

A Guide to the Henry County (Va.) Health and Medical Records, 1790-1903

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 0007785153
Library of Virginia
2020

History

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Henry County (Va.) Health and Medical Records, 1790-1903

Subtitle: Henry County (Va.), Health and Medical Records, 1790-1803

Collection: 0007785153

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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, 11 November 2020

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

0007785153

Language

English

Creator

Henry County (Va.) Circuit Court

Extent

.45 cf; 1 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 Henry County Circuit Court.

Preferred Citation

Henry County (Va.) Health and Medical Records, 1790-1903. Local government records collection, Henry County Court Records, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Henry 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.

See also: Fiduciary Records. 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.

First known as commissions, the Justice of the Peace office originated with the county quarterly court in 1623. Commanders of Plantations (1607-1629) were predecessors of the commissioners, who since 1662 have been called justices of the peace. They have traditionally had both civil and criminal jurisdiction, and have served other functions, including performing coroners' and lunacy inquisitions. Until 1869 justices served both as judges of the county court and as individual justices; since then they have had only the latter function.

During its session begun in November 1769, the House of Burgesses passed an act establishing a hospital in Williamsburg for the mentally ill. The Eastern Lunatic Asylum (now Eastern State Hospital) was the first institution in America constructed as a mental hospital. The first patients were admitted in October 1773.

In 1868, the Freedman's Bureau acquired land known as Howard's Grove, (or Howard Grove), located one half mile east of the city of Richmond, on the Mechanicsville Turnpike, in Henrico County. Through a lease from Mr. Bacon Tait (or Tate), the Bureau renovated several barrack-type structures that had been used as a Confederate hospital during the Civil War. The new facility became known as Howard's Grove Freedman's Hospital.

The hospital was turned over to the state by way of General Order number 136 issued by Major General Canby, Military Governor of Virginia in December 1869. Beginning January 1, 1870 all African American patients at Eastern Lunatic Asylum in Williamsburg, (the only state institution at the time to accept black patients), as well as all blacks jailed for lunacy from across Virginia, were to be removed to Howard's Grove for treatment. The General Assembly passed legislation in June 1870 renaming the facility the Central Lunatic Asylum and designating it the official "reception and treatment facility for colored persons of unsound mind." This legislation was enacted with the stipulation that the Howard's Grove location was to be temporary.

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.

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, 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 1884 the Virginia General Assembly appointed a board of commissioners to select a site for a new lunatic asylum for white citizens to be built west of New River. The board selected a 208-acre site in Smyth County and in August 1884 the General Assembly gave the board the power to purchase the land for thirty thousand dollars and granted the county the right to issue bonds as well. In November 1884 the General Assembly formally established the Southwestern Lunatic Asylum, near Marion, Virginia. Dr. Harvey Black, J. Hoge Tyler, Thomas J. Boyd, D.D. Hull, Dr. John S. Apperson, N.L. Look and F.B. Hurt were appointed to the building committee which was tasked with overseeing the construction of the hospital.

Dr. Harvey Black became the first superintendent of Southwestern Lunatic Asylum when it opened in May 1887. Dr. Robert J. Preston and Dr. John S. Apperson served as assistant physicians, and Mr. C.W. White was appointed as steward to oversee the day-to-day business operations of the hospital. The patient population grew steadily and over time several buildings were added to the hospital's campus including a tuberculosis treatment building, a building for the criminally insane, the Davis Clinic, and the Harmon Building. For much of its early history, the hospital was mostly self-sufficient through the utilization of its own farm for meat, milk, and vegetables. Other early hospital superintendents include Dr. Robert J. Preston (1888-1906), Dr. Daniel Trigg (1906-1908), Dr. J.C. King (1908-1915), Dr. E.H. Henderson (1915-1927), and Dr. George A. Wright (1927-1937). The hospital has gone through two name changes in its history. In 1894 the General Assembly passed legislation changing the name from Southwestern Lunatic Asylum to Southwestern State Hospital. In 1988, the name was changed to Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute.

Henry County was named for Patrick Henry, who was the first governor of the commonwealth of Virginia. It was formed from Pittsylvania County in 1776. The county court first met on 20 January 1777. Part of Patrick County was added later in 1858.

Scope and Content

Henry County (Va.) Health and Medical Records 1790-1903, consists of five folders of Mental Health Records spanning those inclusive dates, and one folder of Smallpox Epidemic Records, 1863-1901.

Mental Health Records, 1790-1903, may include warrants, 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 are occasionally present. See other collections of Henry County Fiduciary Records or Tax and Fiscal Records for mental-health-related materials that are not filed here. Includes African-American individuals, who were identified as such if they were primarily denoted as colored or if the hospitals at Petersburg or Howard's Grove were referenced. References to other mental hospitals include those at Williamsburg, Richmond, Staunton, and Marion.

Smallpox Epidemic Records, 1863-1901, n.d., consist of papers relating to quarantines and hospitals for the containment and/or treatment of smallpox outbreaks in Henry County as reported by justices of the peace. The earliest documents are two 1863 invoices, one of John M. Feazel requesting payment for services as a nurse during a smallpox outbreak that spring, the other of Dr. J. Bishop for treatment of 8 individuals; one of whom had died. Also includes an August 1895 order to apprehend "Duch" Hairston, who was believed to have been exposed to smallpox in Patrick County a few days prior and thus to be at risk of possibly infecting persons in Henry County. Includes an order for doctors to examine a potentially infected person named Bud Salmons in June 1898. References an enforced quarantine of the family of Tom Morrison and others in March and April 1900 and the quarantine of Anderson and Nat Coan in 1901.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Central Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane, Virginia.

Central State Hospital (Petersburg, Va.).

Eastern State Hospital (Va.).
Henry County (Va.) Circuit Court.
Western State Hospital (Va.).
Southwestern Lunatic Asylum (Marion, Va.).
Southwestern State Hospital (Marion, Va.).

Subjects:

African Americans--Mental Health--Virginia--Henry County.
County courts--Virginia--Henry County.
Insanity--Jurisprudence--Virginia--Henry County.
Jails--Virginia--Henry County.
Mental Health Facilities--Virginia.
Medical laws and legislation--Virginia--Henry County.
Mental illness--Virginia--Henry County.
Physicians--Virginia--Henry County.
Psychiatric hospitals--Virginia.
Public health--Virginia.
Public health administration--Virginia.
Public records--Virginia--Henry County.
Quarantine--Virginia--Henry County.
Slaves--Virginia--Henry County.
Smallpox--Virginia--Henry County.
Smallpox Prevention.

Geographical Names:

Henry County (Va.)--History--18th Century.
Henry County (Va.)--History--19th Century.

Genre and Form Terms:

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

Arrangement

Mental Health Records are arranged chronologically by year, then alphabetically by last name of individual. If an individual had more than one instance of suspected mental incapacity, there may be papers filed in more than one chronological location. Reports of physicians listing examinations of multiple patients in a given year are filed at the beginning of a year, with names written on the folder. Smallpox Epidemic Records are arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Mental Health Records, 1790-1903

Folder 1, 1790-1879.

Scope and Content

African-Americans identified: David Hairston, Ruth Hairston, Taliaferro Pace, Elzy Redd, Stephen Scales

Folder 2, 1880-1889.

Folder 3, 1890-1895.

Scope and Content

African-Americans identified: Patsy Hairston

Folder 4, 1896-1899.

Scope and Content

African-Americans identified: Dave Hairston, Eveline Hairston, Isobella Hairston, Dave Harrington, Anna Eggleton, Henry Preston, Pate Proctor, Betsy Redd, Polly Redd

Folder 5, 1900-1903.

Scope and Content

African-Americans identified: Joanna Dillard, Minerva Dodson, Fannie Gravely, Emma Hundley, Callie Koger, Lucinda Philpott, Elkana Turner, Alice Walker, Francis Wootten

Smallpox Epidemic Records, 1863-1901

One folder, 1863-1901.