

A Guide to the Greene County (Va.), Health and Medical Records, 1878-1898

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 0007781343
Library of Virginia
2020

History

Processed by: T. Harter

Title Statement

A Guide to the Greene County (Va.), Health and Medical Records, 1878-1898

Subtitle: Greene County (Va.), Health and Medical Records, 1878-1898

Collection: 0007781343

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2020 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid created in EAD by Tracy S. Harter, 4 Aug 2020

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

0007781343

Language

English

Creator

Greene County (Va.) Circuit Court

Extent

.225 cf; 1/2 hollinger box

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

This collection came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Greene County Circuit Court.

Preferred Citation

Greene County (Va.) Health and Medical Records, 1878-1898. Local government records collection, Greene County Court Records, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Greene County court records can be found on microfilm and in the Chancery Records Index at the Library of Virginia. Consult ["A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm"](#) and [The Chancery Records Index](#).

Historical Information

Mental Health Records may consist of a variety of documents that historically were referred to as lunacy papers in the courthouses of Virginia localities and municipalities.

A fiduciary is an individual who enters into a confidential and legal relationship which binds them to act on behalf of another. Guardians are legally invested to take care of another person, and of the property and rights of that person. Thus, some records referred to as insanity papers are housed with fiduciary records and not with mental health records.

In January 1825 the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation providing for the construction of an asylum in the western part of the state. The institution, which became known as Western Lunatic Asylum, was constructed close to the town of Staunton, west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and was the second mental health facility built in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The buildings and surrounding gardens were designed to embrace the idea of "moral therapy" for mentally ill patients by providing an aesthetically pleasing and tranquil atmosphere in which patients lived comfortably, exercised and worked outdoors.

Western Lunatic Asylum opened in 1828, accepting both male and female patients suffering from a variety of mental disorders. It should be noted that the hospital underwent a short-lived name change between 1861 and 1865, when it was known as Central Lunatic Asylum. (It should not be confused with an asylum of the same name later built in Petersburg, Virginia to house African American patients). From 1865 to 1894 the name was again Western Lunatic Asylum. However, in 1894 the General Assembly passed legislation changing the name to Western State Hospital.

In March 1882 a 300 acre tract of land was purchased by the City of Petersburg and given to the state for the purpose of constructing a permanent mental health facility for African Americans. Construction of the new facility near Petersburg was completed in early spring 1885. This later included a special building to house the criminally insane apart from the rest of the hospital population. An early institutional history notes that treatment at Central Lunatic Asylum during the 1890s was humane and emphasized the value of work and the benefits of recreation. However, practices at the facility also included seclusion, mechanical restraints, and the administering of hypnotics.

In 1894, Central Lunatic Asylum was officially renamed Central State Hospital. This piece of legislation also altered the names of the other mental health facilities in Virginia in an attempt to inspire a more positive image of the institutions, and of mental health treatment in general. It is important to note that another state institution located in Staunton, Virginia went by the name Central Lunatic Asylum between the years of 1861 and 1865. Its name later was changed to Western Lunatic Asylum, and is a separate facility with no connection to the Richmond/Petersburg hospital for African Americans.

Greene County was named for Nathanael Greene, commanding general of the Continental army in the South during part of the Revolutionary War. It was formed from Orange County in 1838. The county seat is Stanardsville.

Scope and Content

Greene County (Va.) Health and Medical Records 1878-1898, consist of Mental Health Records, which may include warrants, bonds, orders, petitions, depositions, reports, etc. for or by justices of the peace and others regarding the mental condition of individuals who were released to the recognizance of a family member or who were committed to a mental hospital. Fiduciary records such as estate inventories of a person judged insane may also be present. Records reference the Central Lunatic Asylum in Petersburg and the Lunatic Asylum in Staunton.

Mental Health Records post-1900 have not been processed, and are restricted for 125 years, and therefore are not open for research nor part of this finding aid.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Greene County (Va.) Circuit Court.
Central Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane, Virginia.
Central State Hospital (Petersburg, Va.).
Western State Hospital (Va.).

Subjects:

African Americans--Mental Health--Virginia--Greene County.
County courts--Virginia--Greene County.
Insanity--Jurisprudence--Virginia--Greene County.
Jails--Virginia--Greene County.
Medical laws and legislation--Virginia--Greene County.
Mental illness--Virginia--Greene County.
Physicians--Virginia--Greene County.
Psychiatric hospitals--Virginia.

Geographical Names:

Greene County (Va.)--History--19th Century.

Genre and Form Terms:

Health and Medical--Virginia--Greene County.
Local government records--Virginia--Greene County.

Arrangement

Mental Health Records are arranged chronologically by year, then alphabetically by last name of individual.