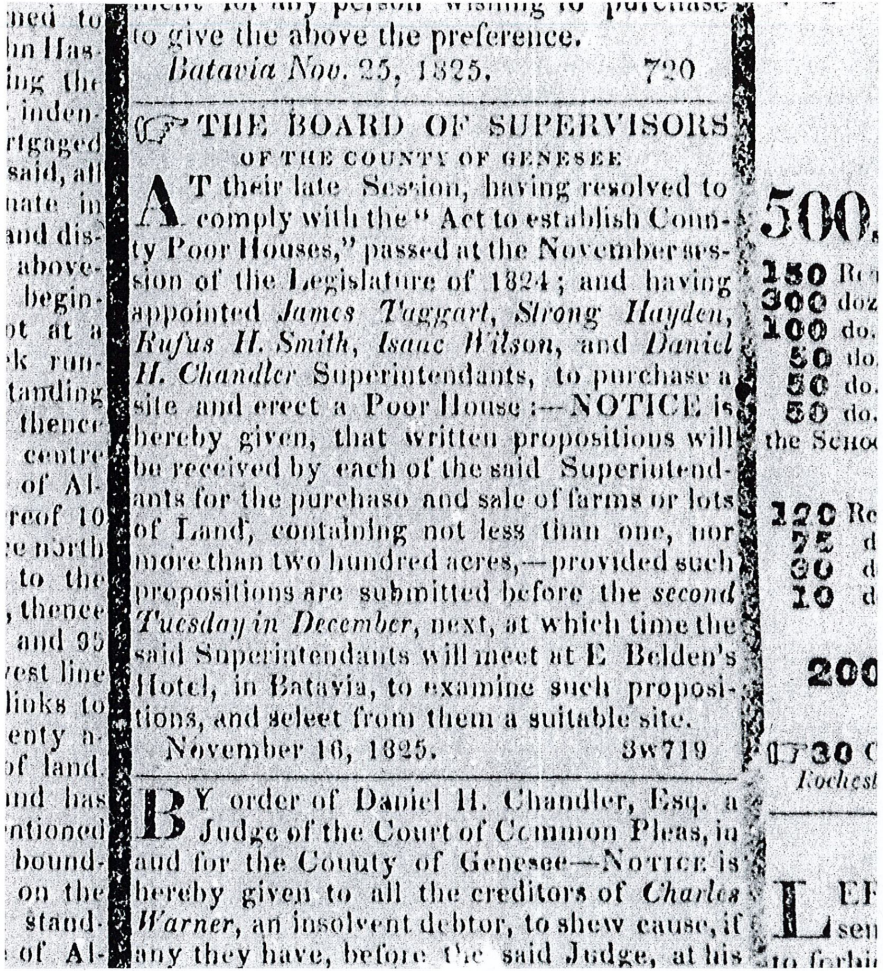
-Opened: Early 1827 after the passage of the NYS “County Almshouse Law” in 1824; Asylum constructed in 1828.

-Original Purpose: Relief for the poor in Genesee County

-Before the Poorhouse: “Outdoor relief” placed individuals in need with local “contractors”

-Why a County Poorhouse?: Consolidated the needy into one place - towns and people were spread thin in the 1820s; also legislation passed by NYS allowed for the construction of county poor houses

-Closed: Feb. 18, 1974; housed about 110; moved to Batavia



to give the above the preference.
Batavia Nov. 25, 1825. 720

☞ THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
OF THE COUNTY OF GENESEE

AT their late Session, having resolved to comply with the "Act to establish County Poor Houses," passed at the November session of the Legislature of 1824; and having appointed *James Taggart, Strong Hayden, Rufus H. Smith, Isaac Wilson,* and *Daniel H. Chandler* Superintendants, to purchase a site and erect a Poor House:—NOTICE is hereby given, that written propositions will be received by each of the said Superintendants for the purchaso and sale of farms or lots of Land, containing not less than one, nor more than two hundred acres,—provided such propositions are submitted before the *second Tuesday in December,* next, at which time the said Superintendants will meet at E Belden's Hotel, in Batavia, to examine such propositions, and select from them a suitable site.
November 16, 1825. 3w719

BY order of Daniel H. Chandler, Esq. a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, in and for the County of Genesee—NOTICE is hereby given to all the creditors of *Charles Warner,* an insolvent debtor, to shew cause, if any they have, before the said Judge, at his

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December 2, 1826
Republican Advocate

"The Board of Supervisors of the County of Genesee

At their late Session, having resolved to comply with the "Act to establish County Poor Houses,"... having appointed…Superintendents, to purchase a site and erect a Poor House…containing not less than one, nor more than two hundred acres,..."
November 16, 1825

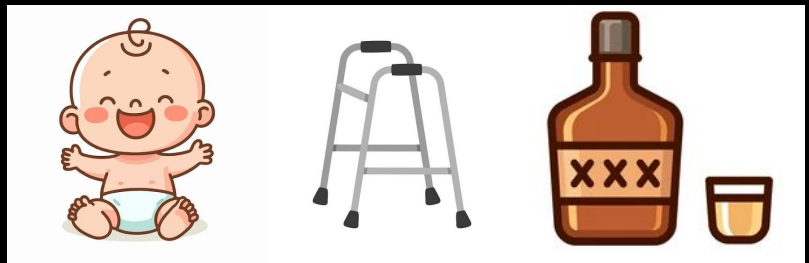
What got you sent to the Poor House?



-Paupers: people of little to no income who could not support themselves financially; relied on public assistance for help

-Who else? Alcoholics (“drunkards”), those with mental and physical disabilities (“lunatics, idiots”), the sick, the elderly, and sometimes criminals and children

→The County Poor House was a catch-all for those without a place in Genesee County



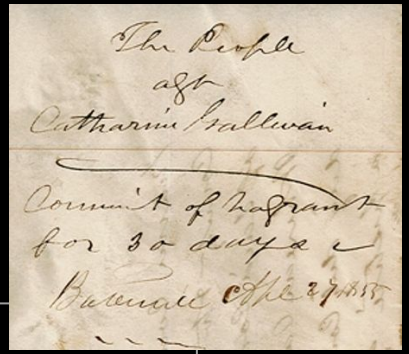
Nov. 13. 1848 (81)

A List of Paupers in Genesee Co. Poor-House during the year commencing Nov 13. 1848.

1848 Names	When Committed	By Committed	Born	Age	Condition	Co. P	Town	Y	P	Discharged	Bound	When Bound	Absconded	Died
Ebenezer Dibble	Mar 12/34	Batavia	Conn	66	Intemperate	Co	P							
Orlo Marsh	May 8./46	"	N.Y.	28	Nearly blind									
Elizabeth Elmore	Jan 1./37	"	"	38	Lunacy	Co	P	Batavia						
Joseph Tucker	" " "	Stafford	"	14	Idiocy	"	"							
John Lightner	Dec 14./36	Batavia	Penn.	63	Int	"	"							
Wm Waterman	Feb 20/37	"	N.Y.	33	Lunacy	"	"							
Chauncey French	Nov 18./45	Le Roy	Vt.	21	Idiocy	"	"							
Anna Huddleson	July 23/45	Oakfield	Ireland	50	Lunacy	"	"							
Asa Buckingham	June 19/38	Batavia	Conn	49	Int	"	"							
Colisha Hurlburt	May 2/37	Bethany	Conn	66	Int	"	"							
Wm Abernathy	Jan 3./35	Pembroke	N.J.	65	Int	"	"							
Chas Mitchell	Nov 11/45	Alabama	R.I.	61	Int	"	"	Alabama	Y	P	Oct 29./49			
John D Henshaw	July 21/38	Batavia	Vt.	56	Lunacy	"	"							
Elijah Bristol	Sept 4/40	Bethany	"	60	Int	"	"							
Frank Guthrie	Nov 20/40	Bergen	N.Y.	26	Idiocy	"	"							
Orrie Hart	Jan 16/45	Alabama	"	4	Int. Father	"	"							
Zenta Eggleston	Jan 31./45	Darien	"	31	Lunacy	"	"							
Marinda Jenkins	Mar 3./45	Bethany	"	35	Idiocy	"	"							
Phebe White	Apl 14/28	Batavia	"	9	"	"	"							
Nancy Osborn	Apl 19./35	Le Roy	Conn	38	Int. Husband	"	"				April 18./49			
Philip Cullen	July 8./43	Batavia	Ireland	55	Int	"	"							
Jack A Rouse	Nov. 25/45	Le Roy	Italy	82	Infirm	"	"							
Flora Eggleston	Feb 5. 47	P. H.	N.Y.	0	Lewd Mother	"	"							
Griswold Cone	May 24/45	Pavilion	Scotland	83	Paralysis			Pavilion	Y	P				
James Crutchlow	Jan 16/43	P. H.	N.Y.	0	Bastardy			Alexander						
John Butler	June 10./46	Le Roy	" "	5	Int Father	"	"						July 12. 1849	To P. Durham Pembl
Francis Butler	" " "	"	" "	3	" "	"	"							
Mabel Strong	May 18/47	Alex	" "	59	Consumption			Alex	Y	P				July 2 1849
Grace Warren	Aug 7. 47	Batavia	England	70	Lunacy	"	"							
Rachel Fair	Aug 12./47	Darien	N.Y.	64	"	"	"							
Cynthia Cook	Sept 10/49	Byron	" "	44	Idiocy			Byron	Y	P				
Caroline E Hammond	23/47	Bergen	" "	33	Lunacy	"	"							
Robert Weber	Oct 1. 47	Bethany	N.H.	75	Rheumatism	"	"							
Margaret Peck	Nov 3/47	Bethany	N.Y.	30	Lunacy	"	"							
Huldah Lines	Dec 22/47	Batavia			Paralysis			Batavia	Y	P				

Admission Records

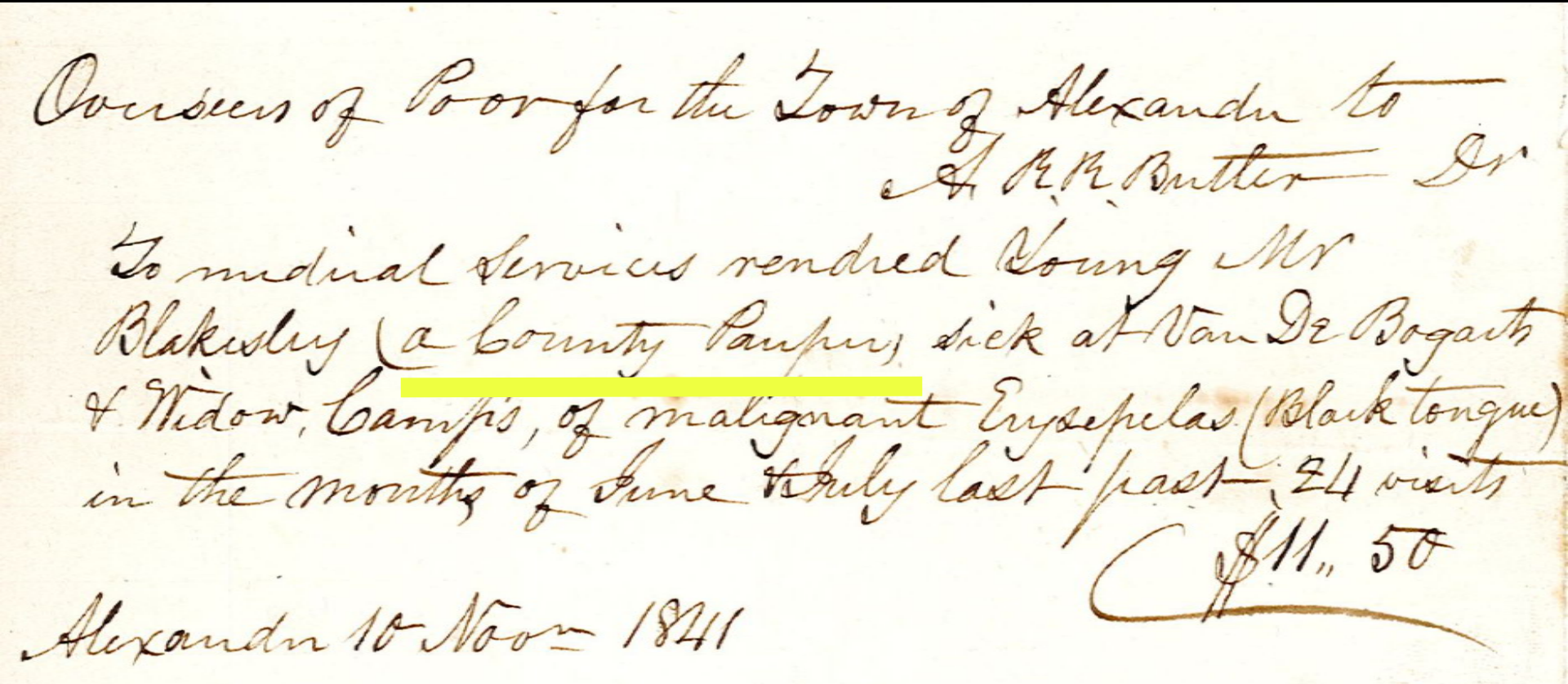
Paupers and their Variants



Who was paying for all these beggars and vagrants?

Town Pauper (1838)	County Pauper
→If one's "settlement" was in a particular town, that town was charged → County was VERY motivated to find an origin	→If the order of committal to the Poor House did NOT state a town of origin, the pauper = a county responsibility
Temporary Pauper	**Permanent Pauper**
-Needed momentary assistance	→Needed consistent assistance

Transportation to the almshouse: Paid for by either the town of origin or the Genesee County Treasurer; carried out by sheriffs, poormasters, etc.



Overseers of Poor for the Town of Alexandr to
A. R. R. Butler Dr

To medical Services rendred Young Mr
Blakesley (a County Pauper) sick at Van De Bogarts
& Widow Camp's, of malignant Erysepelas (Black tongue)
in the months of June & July last past 24 visits
$11.50

Alexandr 10 Novr 1841

County pauper designation

More Financial Info.

People in need could apply for relief in the form of payments to support the individual's household (Indoor Relief)

→Applied to the Overseer of the Poor

In the case of Lunacy:

-Families of the "lunatic" were charged with paying for their family member's care in the Poor House

→If families could not pay, costs were deferred to the town of origin



Structure of who dealt with the Paupers: Who was in charge?

Board of Supervisors (County)

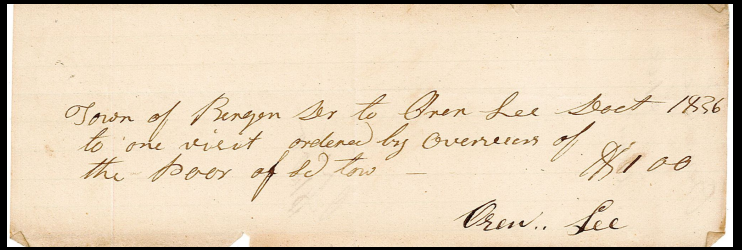
-Current-day Legislators

-Visited the Poor House once a year to inspect conditions

3 Superintendents of the Poor (County)

-Appointed by Board of Supervisors; set to three superintendents total in 1841

-"Charged with the management and discipline of the institution"

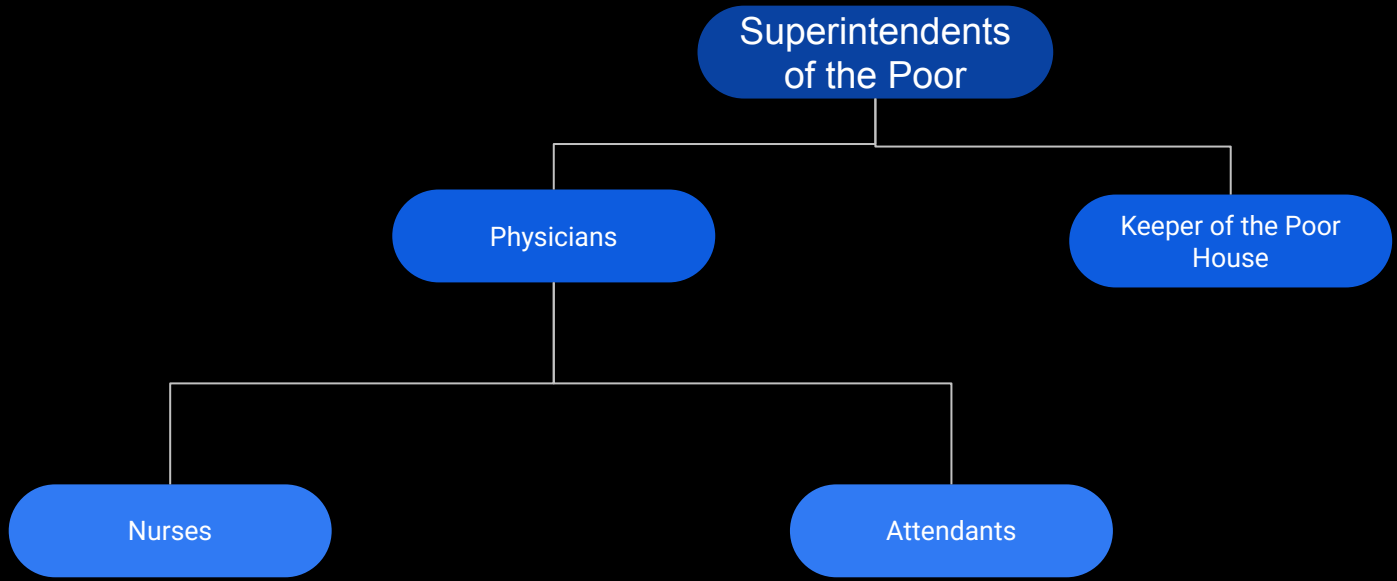


Ordering doctors' visits

Local Overseers of the Poor (Town)

-Provided relief for the poor of towns when able to
-Ordered doctors' visits

Structure of Discipline at the County Home



Superintendents of the Poor

Appointed by County Supervisors (1 year terms as of November 1841)

How many at any given time: 3 (this number was established in 1841 when Wyoming County split off of Genesee County)

What did they do for the poor?

→Among other duties, they set prices for food sales from farm (source: miscellaneous letter from superintendents to Luman Stevens)

Keeper of the Poor House

1. Had control over the Poor House and farm & enforced rules made by Superintendents
2. Kept inventory of all property at the Home and kept an account book to show Superintendents
3. Kept a record of all who entered and resided at the Home
4. Prohibited the use of alcohol on the premises (unless ordered by physician)
5. Kept away and reported all suspicious activity at the Home
6. Ensured overall cleanliness of Home and that nothing got wasted
7. Made sure children in the Home were taught to read and write
8. Could confine paupers, but no longer than 24 hours and needed Superintendent permission
9. Assessed and assigned work to Home residents
10. Enforced no-gambling rule
11. Inspected the Home daily; was responsible for the Home and it's workers
12. Followed Superintendents' instructions

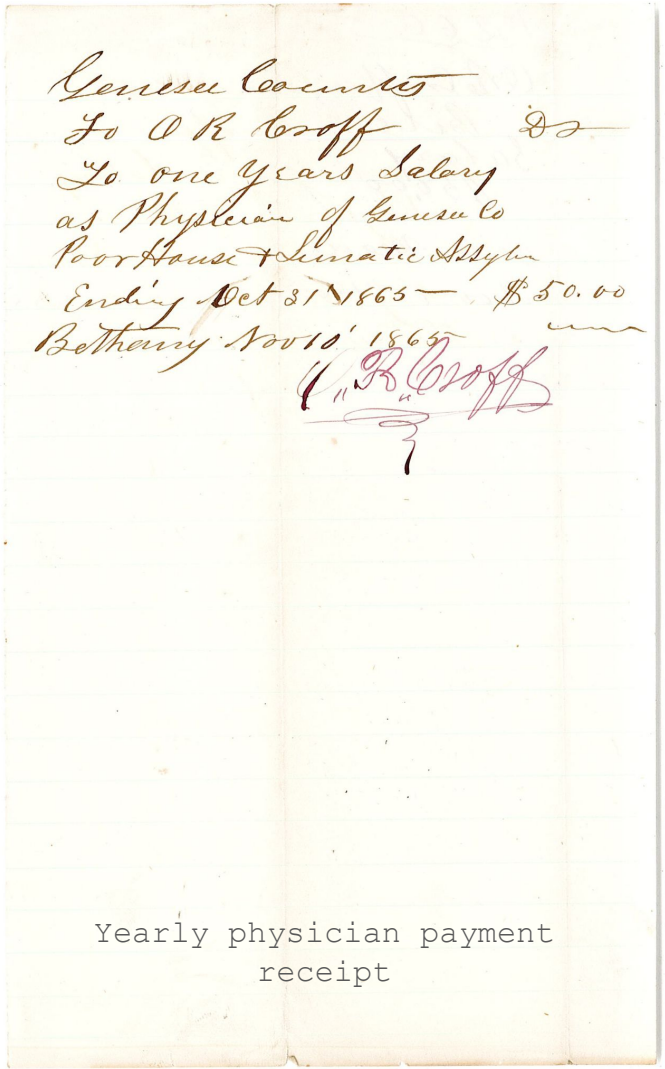


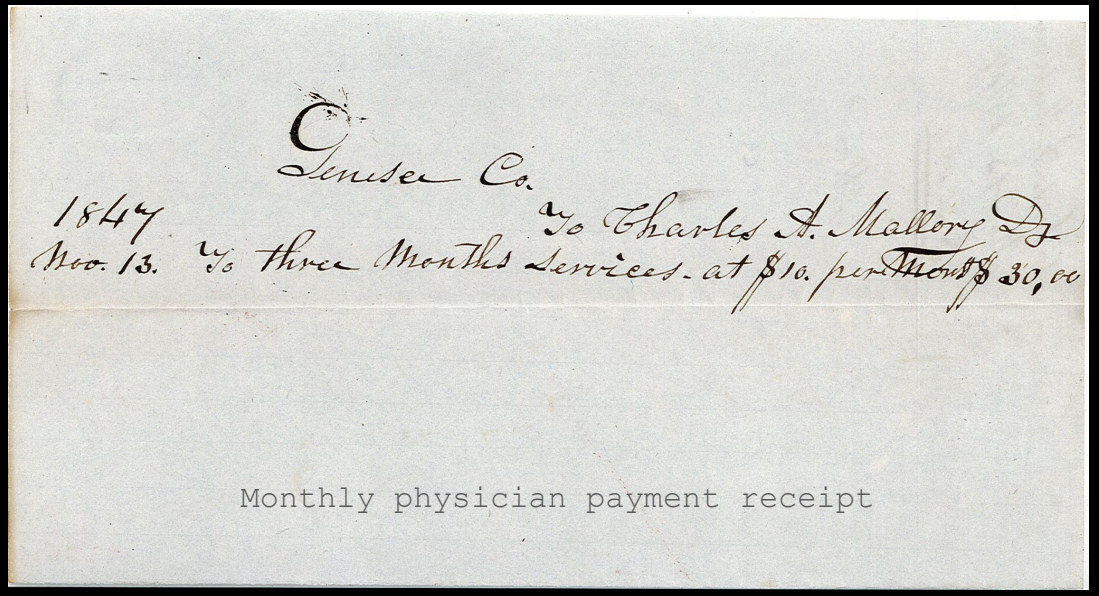
Physicians

-Some had contracts (usually 1-3 years); Others were paid monthly or per visit

-Provided medicine to inmates

-Amputated limbs


Yearly physician payment receipt


Genesee Co.

1847 Nov. 13. To Charles A. Mallory Dr
To three Months Services at $10. per Month $30,00

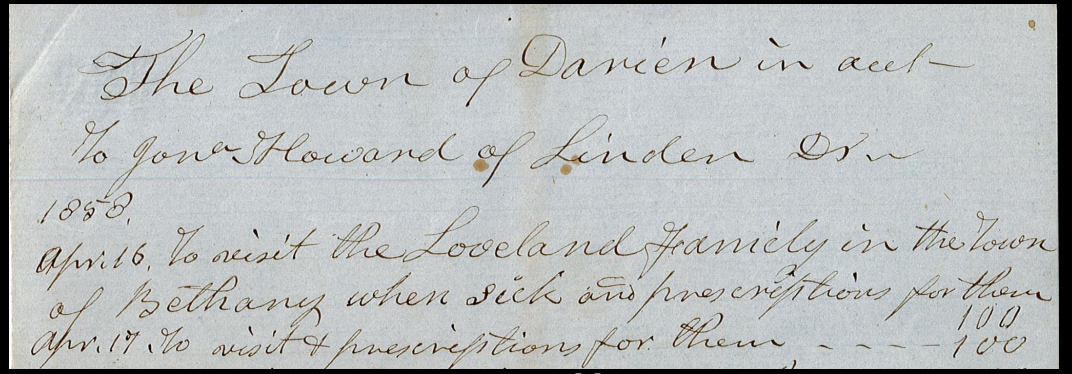
Monthly physician payment receipt

Physicians cont.

-Declared insanity cases

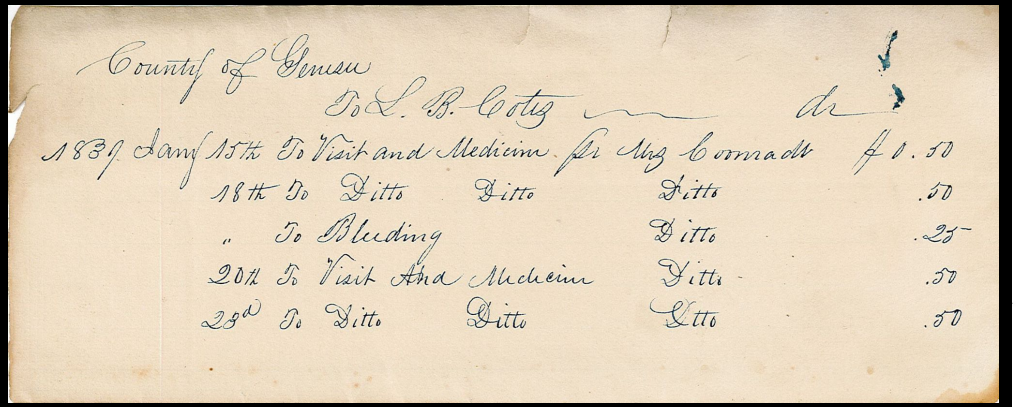
-Treated inmates consistently (same doctor for same inmate)

-Made house calls to poor families



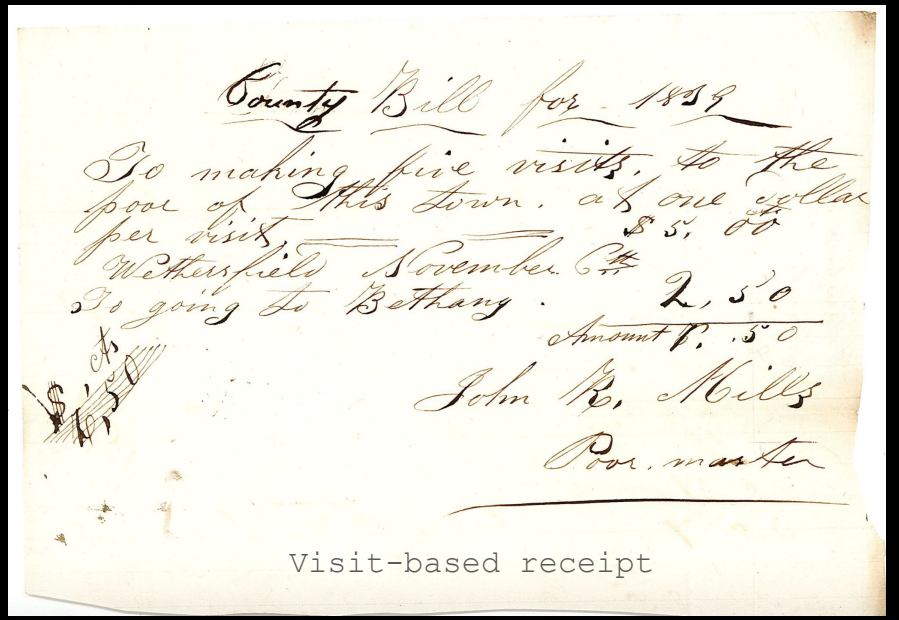
The Town of Darien in act—
To Jonn Howard of Linden Dr.
185-8.
Apr. 16. To visit the Loveland family in the town of Bethany when sick and prescriptions for them 100
Apr. 17. To visit & prescriptions for them ---- 100

House calls



County of Genesee
To L. B. Colby Dr.
1837 Jany 15th To Visit and Medicine for Mrs Cornwell $0.50
18th To Ditto Ditto Ditto .50
" To Bleeding Ditto .25
20th To Visit And Medicine Ditto .50
29th To Ditto Ditto Ditto .50

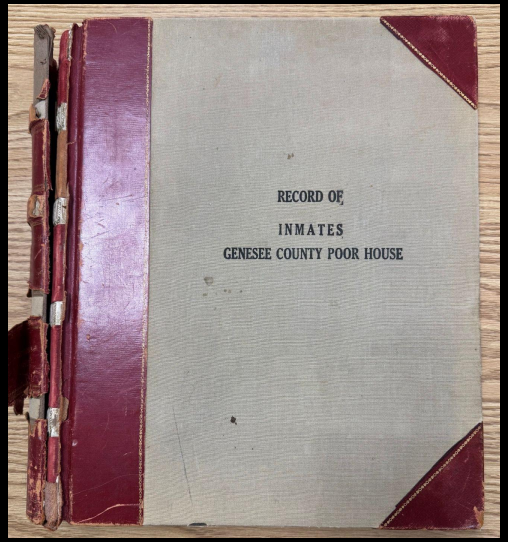
Consistent care



County Bill for 1839
To making five visits to the poor of this town. at one dollar per visit $5.00
Wethersfield November 6th
To going to Bethany. 2.50
Amount D. 7.50
John R. Mills
Post. master

Visit-based receipt

Living at the Poor House



- Nurses and attendants:
  - →Underpaid and understaffed
  - →Received on-the-job training
- Environment determined by inmates
  - →caused a lack of attention to treatment, opting for a necessary focus on discipline
  - →Evidenced in frequent runaways: Horace's escape, among many others
- Overcrowded wards (most poor houses)

all I was afraid she would slip away from you
without your knowledge, and were she here she would

Anxiety over relatives escaping

Oak[illegible]ted March 15th

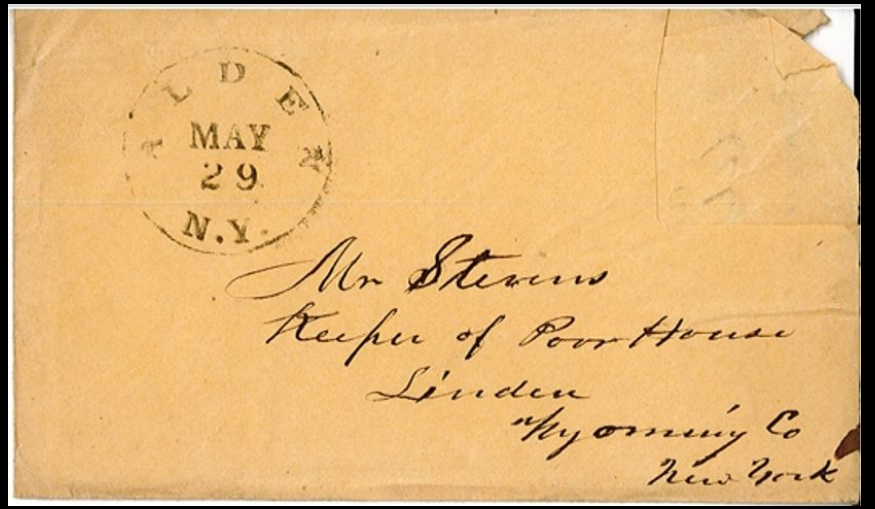
Friend Lewis

I take this opportunity to inform you of the arival of my Brother Horace as he has escaped the Asylum unbeknown to you he arrived heron monday last I do not know whether we will bring him back or not it will depend on his conduct but let that be as it may I wish you to take care of his clothse until it gets better going and I will come out and see you and pay his bill.

Yours &

Daniel J Gill

Horace's escape



Living at the Poor House

-There was an active farm as well as a designated wooded area for timber and supplies

-The farm kept animals (pigs, cows) and crops were grown to financially support the poor house as well as feed the residents (wheat, oats, potatoes, corn, onions, etc.)

→Residents who were able-bodied were put to work on the farm; for the insane, it was thought to aid the curing of their insanity



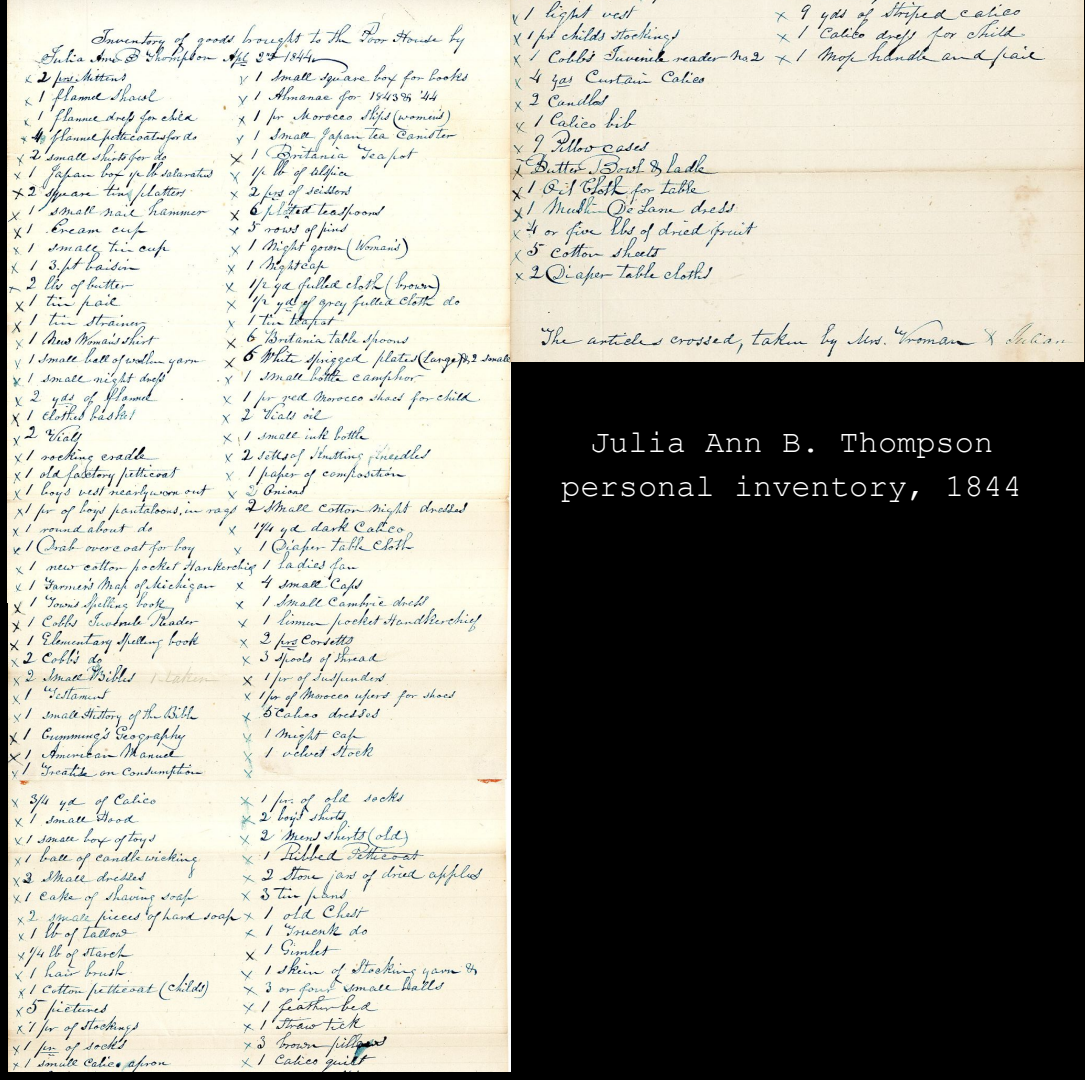
Life at the Poor House



-No drinking or gambling allowed at the Poor House (tobacco was provided to men only, revoked in the 1840s)

-Family members could come visit, bring supplies for relatives

-Inmates brought personal items to Home



Inventory of goods brought to the Poor House by Julia Ann B. Thompson Apl 2d 1844

- 2 pr. Mittens
- 1 flannel Shawl
- 1 flannel skirt for child
- 4 flannel petticoats for do
- 2 small Shirts for do
- 1 Japan box of Medicaments
- 2 pr. Linen tow pillow cases
- 1 small nail hammer
- 1 Cream cup
- 1 small tin cup
- 1 3 pt Basin
- 2 lbs of butter
- 1 tin pail
- 1 tin strainer
- 1 Mens Womans Shirt
- 1 small ball of woollen yarn
- 1 small night dress
- 2 yds of flannel
- 1 clothes bag
- 2 Vials
- 1 rocking cradle
- 1 old factory petticoat
- 1 boys vest nearly worn out
- 1 pr of boys pantaloons, in rags
- 1 round about do
- 1 Drab over coat for boy
- 1 new cotton pocket Handkerchief
- 1 Farmers Map of Michigan
- 1 Towns Spelling book
- 1 Cobbs Juvenile Reader
- 1 Elementary Spelling book
- 2 Cobbs do
- 2 small Bibles
- 1 Testament
- 1 small History of the Bible
- 1 Cummings Geography
- 1 American Manuel
- 1 Treatise on Consumption

- 1 small square box for books
- 1 Almanac for 1843 & '44
- 1 pr Morocco Slips (womens)
- 1 small Japan tea Canister
- 1 Britania Teapot
- ½ lb of Alspice
- 2 pcs of Soldiers
- 6 plated teaspoons
- 5 rows of pins
- 1 Night gown (Womans)
- 1 Night Cap
- 1 pr yd fulled cloth (brown)
- 1 pr yd of grey fulled cloth do
- 1 tin teapot
- 6 Britania table spoons
- 6 White sprigged plates (Large) No 2 Small
- 1 small bottle camphor
- 1 pr yed Morocco shoes for child
- 2 Vials oil
- 1 small ink bottle
- 2 setts of Knitting Needles
- 1 paper of composition
- 3 Cincas
- 2 small cotton Night dresses
- 1¼ yd dark Calico
- 1 Diaper table cloth
- 1 ladies fan
- 4 small Caps
- 1 small Cambric dress
- 1 linnen pocket Handkerchief
- 3 pcs Corsetts
- 3 spools of Thread
- 1 pr of Suspenders
- 1 pr of Morocco uppers for shoes
- 5 Calico dresses
- 1 Night cap
- 1 velvet Stock

- ¾ yd of Calico
- 1 small Hood
- 1 small box of toys
- 1 ball of candle wicking
- 2 small dressed
- 1 Cake of shaving soap
- 2 small pieces of hard soap
- 1 lb of tallow
- ¼ lb of starch
- 1 hair brush
- 1 Cotton petticoat (Childs)
- 5 pictures
- 1 pr of Stockings
- 1 pr of socks
- 1 small Calico apron

- 1 pr of old socks
- 2 boys Shirts
- 2 Mens Shirts (old)
- 1 Ribbed Petticoat
- 2 Stone jars of dried apples
- 3 tin pans
- 1 old Chest
- 1 Gimlet do
- 1 Gimlet
- 1 Skein of Stocking yarn &
- 3 or four small balls
- 1 feather bed
- 1 Straw tick
- 3 Brown pillow cases
- 1 Calico quilt

- 1 light vest
- 1 pr Childs Stockings
- 1 Cobbs Juvenile reader No 2
- 4 yds Curtain Calico
- 2 Candles
- 1 Calico bib
- 2 Pillow cases
- Butter Bowl & ladle
- 1 Oil Cloth for table
- 1 Muslin De Lane dress
- 4 or five lbs of dried fruit
- 5 Cotton sheets
- 2 Diaper table cloths

- 9 yds of Striped calico
- 1 Calico dress for Child
- 1 Mop Handle and pail

The articles crossed, taken by Mrs. Woman & Julia

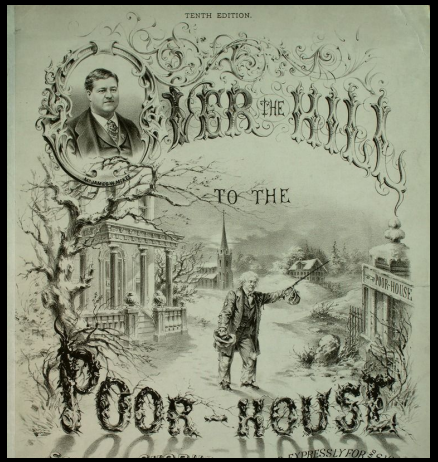
Julia Ann B. Thompson personal inventory, 1844

County Home Inventory, 1862

An Inventory of All the Personal Property
At Genesee County Poor House Ending Jan 14th 62

One horse	$100	Two horses	$270	370 00
13 Cows	$25	Each	" "	325 00
38 Sheep	3	"	"	114 00
11	Fat Hogs			123 75
2	old waggons	$20		40 00
1	Dogg			6 00
2	Gang Plows	5		10 00
1	Democrat Buggy			25 00
1	Double Buggy		Democrat	25 00
1	Double Horse Sled			14 00
1	Single Harness			15 00
1	Double Harness			11 00
1	Buffalo Robe			10 00
1	Cutter			12 00
12	Shoats	$3		36 00
2	Chains	$5		5 00
3	Spades			2 25
2	Shovels			1 75
1	yoke of Oxen			120 00
2	Wheel barrows			4 00
2	Potash Kettles			20 00
	Joiners Tools			10 00
14	Hoes			3 50
8	Scythes			3 00
1	Waggon Rack			4 00
1	Bell			15 00
				$1324.25

Social Stigma around the Poor House



“Over the Hill to the Poor-House” by Will Carleton (1872)

→An elderly narrator who is not welcome anywhere and feels like an afterthought to those around her goes to the Poor House

→ Reveals attitudes towards the poor in 19th century America

→ Same as sending loved ones to a modern-day nursing home or mental institution today

What About the Insane?

-33 “insane inmates” in 1864, about 20 in 1875

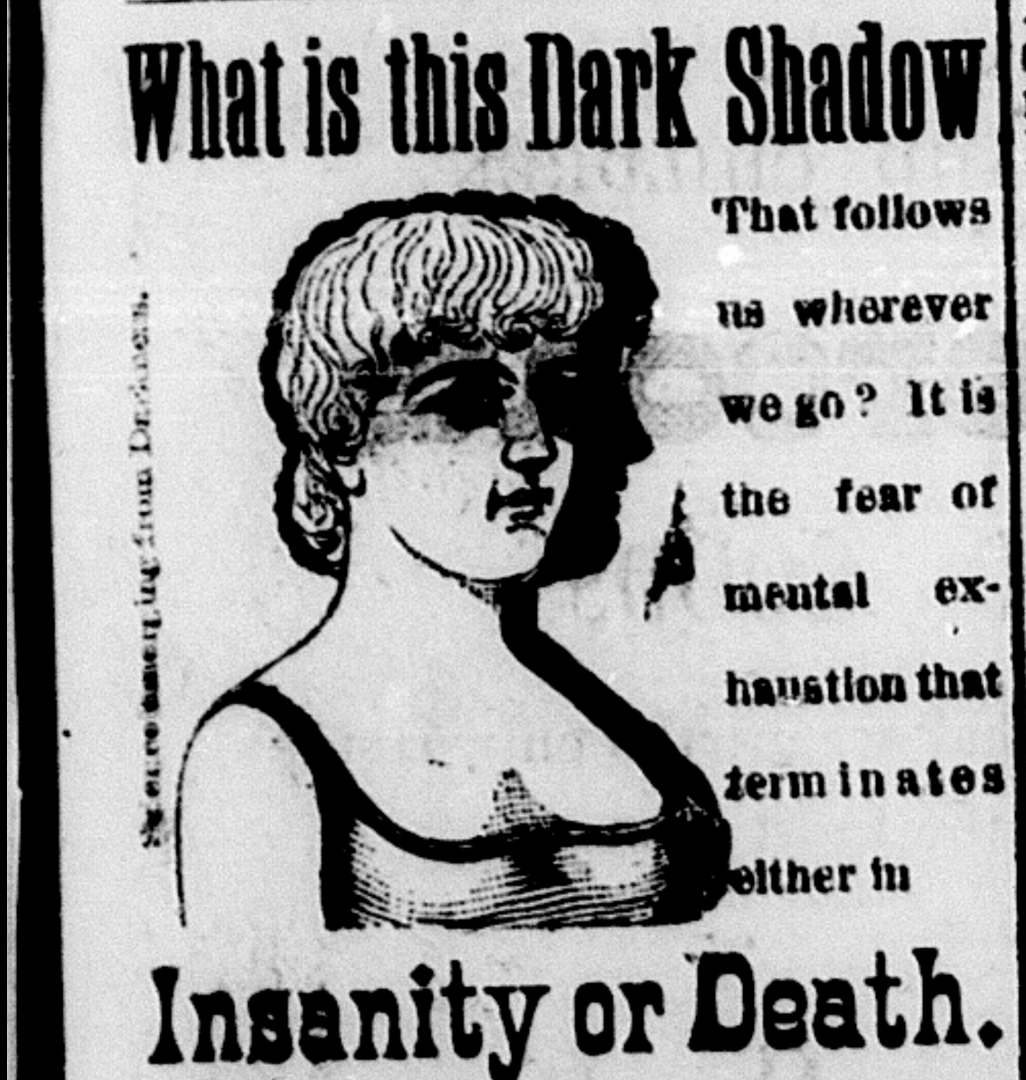
-Saw the causes of insanity as derived from American society (changing rapidly)

-If the insane are isolated from society’s evils, they can be cured; “The charge of the asylum was to bring discipline to the victims of a disorganized society”

→“A well-ordered institution”

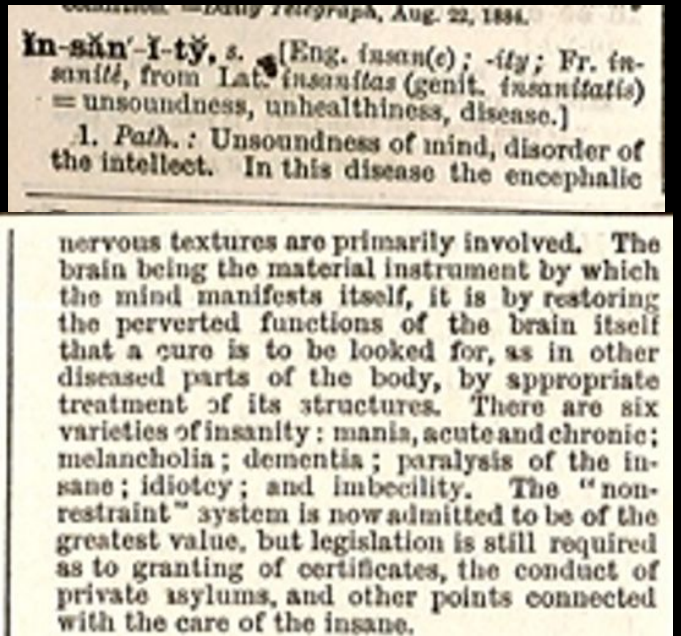
-Working on the farm = cure the “insane” by providing structure to “disordered lives”

-Believed that insanity was curable through insane asylums



Defining Mental Illness

Insanity: “Unsoundness of mind, disorder of the intellect;” different forms of insanity; thought to be curable

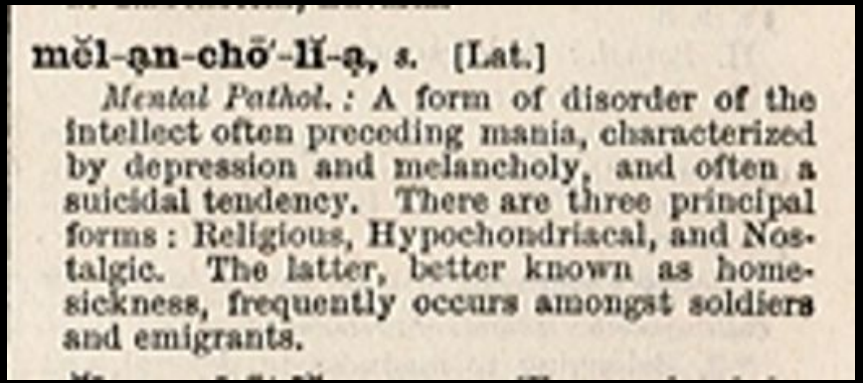


Daily Telegraph, Aug. 22, 1884.

ĭn-săn′-ĭ-tў, *s.* [Eng. *insan(e)*; *-ity*; Fr. *insanité*, from Lat. *insanitas* (genit. *insanitatis*) = unsoundness, unhealthiness, disease.]

1. *Path.*: Unsoundness of mind, disorder of the intellect. In this disease the encephalic nervous textures are primarily involved. The brain being the material instrument by which the mind manifests itself, it is by restoring the perverted functions of the brain itself that a cure is to be looked for, as in other diseased parts of the body, by appropriate treatment of its structures. There are six varieties of insanity: mania, acute and chronic; melancholia; dementia; paralysis of the insane; idiotcy; and imbecility. The "non-restraint" system is now admitted to be of the greatest value, but legislation is still required as to granting of certificates, the conduct of private asylums, and other points connected with the care of the insane.

Melancholia: “disorder of the intellect often preceding mania, characterized by depression and melancholy, and often a suicidal tendency...”



měl-ąn-chō′-lĭ-ą, *s.* [Lat.]

Mental Pathol.: A form of disorder of the intellect often preceding mania, characterized by depression and melancholy, and often a suicidal tendency. There are three principal forms: Religious, Hypochondriacal, and Nostalgic. The latter, better known as home-sickness, frequently occurs amongst soldiers and emigrants.

Defining Mental Illness

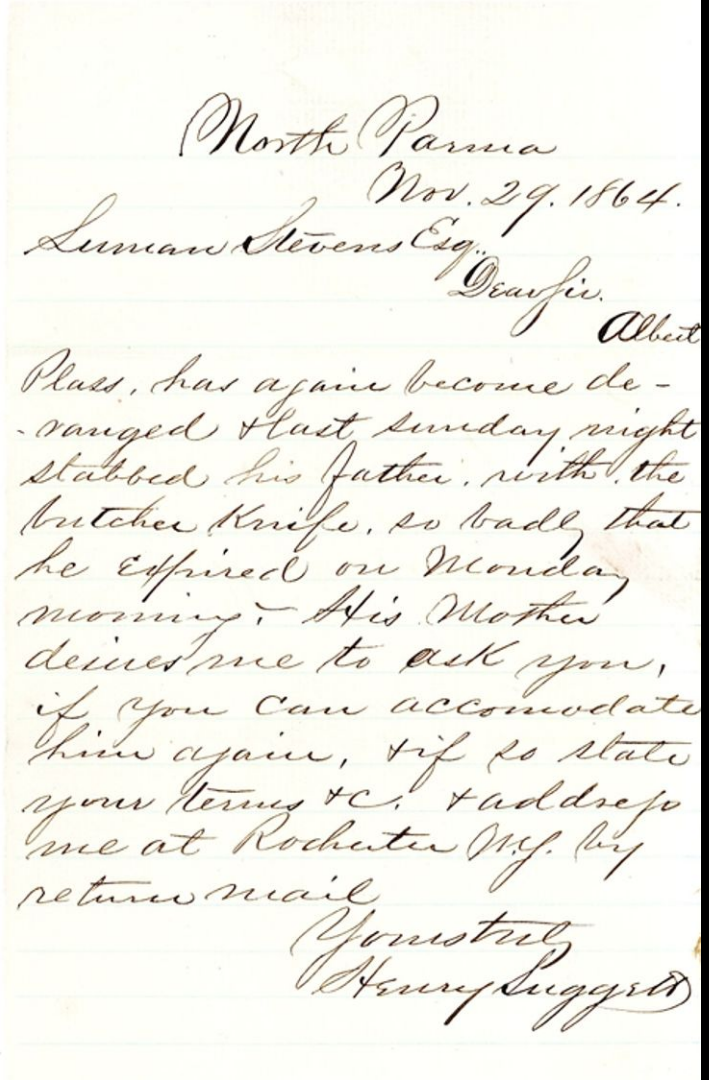
•**Hysteria:** “A nervous disorder of females…The symptoms are innumerable…in many cases, owing to a real defect of will and mental power,”

hŷs-tĕr'-ĭ-ą, s. [Gr. ὑστέρα (*hustera*) = the womb.]

Pathol.: A nervous disorder of females, usually most frequent at the catamenial period and in the unmarried. Indolent and luxurious habits, over-spoiling, disappointed affection, grief, &c., are amongst the chief causes. The symptoms are innumerable, and the imitation of other diseases allied to it endless; indeed, Dr. O. W. Holmes has said that a young hysterical girl would beat Ananias and Sapphira; but in many cases, owing to a real defect of will and mental power, the symptoms are extremely distressing, and the bodily health very indifferent, with great eructation of gas and copious discharge of pale urine, extreme spasmodic action, *globus hystericus*, shrieking, laughing, sobbing, &c. The remedy for all this is undoubtedly mental and moral treatment, change of scene and associations, with general care of the bodily health, particularly as regards diet and the digestive organs, and strict avoidance of alcoholic stimulants.



•**Phrenology**: Study of exterior bumps and depressions on the skull



North Parma
Nov. 29. 1864.

Lumans Stevens Esq.

Dear Sir.

Albert Plass, has again become deranged & last Sunday night stabbed his father with the butcher knife, so badly that he expired on Monday morning. His Mother desires me to ask you, if you can accomodate him again, & if so state your terms &c. & address me at Rochester N.Y. by return mail

Yours truly
Henry Suggett

Perceptions of Mental Illness in 19th Century Genesee County

- "Individuals who eventually ended up in asylums usually manifested some form of extreme behavior…"
  - →1864 Albert Plass letter
  - Suicide Articles
- →Called Henry Holladay's suicide letter "pathetic" (1897) – lack of empathy
- →*Complete* publication of Sarah Nettleson's suicide letter (1887) – feelings publicly on display
- →Very detailed descriptions of suicide methods
- →Not all succumbed to suicide, described as "melancholy" or "despondent"
- →In cases in which the individual did not end up dying, they were generally sent to the Poor House and Insane Asylum
  - →Later in nineteenth century (1887): Willard State Hospital or Utica State Asylum

Process of Committal for Mental Health

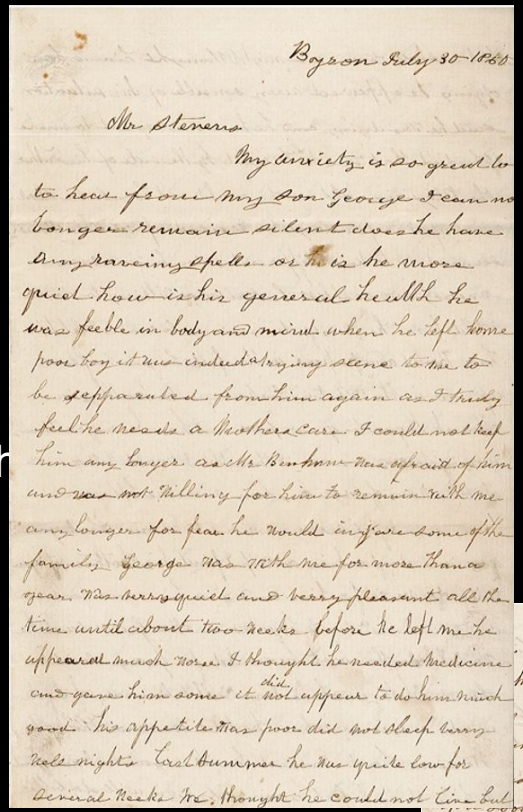
- Generally began in the home:

  —>“Confronted with behavior that threatened the integrity of the family or situations with which they could not cope, relatives began the process of institutionalization as a last resort and with a vague understanding that it was the lesser of the two evils.”

- Social Factors:

  →**Reluctance:** Alza Benham letter (1860)

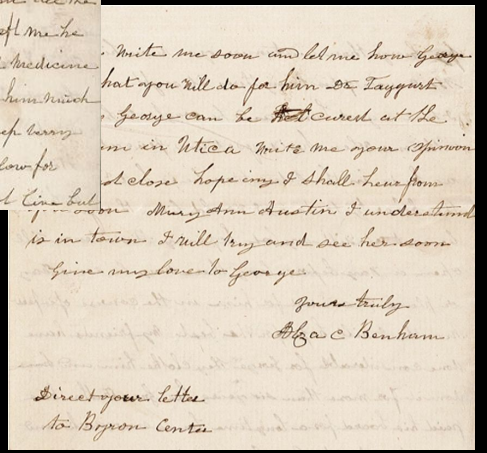
  →**Relief:** W. V. McLean letter (1859)



Byron July 30 1860

Mr Stevens

My anxiety is so great to hear from my Son George I can no longer remain silent does he have any raveing spells or is he more quiet how is his general health he was feeble in body and mind when he left home poor boy it was indeed a trying scene to me to be seperated from him again as I truly feel he needs a Mothers care I could not keep him any longer as Mr Benham was afraid of him and was not willing for him to remain with me any longer for fear he would injure some of the family George was with me for more than a year. was very quiet and very pleasant all the time until about two weeks before he left me he appeared much worse I thought he needed medicine and gave him some it did not appear to do him much good his appetite was poor did not sleep many nights together was he was quite low for several weeks we thought he could not live but



write me soon and let me know George what you will do for him Dr Taygart George can be cured at the in Utica write me your opinion close hoping I shall hear from Mary Ann Austin I understand is in town I will try and see her soon Give my love to George

Yours truly

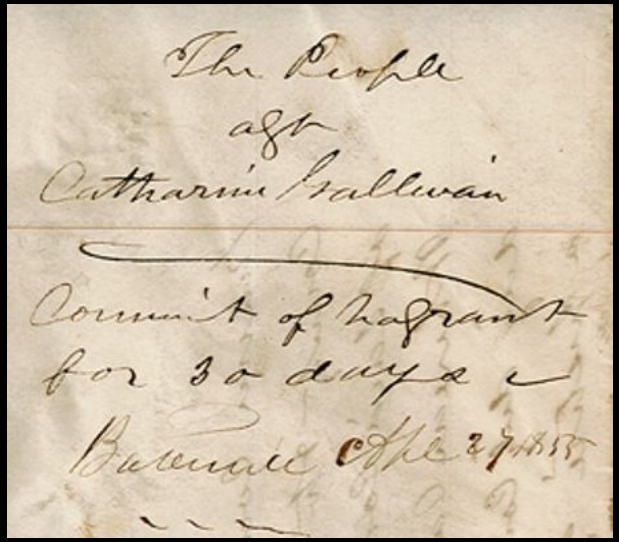
Alza C Benham

Direct your letter to Byron Centre

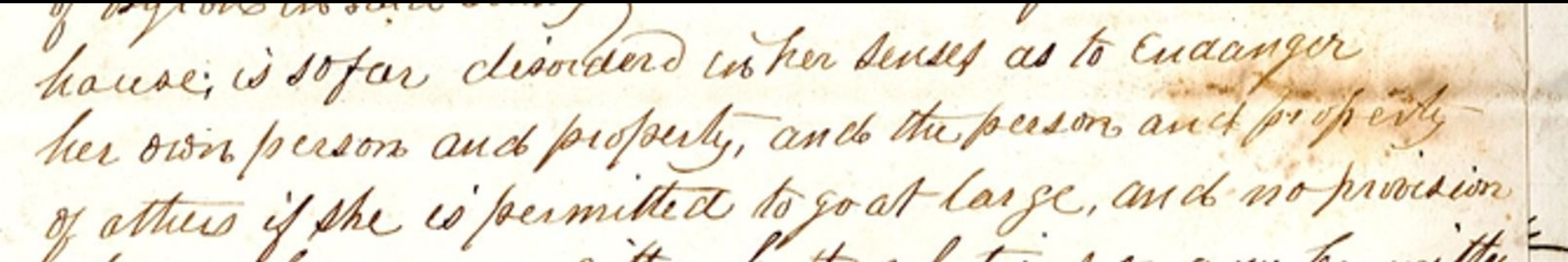
Benham letter

Process of Committal cont.

- Economic Factors:
  - →Strain of resources if one could not contribute to society
    - →Examples: Phebe White (1828), Catharine Gallivan (1855)
- Legal Factors:
  - →One or two Justices of the Peace
  - →Two practicing physicians
  - →Legal language:


The People
agt
Catharine Gallivan

Commit'd of Insane
for 30 days
Burnett Sher 27th 1855


house; is so far disordered in her senses as to endanger
her own person and property, and the person and property
of others if she is permitted to go at large, and no provision

"The Grand Jury, having had their attention called to the insecure condition of the public records in the offices of the County Clerk and Surrogate of the county and finding that they are now exposed to destruction by fire, as well as by the slow, but equally certain mode, dampness; and in view of the immense importance to all classes of citizens in the county—more particularly the property owners and

tax payers"

Board of Supervisors Financial Decisions display Attitudes toward the Insane and Poor

- 1871: Asylum was reportedly “a dilapidated concern, uncomfortable, insufficient and a discredit to the county”
- Opposition to rebuilding asylum:
  - →Location
  - →Number of insane too low
  - →Money
  - →Send them elsewhere

1887

Genesee County Board of Supervisors decided to send the acute insane to the Buffalo State Hospital and the chronically insane to Willard

Fast Forward: May 1974: “Auction to Dispose of Former County Home, Legislature Decides:”

→ “‘We feel the best thing is to get rid of it as soon as possible,’ the chairman commented.”

→Historic wooden buildings dating back to the 1800s were demolished, we still see a lack of concern for the people in destroying their history