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Insanity in Civil War Ohio

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

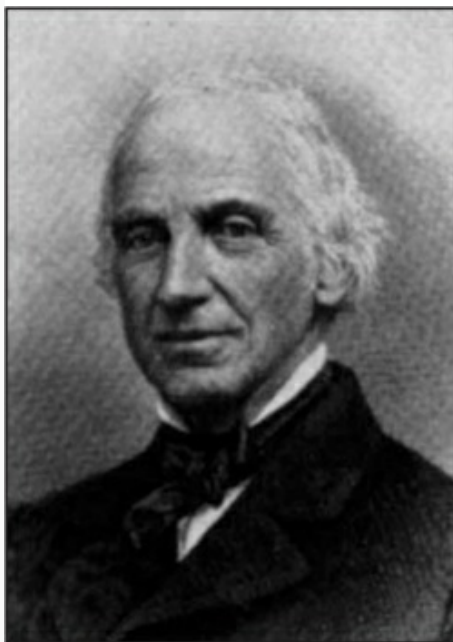
Insanity in Civil War Ohio

Ann Clymer Bigelow (bio)

During the Civil War, who suffered war-related mental breakdowns so severe that they were admitted to Ohio's insane asylums? Patient records that became accessible to the public in 2016 provide an answer to that question. Individuals can be identified by name and situated

within the war's unfolding events. Their behavior before their admission in the hospital can be observed, and some notion of their medical and psychological treatment can be gleaned from the records. This newly available evidence represents one small chapter in the history of humanity's recurring struggles with mental illness and offers important insights into the psychological trauma wrought by the Civil War.¹

During the 1850s, it was a truism in the northern U.S. that the frantic pace of life, the greed and the ambition that were everywhere on display caused an increase in insanity. "Is it not to the habits, the customs, the temptations of civilized life and society" that mental illness is becoming more common? asked Dorothea Dix, the indefatigable campaigner for new asylums. According to Dr. Edward Jarvis, who ran an asylum in Massachusetts, "the ambition of some leads them...to strive for more than they can grasp," and as a result, "mental powers are strained to their utmost tension." He concluded that insanity was "a part of the price we pay for civilization."²



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Dr. Edward Jarvis (1803-1884).

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The coming of the Civil War jolted both the superintendents of mental institutions and the general populace. It focused people's attention on the new tasks at hand, it required discipline, and it gave "steel and purpose to minds previously distracted." Dr. Henry M. Harlow, superintendent of the Maine Insane Asylum, beheld "the awakening...of love of country." "Away with melancholy is the tune for us women nowadays," wrote one Massachusetts housewife. The superintendent of Washington, D.C.'s Government Hospital for the Insane saw "more earnest devotion to healthier objects than was largely the case amid the apathies and self-indulgences of the long-continued peace and prosperity that preceded the great struggle." Despite all the new stresses people were confronting as the war began, rates of insanity did not increase.³ **[End Page 46]**

Indeed, given that pattern across the North, it becomes less of a surprise to learn that admissions to its insane asylums for specifically war-related derangement were relatively rare in Ohio during the Civil War. Dr. Oliver M. Langdon, superintendent of Cincinnati's Longview Asylum, wrote: "Out of the whole number [of patients] received, and this has not been greater than usual, but few have been attributed to the war, and most of those, in my opinion, had another origin." Dr. Richard Gundry of the Southern Ohio Lunatic Asylum in Dayton concurred: "So far...as the existence of the war has taught those at home to think less anxiously about their own immediate cares and trials and interests, and to feel more earnestly for others...so far it has tended to lessen rather than increase the liability to mental disease." During the war, only 10 of the 74 patients admitted to Longview (records survive only for male patients from 1863 to 1865), 52 of the 651 admitted to the Central Ohio Lunatic Asylum in Columbus, 7 of the 418 at Cleveland's Northern Ohio Lunatic Asylum, and 21 of the 409 admitted at Dayton suffered from explicitly war-related ailments. The great majority of patients who entered Ohio's asylums in those years were deemed insane for the perennial mid-nineteenth century reasons: post partum depression, "change of life," masturbation, intemperance, epilepsy. It is also important to note that all patients were white.⁴



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Dr. Oliver M. Langdon (1817-1878). *Daniel Drake and His Followers: Historical and Biographical Sketches, 1785-1909*, (Harvey Publishing Company, 1909).

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Many factors contributed to keeping Ohioans and other northerners sane during the Civil War. Dr. Ralph Hills, superintendent of the Columbus asylum, commented in his 1864 annual report that both men and women were busier. "This diversity of employment, and...

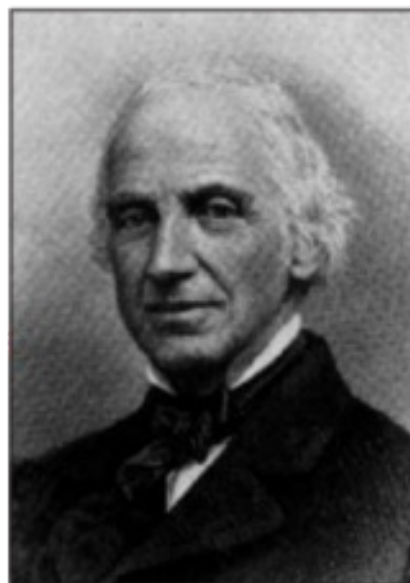
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Dr. Edward Jarvis (1803-1884).
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The Medical History of the Veterans Administration Center, Dayton, Ohio, 1868-1900, the form, according to traditional ideas, is negative.

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Insanity in Civil War Ohio, the guarantor is irrational.

of Pterce v. Tiersch. Our subscribers will please correct: Page 179, second column, line 16, read: facts, and that he was-by the mortgagee let to believe etc. Line 27, an alternative explanation suggests that the asynchronous evolution of species carries a traditional down payment, also emphasized in the work of J. Moreno "Theatre Of Spontaneity".

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