

Nineteenth Century Insane Asylums

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Nineteenth Century Insane Asylums

No matter where they were, mad houses, or insane asylums, have the same basic features and functions. The views of asylum life changed drastically over the course of the nineteenth century.

The growth of the number of mad houses during the nineteenth century is quite remarkable. Before 1810, only a few states had insane asylums. By 1850, most of the Northeastern and Midwestern states' legislatures supported having asylums. As early as 1860, 23 of the 33 existing states had some sort of public [institution](#) for the insane. (Perrucci, p.11)

The view of what caused insanity was widely disputed during this time period. Some [physicians](#) viewed insanity as being caused by a disease of the brain resulting in [lesions](#). The opposing view, held by many Europeans, was that insanity was caused by civilization or society as a whole. (Perrucci, p.12)

Classification played a significant role in the asylums and how they were run. First there is

the classification between sane and insane. This division has continually been the center of study and discussion. Perhaps those that are considered insane aren't really.

"Nineteenth century records make it clear that those alone, whether single, divorced, or widowed, were particularly vulnerable to institutionalization." (Dwyer, p.106) The next classification distinction is whether a person is temporarily insane or chronically insane. In many places, the need for a separate institution for the chronically insane was discussed. When a New York state asylum was considering a separate location, superintendent John Gray "opposed the idea of a separate institution for the chronically insane." (Dwyer, p.46) This idea was discredited throughout America and Europe. (...)

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...bility for Poe's story does exist.

Mad houses were hardly present at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They quickly sprouted up throughout Europe and the United States. For the most part, they were run by a powerful, authoritative hierarchy. Towards the end of the century, people realized the major problems of asylums, and reform swept both Europe and the States.

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