

## Michigan Insane Asylum Records—continued

By Jennifer Ralston Porter

insane asylum records because no one can access them, so the records sit there, unused, taking up valuable space in the Archives.

I did learn the psychiatric disorder one of my relatives suffered from, and it is a disorder currently considered to have a genetic disposition. My persistence should have made clear to the DCH, the probate judge, and my state senator that the records are of value to me.

There is more information in terms of behaviors exhibited and what the family and doctors did about it in the guardianship file. I do recommend to other researchers that you secure the guardianship file from the probate court your ancestor lived in. Your ancestor may have lived in a different county than the one in which the asylum was located. You will need to know the county your ancestor lived in when committed to the asylum and the county of the asylum they were sent to. The county I was working in was kind enough to locate the guardianship file and mail photocopies to me for one dollar a page. Considering that the court is in Northern Michigan, this was a good deal.

Are there insane asylum records that you wish to view? I urge you to call your state legislators and express this and encourage them to support any upcoming legislation that will open records 70 years or older to the public. And then, I encourage you to follow through with the process. The more often researchers persist and request access to the records, the more obvious the value of the mental health records will be. As family historians, we should do what we can to ensure the records are never destroyed. And, as soon as the law changes, I will be up in Lansing, going year by year through the Records Group, to find the remainder of the records concerning my relatives.

For Authorization to Disclose Protected Health Information forms: Office of Legal Affairs, Department of Community Health, 201 Townsend Street, Lansing, Michigan 48913, (517)- 373-3772

### Websites:

<http://seekingmichigan.org>

[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) - \$

[www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com) - \$

Information about asylums:

[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~asylums/index.html#mi](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~asylums/index.html#mi)

### Other Resources:

Keep in mind that as the laws regarding the mentally ill changed, the asylum's names sometimes changed. Northern Michigan Asylum changed its name in 1911 to Traverse City State Hospital.

Dr. William A Decker has written two illustrated books, published by Arbutus Press

([www.arbutuspress.com](http://www.arbutuspress.com)):

*Northern Michigan Asylum – A History of Traverse City State Hospital*

*Asylum for the Insane: A History of the Kalamazoo State Hospital*

The Eaton County Genealogical Society's library ([www.miogs.org](http://www.miogs.org)) has:

Asylum and Sanitorium Record, Eaton County, 1907-1927 (indexed)

Michigan Asylum Record, Eaton County, 1884-1907

The Society has published indexes to these records in their publication – Eaton County Quest

Through Heritage Quest Online -- PERSI you can search for articles that Genealogical Societies have published with information concerning the asylums in their area. I access PERSI through a library. OCGS's *Acorn to Oaks* has published articles about the Eastern Michigan Asylum of Pontiac.

Northern Michigan Asylum/Traverse City State Hospital produced reports from 1887 to 1918 and some of these are available for free at Google Books (<http://books.google.com>). The reports are titled-Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees for the Northern Michigan Asylum/ Traverse City State Hospital. I would search for the asylum you are working with also.