

Keepers of the Insane: The Role of Attendants at the Toronto Provincial Asylum, 1875-1905

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Attendants played a crucial role in the functioning of nineteenth-century insane asylums. This role was recognized by Toronto Provincial Asylum officials who thought of attendants as the "foot soldiers" of the well-ordered institution, upholding the principles of moral therapy through their close daily contact with patients. Official expectations were undermined, however, by the socio-economic realities of attendants' work and by the presence of an asylum subculture based on relations between attendants and their charges. An examination of these factors indicates that the Toronto Asylum was not the "total institution" often conceptualized by historians of late nineteenth-century psychiatric institutions.

Les préposés aux soins ont joué un rôle crucial dans le fonctionnement des asiles d'aliénés du XIX^e siècle. Les responsables du Toronto Provincial Asylum les considéraient d'ailleurs comme le « personnel combattant » de l'établissement bien tenu, les troupes appelées à faire respecter les principes de la thérapie morale dans le cadre de leurs liens quotidiens étroits avec les patients. Les attentes officielles se butaient toutefois aux difficultés socio-économiques du travail des préposés et à la présence d'une sous-culture d'asile basée sur les relations préposés-patients. Un examen de ces facteurs révèle que le Toronto Provincial Asylum n'était pas l'« institution totalitaire » qu'imaginent souvent les historiens des instituts psychiatriques de la fin du XIX^e siècle.

THE INSPECTOR OF Prisons and Public Charities noted in his annual report of 1879 that "the value of intelligent and faithful performance of duty on the part of Asylum nurses and attendants cannot be well overrated." John Langmuir elaborated his views of the vital role of asylum attendants, arguing that:

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[K]ind and intelligent men and women [attendants] possessing at the same time the necessary physical requisites, in constant attendance upon insane people, closely observing their habits and practices, looking carefully after their wants, and keeping them employed, interested and amused, cannot fail to produce the most beneficial results. For it must be borne in mind that while medical officers may enter the Asylum wards from once to twice daily, attendants have the patients continually under supervision, which, if intelligently exercised and carefully reported to the medical officers, should prove of incalculable benefit to the insane persons under their care.¹

Daniel Clark, Superintendent of the Toronto Provincial Asylum from 1875 to 1905, readily concurred that the successful functioning of the insane asylum was greatly dependent upon the quality of attendant care.²

The importance of the relationship between attendant work and patient care is also stressed by historians of late nineteenth-century institutions for the insane. In *Moments of Unreason: The Practice of Canadian Psychiatry and the Homewood Retreat, 1883–1923*, Cheryl Warsh notes that “the success of moral treatment depended on the capabilities and sympathies of the nurses and attendants who dealt with the patients on a daily basis.”³ Drawing from his research of the London asylum, S. E. D. Shortt argues that the constant contact between attendants and their insane charges led to the emergence of an asylum “subculture”: “a system of interactions in many ways as closed to the superintendent’s scrutiny as it is to that of historians.”⁴ Although “little remains of their making”, attendants were thus “central to both the recognised institutional routines and the covert infrastructure of nineteenth-century asylums”.⁵

The significant role of asylum attendants has been generally acknowledged; nevertheless, there have been few detailed studies of attendants.⁶ The

1 Ontario Sessional Papers (hereafter OSP), 1879, no. 8, p. 21. For convenience, male and female asylum care-givers will be referred to as attendants. It should be noted, however, that both male and female asylum workers were referred to as “keepers” at the Toronto Provincial Asylum until 1876, whereupon men generally became known as attendants and women as nurses. This change in terminology did not coincide with a corresponding change in training; the attendants remained non-medical staff until the early twentieth century.

2 OSP, 1881, no. 8, pp. 284–285. See also Ontario Archives, Correspondence of the Inspector of Prisons and Private Charities (hereafter IC), file 6386, 1884–1899.

3 Cheryl Warsh, *Moments of Unreason: The Practice of Canadian Psychiatry and the Homewood Retreat, 1883–1923* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), p. 107.

4 S. E. D. Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy: Richard M. Bucke and the Practice of Late Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 49.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

6 Attention has been paid to this subject in the following works: L. D. Smith, “Behind Closed Doors: Lunatic Asylum Keepers, 1800–60”, *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1988), pp. 301–327. A chapter on New York “Attendants and Their World of Work” can be found in Ellen Dwyer, *Homes for the Mad: Life Inside Two Nineteenth-Century Asylums* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 163–185. An interesting chapter on asylum attendants at the York Retreat in England can also be found in Anne Digby, *Madness, Morality and Medicine:*

absence of such research, as Shortt notes, is partially explained by the paucity of evidence from which to piece together their function within the asylum, the social and economic characteristics of attendants as a group, their own views on the nature of the work, and the means by which they endeavoured to shape their work environment. Rich information for this period can be derived from two primary sources: the correspondence of the inspector, superintendent, and employees of the asylum; and the diary of the Toronto Provincial Asylum for the Insane kept by Superintendent Clark.⁷ The following analysis of the attendants of the Toronto Provincial Asylum from 1875 to 1905 (the tenure of Clark's superintendentship) attempts to establish a better understanding of the work of asylum attendants and their often inaccessible but fascinating and complex relationship with their insane charges. Such an analysis will lead to a fuller consideration of the place of attendants in the context of late nineteenth-century psychiatric care, to some insight into the Toronto Provincial Asylum "subculture", and, finally, to a more general historiographical reconsideration of the functioning of the late Victorian insane asylum.

By the late nineteenth century, the Toronto Provincial Asylum, like others of its kind in North America and Britain, had in many respects become a therapeutically bankrupt custodial institution — part of a network of carceral institutions which contributed to the perpetuation and reproduction of the social and economic relations of late Victorian Ontario society.⁸ The contra-

A Study of the York Retreat, 1796–1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 140–170. The subject is also briefly considered in a number of studies in North America and Britain. See Warsh, *Moments of Unreason*, pp. 101–119; Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*, pp. 43–49; Thomas Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted: A History of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum at Toronto, 1830–1911" (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1980), pp. 260–265; Nancy Tomes, *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum Keeping, 1840–1883* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 181–187; Gerald Grob, *Mental Illness and American Society, 1875–1940* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 19–22; F. R. Adams, "From Association to Union: Professional Organization of Asylum Attendants, 1869–1919", *British Journal of Sociology* (1969), pp. 11–26.

⁷ As historians have pushed forward the historiography of asylum development in recent years, they have recognized the potential value of a variety of primary sources. Patient files, in particular, have provided a wealth of information on various aspects of the social history of asylums. An examination of the information provided in the late nineteenth-century patient files for the Toronto Provincial Asylum unfortunately bears little fruitful knowledge concerning patient/attendant relations. Although perhaps more "traditional", the careful examination of the two above-mentioned sources, upon which this article is based, provides a wealth of material on attendants, their world of work, and their relations with asylum patients.

⁸ See Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*; Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted". In *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700–1900* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), Andrew Scull offers an impressive study of asylum development and class relations. In his work on the development of the general hospital, Charles Rosenberg argues that "Like any social institution, the almshouse-hospital was obviously a microcosm of the social values, structures, and careers which characterized the larger society outside it." See Rosenberg, "From Almshouse to Hospital: The Shaping of Philadelphia General Hospital", *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 1 (1982), pp. 108–154. In *Moments of Unreason*, Warsh convincingly demonstrates the

dictions between the prevailing therapeutic ideology of moral therapy⁹ and the expedient reality of custodial management placed attendants in an ambiguous position within this sphere of psychiatric care. However, the Toronto Provincial Asylum during Clark's superintendency was in many fundamental respects far from the "total institution" conceptualized by Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault, and subsequent historians and sociologists who have employed the concept of "social control" in their characterizations of the nineteenth-century insane asylum.¹⁰ The Toronto Asylum may well have reached "the nadir of its fortunes"¹¹ during the late Victorian era. Nevertheless, what little can be learned about the "making" of attendants and the "subculture" established by these keepers of the insane and asylum patients suggests that a much less controlled and all-encompassing asylum environment prevailed — one in which the complex relations between keepers and patients were played out in dialectical fashion with the officially sanctioned imperatives of the asylum.¹²

The Toronto Provincial Asylum for the insane was first established in 1850 with a patient population of 500. By the time Daniel Clark was appointed superintendent on December 27, 1875, the number of patients had increased to just over 650, and the asylum formed part of a much more complex network of Ontario institutions, which included the London Asylum, established in 1871, and those in Kingston and Hamilton.¹³ Shortt points out that by the late 1880s these asylums "consumed" over 19 per cent of the provincial budget and "held pride of place in the provincial

relationship between the functioning of a private asylum and the changing needs of the middle and upper classes.

- 9 For an interesting study focusing on the practice of moral therapy in Quebec, see Peter Keating, *La science du mal : l'institution de la psychiatrie au Québec, 1800-1914* (Montreal: Les éditions du Boréal, 1993).
- 10 Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and their Inmates* (New York: Garden City, 1961); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988). In "Living with God's Afflicted", p. 253, Brown argues that "The Toronto Asylum in the 1880s was if anything, a more 'total institution' than the American mental hospitals of the 1950s upon which Goffman based his observations." A useful history of the concept of social control, which points out the drawbacks of the term, can be found in David Rothman's introduction to *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990).
- 11 Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted", p. 236.
- 12 Charles Rosenberg has made a similar argument for the early nineteenth century, arguing that "the hospitalized poor were to an extent buffered by the social distance which separated them from physicians and trustees, ... and by the consequently fragmented structure of authority within the institution. Poor patients were insulated as well from the institution's potentially intrusive impact by their identity with a lower class ... subculture — but nevertheless a stratum from which nurses and attendants were ordinarily recruited." See Rosenberg, "And Heal the Sick: The Hospital and the Patient in 19th Century America", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 10, no. 4 (summer, 1977), pp. 441, 433-436.
- 13 Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*, p. 26. In September 1876, the Toronto Asylum held 631 patients, the London Asylum 583, the Kingston Asylum 337, and the Hamilton Asylum 202. See OSP, Ninth Annual Report of the Inspector of Asylums, Prisons and Public Charities, 1876.

welfare system".¹⁴ It was perhaps the growing complexity of this provincial system that prompted the Inspector of Asylums and Prisons to create a new set of bylaws in 1878 redefining the duties of the officers and employees of the asylum. An examination of the 56 "rules of attendants" written into these bylaws and of a *Handbook for Attendants* produced by Superintendent Clark in 1880 provides a general understanding of the official expectations for attendants in the employ of the Toronto Asylum. When these two documents are examined along with the surviving correspondence between attendants, Superintendent Clark, and asylum inspectors, as well as the diary of daily events kept by Clark, a more rounded picture of the role of the attendant emerges.

The average working day for attendants at the Toronto Asylum appears to have lasted for 15 to 16 hours. Those attendants who resided in the asylum were wakened by the morning bell between half past four and six, depending on the season. Their first duties were to wash and dress the patients, a task that varied in difficulty depending on the condition and disposition of each patient. Some required "a great deal of personal attention in this respect, others [could] attend to their own wants, but all ... require[d] supervision in order to ensure cleanliness".¹⁵ Clark noted that bathing patients was "often the most unpleasant part of an attendant's work" but that the cleanly maintenance of asylum patients was nevertheless of the utmost importance. Indeed, Clark argued that "soap and water, well applied to patients, might be classed as remedies for disease."¹⁶ Attendants' aversion to this task was demonstrated in 1878 when Clark made an inquiry among the asylum's attendant supervisors as to how many patients were washed in each bathful of water. The supervisors reported that "if the patients are very dirty, from 2 to 4" but that it was usual in some wards to bath from 10 to 19 "in each bathful". Clark's investigation led him to caution his attendants "that at the most, not more than 4 under any circumstances [should] be bath[ed] in the same water" and that "on no occasion is *cold water* to be used under any circumstances whatsoever."¹⁷

Clark's discovery that large numbers of patients were being "cleaned" in one bathful of water, which may at times have been cold, highlights the contradictions between the work expectations placed on attendants and the moral therapeutic system of treatment upheld by late nineteenth-century superintendents like Clark. The bathing of patients was not only the most unpleasant of attendants' duties; it was also the most time-consuming. The strictly scheduled work day required that attendants bathe patients, make their beds (including changing soiled bedding), and clean the rooms by 9:00 a.m. With an attendant-to-patient ratio averaging one to 16, it is logical to conclude that bathing multiple patients per bathful of water was one strategy

14 Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*, p. 26.

15 OSP, 1881, no. 8, Clark, *Handbook for Attendants*, p. 292.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 292.

17 Ontario Archives, Clark Diary, p. 37; Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted", p. 272.

attendants employed to save time in the morning schedule.¹⁸ Furthermore, the evident discovery by Clark of the occasional cold bath suggests the survival of a tradition pointed out by L. D. Smith in his study of asylum attendants in England in the first half of the nineteenth century. Smith notes that at “the Hereford Asylum in the 1830s the cold bath was used unequivocally as both treatment method and punishment”.¹⁹ Although the cold bath as a therapy or a form of discipline was antithetical to Clark’s conception of moral management in the late 1800s, it may sometimes have been used by his attendants as a means to establish a degree of authority over their insane charges. In an institution with a patient population as large as that at the Toronto Provincial Asylum, one superintendent and a few assistant physicians could do little to prohibit this kind of strategy completely.

Two attendants from each ward of the Toronto Asylum were to be present half an hour before the patients’ breakfast — served between 6:30 and 7:30 — to “assist the preparation” of the meal, as well as “to distribute food, maintain order, and give assistance to those who need it”.²⁰ A close count was to be kept of the knives and forks used by patients during meals to avoid potential injury.²¹ Although all patients were technically required to be present at all scheduled meals, in some cases attendants had to serve food individually to patients in poor health. Because of the “suicidal determination” of a patient in Ward no. 13, for example, Clark instructed attendant supervisor Mary Clarke to administer the patient’s meals in her room, “and not to furnish her with a knife and fork”.²² Alternatively, in those cases where patients refused to eat, attendants administered food by force. As with breakfast, attendants helped organize and administer food at dinner, held at noon, and at six o’clock “tea”.

The activities of patients — and thus the responsibilities of attendants — between meals varied considerably. Many patients spent several hours during the day working in sewing and laundry rooms, helping out on the asylum farm, or assisting in the bakery in the making of bread for patients’ meals. In fact, as a major component of the moral management of the insane, “work therapy” was put into extensive practice at the Toronto Provincial Asylum.²³ Since asylum engineers, bakers, tailors, laundresses,

18 The attendant/patient ratio at the Toronto Asylum was erratic, depending on the number of attendants needed to manage the patients of a specific ward and on the size of the staff from year to year. The average is taken from Brown, “Living with God’s Afflicted”, p. 262.

19 Smith, “Behind Closed Doors”, p. 322.

20 OSP, 1879, no. 8, “Rules for Attendants”, pp. 266, 267.

21 There are many examples in Clark’s diary of patients gaining access to kitchen implements with an aim to injuring themselves. A male patient from Ward no. 6 who was known “to be suicidal” was “closely watched” by the attendants. Nevertheless, on August 30, 1881, “he made a rush for the dining table and got possession of one [knife] and made several slight incisions in his neck before he could be prevented.” See Clark Diary, p. 183. The failure of attendants to prevent these opportunities for patient injury from arising could lead to dismissal. See, for example, Clark Diary, p. 109. A fuller discussion of patient suicide and the role of the attendant appears below.

22 Clark Diary, October 15, 1882.

23 In his visit to the Toronto Asylum in 1884, Daniel Tuke found that “the patients are employed to

and farmers were often responsible for the care of the patients while they engaged in work therapy, these employees could well be considered as "occasional attendants". In this capacity, they contributed substantially to the overall character of the subculture of asylum life. While many patients worked, others played games or took walks around the asylum grounds.²⁴ Attendants were responsible at this time for keeping a close watch over their charges, administering medicine as instructed by the medical staff, and generally keeping the asylum patients clean and in good order.

After asylum patients and their rooms had been well cleaned, a medical inspection was made by the superintendent and assistant physicians. Clark recognized the potentially important contribution that the attendants, with their constant contact with the asylum inmates, could make to the medical assessment of their insane charges. He therefore considered an important aspect of their work to include noticing

the habits and conduct of the patients, and [informing] the Medical Superintendent at his visits, of all the circumstances requiring attention, such as loss of appetite, or any indisposition, tendency to suicide, &c., and [reporting] any accident or unusual occurrence immediately to the Medical Superintendent, or in his absence to the Assistant Physicians.²⁵

There was a degree of irony in the superintendent's reliance on and recognition of his attendants' assessments of the physical and mental condition of patients, for the keepers of the insane had no formal medical training during this period.²⁶ Perhaps the diagnostic efforts of Clark's non-medical attendants nevertheless provided some pertinent information to a superintendent who had "little daily contact" with the asylum patients but who greatly influenced the course of their treatment in the institution.²⁷

a considerable extent, namely about 60 percent of the free class, from whom alone work can be attained." Daniel Tuke, *The Insane in the United States and Canada* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), p. 213. For an interesting account of a patient's work in the asylum tailor shop, see IC, file 6387, "Duncan McArthur ('a lunatic') Requests compensation for Work Done". See also Ontario Archives, Reports of the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities for 1872-1873, 1875, and 1879 for patient work performed at the Toronto and London Asylums.

24 Work therapy, like other components of moral management, was theoretically designed to keep the insane from the morbid thoughts and preoccupations which contributed to their insanity. As Nancy Tomes notes, however, while work was considered as the activity *par excellence* for an asylum's non-paying patients, leisure pursuits were deemed more appropriate for the middle-class, paying patients. Here we are provided with an interesting example of the implications of social class and moral therapy within the institutional setting of the lunatic asylum. See Tomes, *A Generous Confidence*, pp. 202-203.

25 See OSP, 1879, no. 8, "specimen" of monthly report in "Rules for Attendants", p. 267.

26 It was not until 1888 that Dr. C. K. Clarke opened the Rockwood Training School for nurses in affiliation with the Kingston Lunatic Asylum. The Toronto Asylum appears to have received its first hospital-trained nurse in 1906. See OSP, 1907, no. 41, pp. 6-9.

27 Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted", p. 258.

After the patients had their tea at six o'clock, the attendants prepared them for sleep. At nine o'clock, attendants retired to their quarters and the duties of the night attendants commenced. Night attendants were "to remain in their respective divisions during the night, passing continually from one corridor to another, with as little noise as possible". They were responsible for "seeing to the sick and to those requiring particular care, as the suicidal and violent; executing the orders of the Medical Superintendent, and performing the services that may be required in any emergency".²⁸ During their "tour of duty", the night attendants were also to

get up those patients who are in the habit of either wetting or dirtying their beds, and [to] use their best endeavours to check or break them of the habit. They will also mop up and remove any uncleanness that may be deposited on the floor or elsewhere, before it soaks into the wood or produces stains.²⁹

Each ward of the Toronto Asylum had a supervising attendant who oversaw the duties of the other attendants. It is evident from Clark's "rules for attendants" that much of the supervisors' work involved inspecting and reporting on the condition of the patients and the quality of the other attendants' work. Thus, for example, ward supervisors saw that the patients were properly dressed and washed in the morning, oversaw attendants' duties during meals, examined patients' rooms and bedding for cleanliness and good order, and were present as the day attendants handed over their charges to the night watches to ensure that the patients were received "dry and orderly". Supervisors also kept a daily report-book in which they recorded information deemed pertinent to proper patient care and asylum management. The distinct responsibilities and greater authority of attendant supervisors sometimes placed them in conflict with the "ordinary" attendants. Indeed, Clark's diary reveals that the critical report of an attendant supervisor concerning one of the attendants working on his or her ward was often enough to secure dismissal of the unwanted attendant.³⁰

The duties of attendants at the Toronto Asylum often extended beyond those officially indicated in the "Rules for Attendants" in the asylum bylaws and in the *Handbook for Attendants* written by Clark. In a letter from Clark to Inspector Christie, for example, the superintendent notes that "for the first ten or twelve years of the term of [Thomas] Jones' employment, he had charge of the Shoemaking Department [of the asylum] and turned out a great deal of work. This was in addition to his duties as attendant."³¹ The duties of Samuel Black, in charge of Ward no. 2 from 1887

28 OSP, 1897, no. 8, "Rules for Attendants", p. 268.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 268.

30 See Clark Diary, November 8, 1878, p. 31; April 14, 1879, p. 57; April 18, 1881, p. 167; July 1, 1881, p. 175.

31 IC, file 6444, Clark to Inspector Christie, March 26, 1898, and F. W. Cagney to Christie, November 19, 1898.

to 1905, were also extensive. In addition to filling the role of “porter in the absence of our porter”, Black’s job entailed “keeping all the basement wards in cleanliness and proper order in and around the buildings, kitchen etc. attending to the wants of the female wards and departments [and] ... also doing relief duty and attending to wants from offices”. Clark notes that, although Ward no. 2 had for the most part “quiet working patients”, there were 28 of them for Black to attend to alone, a number “almost equal to an ordinary ward and ... altogether too many for one man”.³²

Some indication of what attendants themselves thought of their work can be found in their petitions to Daniel Clark for higher wages and better working conditions. In a collective petition signed by the male attendants, the following account is given:

[W]e have to be on duty from 5:30 AM in summer and [from 6:00 AM] in winter until 9PM the year round making 15 and 15 1/2 hours daily. ... We have to be all our time attending on and mixing with all classes of the unfortunate classes of this place. ... We have to bear patiently with all the abuse and insults we get. ... Besides ... the insane ... are mentally and physically diseased there are many feeble chronic cases who have to be nursed and tended to with great care as they have neither the senses nor ability to keep themselves in any way.³³

A similar petition written by the female attendants noted:

[W]e have to endure long hours, attending on the sick and feeble and those incapable of taking care of themselves in any way, also to bear patiently with abusive language, insults and even assaults, as the insane having no fear of punishment have no inducement to control themselves, even under an ordinary [?] of temper.³⁴

This description of attendants’ lengthy daily routine and of the many trying and unpleasant aspects of their work, in addition to their low wage scale,³⁵ would seem to provide ample justification for the findings of asylum historians indicating high turnover rates among attendants in late nineteenth-century psychiatric institutions. In *Mental Illness and American Society, 1857–1940*, Gerald Grob notes: “Long hours, arduous duty in wards filled with difficult patients, and relatively low pay made it difficult to attract or to retain high quality personnel. The resulting high turnover rates further undermined institutional stability.”³⁶ Thomas Brown likewise notes that, at the Toronto Provincial Asylum, “if the yearly turnover-rate of attendants is any indication, most quickly found such employment decidedly unpalata-

32 IC, file 6373, Black to Clark, December 15, 1892, and Clark to Christie, January 2, 1893.

33 IC, file 6918, Employees to Clark, October 13, 1881.

34 IC, file 6918, Petition of the Female Employees of the Asylum for the Insane to Clark, October 1881.

35 A full examination of attendants’ wages will be made below.

36 Grob, *Mental Illness*, p. 19.

able."³⁷ According to Shortt, "low wages and uncongenial working conditions ... produce[d] a significant resignation rate in the London Asylum."³⁸ While there is no doubt that many attendants left the asylum after a short period of work either because they found it disagreeable or because of better employment opportunities elsewhere, a careful examination of the turnover rate of attendants between 1876 and 1882 at the Toronto Asylum suggests that the issue of attendant mobility is much more complex than has hitherto been indicated.

The pay lists of the Toronto Asylum offer an opportunity to trace the movement of all attendants working in the institution with a great deal of accuracy. Unfortunately, pay lists are missing for the three years from 1874 to 1876 and for the five years from 1883 to 1887. In order to follow the movement of attendants within an uninterrupted block of time, Table 1 traces the work patterns of those attendants employed during the seven-year period from 1876 to 1882. The table also follows the movement of attendants before and after these dates if they worked at the asylum for longer than the given period.³⁹

A large turnover rate of attendants is indeed indicated in Table 1. What is equally striking, however, is the number who provided longer-term service. The precise definition of "short-term" employment is arbitrary, but just under 44 per cent of attendants held their jobs for four years or more.⁴⁰ A considerable number of attendants, in other words, persisted at their jobs in spite of the long hours, poor pay, and unpleasant working conditions.

Another interesting feature that emerges from the pay lists is the number of workers who were listed as attendants for a few years, then left the employ of the asylum only to reappear some years later. Eleven attendants (9.5 per cent) during the period studied show this propensity to drop in and out of service at the Toronto Asylum. For example, Richard McCreary appears as night attendant from 1876 to 1878, when he left the employ of the asylum until his return in 1882 as supervisor of Ward no. 6. He later left again (he is not present on the 1887 pay list) and returned for one year or less in 1888 as supervisor of Ward no. 16.⁴¹ As McCreary's case indicates,

37 Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted", p. 261.

38 Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*, p. 46.

39 Due to the lack of available pay lists for the above-mentioned periods and given the difficulty of tracing the work histories of female attendants who married and thus changed their last names, the results of this study of attendant turnover, if anything, underestimate the length of time worked in the asylum.

40 Pay Lists, January 1870 — November 1889. A "considerable amount of movement between jobs" has been discovered among Hamilton workers between 1851 and 1871. See Michael Katz, Michael Doucet, and Mark Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 171. There have been few studies of occupational mobility in Canada during the period discussed here. Peter Bischoff's " 'Travelling the Country Round': migrations et syndicalisme chez les mouleurs de l'Ontario et du Québec membres de l'*Iron Molders Union of North America*, 1860 à 1892", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1990), pp. 37-71, makes some helpful observations on "la grande mobilité des mouleurs".

41 Mary Clarke's 10 years of service as supervisor of Ward no. 13 was interrupted for one year or more between 1873 and 1876.

Table 1 Attendant Mobility, 1876–1882

Number of years worked	1 yr. or less	2–4 yrs.	5–7 yrs.	8 yrs. or more
% of workers	29.3%	37.8%	19.7%	13.0%

Note: Total number of attendants is 116.

Source: Ontario Archives, RG 10-20-B-4, Pay Lists January 1870 — November 1889.

in addition to this periodic pattern of asylum work during the course of an attendant's career, there could also be a considerable degree of movement from one ward to another. Thomas Shaw, for example, started work as an attendant of Ward no. 2 in 1878. From 1879 to 1880, he moved (or was moved) to Ward no. 4, then left the asylum service until 1882 when he returned as attendant of Ward no. 14.

The movement of attendants from ward to ward in part reflected Superintendent Clark's efforts to re-establish a balance in his work force after the departure of one or more attendants.⁴² These transfers might also in part have arisen out of the development of an attendant "incentive system". Nancy Tomes points out the existence of this kind of system of rewards and punishments for asylum patients at the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane. Because of a recognized "ward hierarchy" at the Pennsylvania Asylum, patients "regarded the First and Second wards as the most desirable and the lower wards as the most unpleasant. Thus, changing their ward assignments was an effective way for [Superintendent] Kirkbride and his assistants to punish or reward patients."⁴³ There is evidence to suggest that Superintendent Clark employed a similar ward incentive system in an effort to control the behaviour of his attendants.⁴⁴

A study of the Toronto Asylum pay lists also reveals the apparent existence of families of attendants working in the same institution. While evidence confirming that asylum officials hired the relatives of attendants is elusive, the piecing together of a number of sources points to such a practice. For example, there is a high instance of attendants employed at the asylum between 1870 and 1890 with the same last names. While this alone does not indicate immediate family relationships, the pay lists nevertheless strongly suggest a noticeable number of related attendants working from 1875 to 1906. For instance, there were three Galbraiths (Ellen, Margaret, and Mary Ann) working at the Toronto Asylum from 1870 to 1872. In 1872, they were joined by Catherine Galbraith, who worked in the East Hospital of the asylum until 1877, then left the asylum service until 1879, when she returned for one more year of work. The 1871 Census lists the

42 See Clark Diary, May 1, 1881, p. 169.

43 Tomes, *A Generous Confidence*, p. 204.

44 See Clark Diary, entries on pp. 79, 87, 97, and 187, for Clark's imposition of the "ward incentive system" on attendant Herdman. See also a similar example regarding attendant Hassard in Clark Diary, April 9, 1883, p. 247.

four Galbraiths as living at the Toronto Asylum. While it is thus not possible to confirm their relationship by locating them in the same household, other census information strongly indicates a family connection.⁴⁵ There are eight other similar examples of attendants at the Toronto Asylum with same last names and identical additional background information listed in the 1871 Census.⁴⁶

This apparently high incidence of relatives in the employ of the Toronto Asylum provides some insight into the institution's hiring practices. One could argue, for example, that one of the most reliable work and character references that an asylum superintendent could be given when trying to fill a position was that provided by an attendant who had already proven sufficiently competent on the job and could recommend a relative who was looking for work. The practice of hiring relatives was especially logical given Superintendent Clark's frequent complaints about the difficulty of acquiring a "better class" of attendants.⁴⁷ Since the wages paid to attendants were so low (\$16 to \$22 per month for men and \$8 to \$10 per month for women in 1880) and the conditions of work so unpleasant, the best hiring strategy for Clark may well have been to employ the relatives of those attendants he thought to be reliable. In his discovery of a similar "network of relatives" at the Michigan General Hospital, Rosenberg suggests that this phenomenon may, at the same time, have helped to perpetuate an institutional culture — "one for which [the institution's administrators] felt neither empathy nor understanding".⁴⁸

Married attendants during this period lived both at the asylum and beyond the institution's walls. Shortt points out that "in 1887 the government abruptly decided that the provision of accommodation for the families of married attendants imposed 'a large and cumbersome burden'." The Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities thus "ordered all families to leave the institution within six months".⁴⁹ Such a change would seem to indicate that a number of married attendants had been accommodated at the asylum at least prior to the 1887 ruling. Again, the 1871 Census tends to corroborate the existence of "live-in" married attendants. In certain respects it was indeed advantageous for attendants with families to live at the asylum, as room and board were free. Moreover, it would have been convenient for an attendant to

45 The respective ages of the Galbraiths (Catherine, 20 years; Ellen, 22 years; Mary Ann, 26 years; and Margaret, 30 years) suggest that they were in fact sisters. The four women moreover shared a common birthplace (Ireland) and religion (Wesleyan Methodist). The December 5, 1879, entry in Clark's diary further substantiates their relationship: "Catherine Galbraith who had been for a great many years nurse, died in the East Hospital [of the Asylum] from haemorrhage of the lungs as a sequel to phthisis [tuberculosis]. She is the last of a large family who have died from the same fatal disease. She was a faithful nurse."

46 See, in the 1871 Census, the Watsons, the Blakelys, the Giles, the McCutcheons, the Nelsons, the Archibalds, the Hannas, and the Robinsons.

47 IC, file 6918, Clark to Langmuir, October 15, 1881, and October 18, 1881.

48 Rosenberg, "And Heal the Sick", p. 435.

49 Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*, pp. 45-46.

retire to his or her living quarters at the asylum following a long 15-hour shift. In the case of a married couple living on the premises, it is likely that the spouse of an attendant might also at one point decide to work in the asylum. As the following "rule for attendants" suggests, the time an attendant could spend outside the asylum with his family was restricted:

Every keeper and servant shall be in the Asylum punctually at the hour of nine o'clock at night; and no keeper or servant is to be permitted to pass the night out of the Asylum, except the male keepers or servants who are married, and who are permitted to sleep out every third night, provided that their services are not required in the institution.⁵⁰

During his long period of service, it is likely that attendant John Scully lived both at, and later outside, the asylum. Scully's work history at the Toronto Asylum spanned 38 years, from 1856 until his death in 1894 at the age of 75. During the early stages of Scully's employment, his wife, Mary Ann Scully, was a cook at the asylum, and they both likely lived on the grounds. By the time the Scullys were raising their family, however, they had moved to a "little house" outside the asylum at 184 Bellwood Avenue.⁵¹

Through the correspondence of John Scully and other Toronto Asylum attendants with various asylum officials, one can gain an appreciation of the social and economic conditions which attendants faced in various stages of their lives. For example, after Scully's death, his wife filed a petition to Inspector Christie for a gratuity from the government for the long service of her husband. In her petition she noted that "my late husband and myself were depending entirely upon his salary for our means of living, and now that he is gone I am without the means of livelihood. I am advanced in years and cannot earn my own living."⁵² Endorsing Mary Ann Scully's petition, Clark acknowledged that "John Scully was an honest and faithful servant and if any service of this kind on very poor wages is worthy of consideration then his is one of the most worthy."⁵³ In spite of his long period of uninterrupted full-time work, Scully was only able to provide for the immediate needs of his family.⁵⁴

Samuel Black, attendant of Ward no. 2 from 1887 to 1905, also noted the difficult challenge of surviving on an attendant's wages. In 1892 he wrote a petition for higher wages to Inspector Christie, stating that "it is a matter

50 OSP, 1879, no. 8, p. 269. It is interesting to note that this rule did not refer to female attendants who were married.

51 IC, file 6389, Clark to Christie, March 15, 1894.

52 IC, file 6389, Scully to Christie, March 12, 1894.

53 IC, file 6389, Clark to Christie, March 15, 1894.

54 The financial predicament of Mary Ann Scully exemplifies the unfortunate situation of many aging women in late nineteenth-century Canada with the loss of a principal wage earner. See Bettina Bradbury, "Surviving as a Widow in Nineteenth-Century Montreal", *Urban History Review*, vol. 17, no. 3 (February 1989), pp. 148-160.

almost impossible for a married man to keep a house and support a wife and family on such a small salary no matter how economical we are as it takes nearly half my pay to pay the rent."⁵⁵ By 1897 the tone of Black's petitions had become more urgent. In a letter to Superintendent Clark, Black asked if "in all fairness it is possible to do it ... pay rent, Doctor's bills and provide everything, on account of inadequate means of support we are deprived of living in a respectable locality and our children deprived of the comforts of life and education."⁵⁶ As in the case of Mary Ann Scully, Superintendent Clark appeared to sympathize with the hardships faced by Black and other attendants. Clark endorsed Black's petition for higher wages, noting that "he is a married man and has a family — and how a man with a family can live on the small wages he receives is more than I can tell."⁵⁷ The sentiments of Scully and Black were echoed in an 1881 collective petition from the male attendants at the Toronto Asylum:

At the present time ... it is impossible for married men to keep [a] house, support a wife and family on the small pittance he receives not enough to keep body and soul together when the high price of house rent, provisions, fuel etc. are considered he would not have a cent left to clothe them. In fact it is but genteel poverty now and no prospect but real poverty in the future should he be incapacitated from duty and a man need not expect to be always in good health even in an asylum he will feel the touch of time and the encroaches of old age with its loss of energy and health.⁵⁸

It is evident from the experiences of Margaret Galooley and Ann Donohoe that female attendants could also be left in dire economic straits if they lost their jobs at the asylum through ill-health. Attendant Galooley worked at the Toronto Asylum for 17 years. However, in 1879 her services were "dispensed with as she [had] become incapacitated from further work through failure of health."⁵⁹ Writing to Langmuir, Clark asked that the inspector remember Galooley's age (47) "and the number of years that she has been employed, as well as the fact that she has no means of support, and is likely to never [recover physically]", when considering a retiring

55 IC, file 6373, Black to Christie, December 5, 1892.

56 IC, file 6373, Black to Clark, January 5, 1897. It is tempting to surmise that Black is referring to the fact that his children were forced to supplement the inadequate income of their father through waged or non-waged work, and were thus unable to reap the full advantages of a developing free primary education system in late nineteenth-century Ontario. This phenomenon is discussed at length in John Bullen, "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario", in L. S. MacDowell and Ian Radforth, eds., *Canadian Working Class History: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1991), pp. 269–287.

57 IC, file 6373, Clark to Christie, December 13, 1892. See also IC, file 6389, Petition of Edward Maguire to Clark, October 3, 1894.

58 IC, file 6918, Male attendants to Clark, October 13, 1881.

59 IC, file 6895, "Margaret Galooley Retiring Allowance", Inspector Langmuir to Provincial Treasurer, March 9, 1879.

allowance for the ailing attendant. She was granted a retirement gratuity “calculated at the usual rate [at this time] of one months [*sic*] pay for each years [*sic*] service”. In Galooley’s case, “the account would be equal to \$136 as the wages paid have been \$8 per month.”⁶⁰ The case of Ann Donohoe, who had also been an attendant at the Toronto Asylum for 17 years, was less fortunate. On November 2, 1885, Clark received two letters from employees of the House of Providence — one from Dr. Cameron, the other from Sister Louisa — informing him that Ann Donohoe had been a patient at the House for the past five months. She was suffering from “chronic cough” and “lung affliction”, a condition from which, according to Cameron and Sister Louisa, she was unlikely to recover. The letters from the House of Providence requested some sort of retiring allowance on Donohoe’s behalf. Unfortunately, Donohoe would only receive \$30 from the government for her years of service.

The disparity between the retirement allowance of Galooley in 1879 and that of Donohoe in 1885 can be explained by fundamental changes in the laws governing retirement allowances for attendants which occurred in 1881. On May 2, 1881, a new order-in-council stated that “no gratuity shall be given on the resignation of any of the following officials, who have not been for more than one year employed in the public institutions of the Province namely, attendants, guards, engineers, gardeners, farmers and such like.”⁶¹ Of more importance to most of those asylum attendants retiring from lengthy careers after 1881 was the section stating that “with respect to the officers who have been more than one year in the public service that the Government shall from time to time consider the case of each when his services are dispensed with, though no obligation of any kind is recognized to pay a gratuity or allowance to any of them.”⁶² The interpretation usually placed on this part of the law in regard to workers with long careers at the Toronto Asylum was that the retiring employee was to receive between four months’ and one year’s salary in gratuity. Such an allowance was a far cry from the earlier, more generous system that rewarded employees in proportion to the seniority they obtained. As in the case of Ann Donohoe, the reduced retirement allowances had an adverse effect on the lives of many asylum attendants.⁶³

60 *Ibid.*

61 IC, file 6369, copy of an order-in-council, May 2, 1881.

62 *Ibid.*

63 The changed laws governing retirement allowances were particularly harsh on those attendants who had begun work at the asylum prior to 1881. For example, attendants like Thomas Jones, who were hired “prior to the Order in Council of 2nd of May 1881 ... did not receive the notice which was sent to employees appointed subsequently to the effect that they were not to hope for gratuity allowance upon their retirement”. The confusion and disappointment resulting from the failure of asylum authorities to inform all attendants of the changed policy concerning retirement allowances can be seen in the petitions of many retiring attendants, who, upon receiving one year’s salary or less, asked that the “apparent mistake ... be rectified”. See IC, file 6444, Letters concerning the retirement of attendant Thomas Jones; IC, file 6389, McPherson, Clark and Jarvice (barristers) to

It is obvious from the information available in much of the asylum correspondence that the wages of attendants provided a low standard of living — one which, through the loss of one's position because of old age or ill health, could decline rapidly, leading to severe hardship and even destitution. A brief comparison of attendants' wages to those of other low-paid wage earners in the late nineteenth century confirms the precarious social and economic status of attendants described in the asylum correspondence. In 1882 male attendants earned between \$16 and \$22 per month, while a farm hand in York county earned about \$17 per month with board or \$24 per month without board. By 1889, male attendants' monthly wages ranged between \$18 and \$25, while York county farm labourers earned on average \$26.72 per month with board. General labourers in 1889 were paid an average weekly wage of \$7.25 for a 60-hour work week. Keeping in mind that attendants' pay included board and, prior to 1887, often accommodation at the asylum, it can nevertheless be concluded that the monthly wages of male asylum attendants and those of labourers were relatively consistent.⁶⁴

The wages of female Toronto Asylum attendants may be compared to those of domestic servants. In 1882 female attendants were paid \$6 to \$10 per month, while domestic servants in York county earned an average weekly wage of \$1.50 with board. By 1889, the monthly wages of female attendants fell between \$12.50 and \$14.50, whereas domestic servants earned \$7.33 per month with board. As with male asylum attendants, it should be kept in mind that a number of female attendants would have taken the free accommodation (and most of them, the free board) offered at the asylum before 1887.⁶⁵

There was a great disparity between the wages of male and female Toronto Asylum attendants. As Table 2 indicates, female attendants earned roughly half the wages of male attendants, a pay differential that was particularly striking given that the work performed was almost identical.⁶⁶ This large gap between the wages of male and female attendants was to a great extent the result of differing conceptions of the roles of men and women in late nineteenth-century Canada. As we have seen, many of the men's

Provincial Secretary J. M. Gibson, August 18, 1894; IC, file 6386, Mary Ann Parkes to Provincial Secretary A. S. Hardy, January 22, 1884.

64 The wages of male attendants are found in the asylum pay lists. Those of Ontario labourers are derived from the *Annual Reports of the Bureau of Industries for the Province of Ontario* for the years 1882–1883 and 1890, found in OSP. The similarity between the wages of attendants and labourers is more apparent still when the attendants' long 15-hour day is taken into account.

65 OSP, *Annual Reports of the Bureau of Industries*, 1882–1883 and 1890. According to the female attendants, "our [asylum] duties here [are] far more wearying and trying on the mind ... than those of women employed in purely domestic service." IC, file 6918, Female Attendants to Clark, October 1881. See also Dr. Henry Landor's comments regarding attendants' wages at the London asylum in 1873, in Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted", p. 262.

66 Asylum attendant work is arguably one of the few nineteenth-century occupations in which the job requirements of men and women were so similar.

Table 2 Monthly Wages of Toronto Asylum Attendants

Year	Female attendants	Male attendants
1871	\$6–10 per month	\$14–18 per month
1876	\$6–10 per month	\$16–22 per month
1882	\$8–10 per month	\$16–22 per month
1889	\$12.50–14.50 per month	\$18–25 per month

Source: Ontario Archives, RG 10-20-B-4, Pay Lists January 1870 — November 1889.

petitions for higher wages were justified by the need to provide for their wives and children. Superintendent Clark endorsed many such petitions, pointing out to asylum inspectors the family responsibilities of his male attendants. In contrast, to the extent that female attendants ever ventured to ask Clark for higher wages (the available examples are indeed very few), the rhetoric of the principal breadwinner and of family responsibility was conspicuously absent, in both petitions and subsequent correspondence by Clark and asylum inspectors. Yet the wages of female attendants must have contributed substantially to their own families' incomes; they may, in some cases, have been the principal wage earners of their households. Moreover, as has been demonstrated in the cases of Galooley and Donohoe, female attendants could eventually be left in very unfortunate social and economic circumstances as the result of poor salaries during their employment at the Toronto Asylum and subsequently inadequate allowances at the end of their working days.

The means through which male and, to a much lesser extent, female attendants could improve their wages and conditions of work between 1875 and 1906 were limited. Petitions constituted the principal bargaining mechanism available to asylum attendants in their quest for higher wages. As we have seen, an initial letter was usually sent to Superintendent Clark by an attendant asking him to favour the attendant's petition. Clark would then send the employee's letter, along with any additional information he thought was needed concerning the nature of the attendant's work, as well as his own assessment, to the asylum inspector. The inspector, usually on the basis of Clark's written assessment of the case, either rejected the attendant's request or recommended that it be considered by the Provincial Secretary, and finally the Provincial Treasurer, for approval. As one might expect, one immediate problem of this process, from the attendant's viewpoint, was the great amount of bureaucratic procedure involved. Even when the petitions were approved, it could take months to act upon them. Moreover, as an attendant's plea for higher wages moved up the ranks of the government bureaucracy, the urgency of the original letter was often superseded by other concerns, such as the state of the provincial budget and the costs of running an asylum. As the chief bargaining mechanism available to attendants, petitions were quite ineffective.⁶⁷

67 This conflict of interests is demonstrated by the response of asylum officials to the persistent petitioning of attendant supervisor Black. See IC, file 6373, Gibson to Christie, January 9, 1895, and Christie to Clarke, January 8, 1897.

The monthly wages of male attendants were increased by two dollars after one year of service. If they gained the seniority to be promoted to attendant supervisor, their monthly wages increased again, usually by two dollars. Such incentives were not, for the most part, offered to female attendants. From 1870 to 1890 there were no wage increases for female attendants after a certain length of asylum service. Work in certain wards did appear to have been rewarded with a slightly higher monthly wage, depending on whether a given ward had "quiet working" or "refractory" patients. Furthermore, until 1876 there were no female attendant supervisors, and until 1878 there was no pay difference between female supervisors and attendants. After 1878, female supervisors earned one dollar more per month than ordinary attendants.⁶⁸

A few male attendants might, on occasion, also be promoted by Clark to the position of "stoker" from which they might learn enough to move up the ranks of the engineering department or into a better paying position outside the institution.⁶⁹ As Inspector Langmuir explained, there also existed "a regular system of promoting the most deserving of the [male] attendants employed in the Toronto Asylum into the service of the Central Prison, provided their physique and general capabilities fit them for the position of prison guard".⁷⁰ Thus, for instance, upon Langmuir's request in May 1881, Clark chose attendants White and Hunt to be placed into better paying positions as guards at the Central Prison.⁷¹ While Clark was "glad to see [his] men promoted", he nevertheless resented the fact that "with the Police Force — the Central Prison — and the demand for Night Watchmen at the wholesale houses, I am losing my best [attendants] and recently the demand for them has been considerable."⁷²

The superintendent's dismissal of those who in one way or another violated the rules of asylum conduct also accounted for some of the turnover among Toronto Asylum attendants. Many infractions that prompted dismissal were related to a lack of proper patient care. The most serious of these offences was violent behaviour towards a patient. Yet there appeared to be a fine line between clearly unacceptable, outright physical abuse (which, when discovered, resulted in dismissal) and a kind of "rough handling" of patients which was tolerated by Clark — the latter form of behaviour was more the result of the attendants' exacting 15-hour daily schedule of constant contact with the asylum patients than of particularly vicious dispositions. This fine line of conduct is reflected in Clark's own assessment of suspected

68 This information was gleaned from an examination of asylum pay lists. One interesting potential promotion for female attendants appeared to be the position of "dairy maid", an appointment given for the first time to attendant Ann Smith of Ward no. 7. See Clark Diary, March 13, 1879, p. 53, and November 26, 1879, p. 89.

69 IC, file 6369, Clark to Christie, February 10, 1899.

70 IC, file 6907, Langmuir to Murrich, October 14, 1881.

71 IC, file 6907, Clark to Langmuir, May 28, 1881.

72 *Ibid.* According to the Bureau of Industries, watchmen were being paid about \$8.30 for a 70-hour week in 1884, an attractive option for an attendant earning between \$18 and \$25 dollars a month and working a 90-hour week. OSP, *Report of Bureau of Industries*, 1885.

cases of patient abuse. For example, "after an inquiry into the conduct of attendant Brickham", Clark was convinced that he had "abused several of the patients in Ward no. 6".⁷³ Brickham was promptly discharged. In another instance, a patient complained that a night watch, Mr. Elroy, had "kicked and beaten him with a stick". Clark dismissed the night watch, finding him "guilty of this brutal assault".⁷⁴ Assistant physician Dr. Lett informed Clark that he saw attendant Attie Jones "strike with her fist a patient in no. 3 [ward]" for which she was immediately discharged. These cases may be contrasted with that of attendant Addie, who "had been seen to be rough with patients". The charge was made by a patient who claimed that the asylum painter Thomas Bruce had also witnessed the event. Bruce, however, told Clark that he "saw nothing out of the way". Clark did not dismiss Addie but gave him "a caution as it was evident there was something" to the patient's complaint.⁷⁵

Although the unequal power relations between attendants and patients suggest that patients were more often on the receiving end of abuse, it is clear that attendants frequently had to deal with assaults from their charges. In his petition to Inspector Christie, John Druce, attendant of Ward no. 14, explained that he had been "kicked in the groin by one of the patients" and, upon consultation with two doctors, was told that his injury required surgical treatment. "In view of the fact that I was injured while on duty", argued Druce, "I think the government should pay Dr. Nevitt's [the surgeon's] fee." Clark, however, was of a different opinion. Informing Inspector Christie that Druce "was at one time kicked slightly by one of the patients", Clark noted that Druce "never was off duty because of the injury nor did he consult any of the medical men in the Institution". Clark's further argument is significant: "if a compensation were given to one who was slightly injured by a patient there would be no end of claims for damages for the most trivial injury."⁷⁶

73 Clark Diary, November 1881, p. 231.

74 Example taken from Brown, "Living with God's Afflicted", p. 264.

75 Clark Diary, January 25, 1882, p. 237. Other reasons for dismissal included laziness, sleeping on the job, drunkenness, stealing from the asylum storerooms, and insubordinate behaviour towards superiors. For examples, see IC, file 6907, Inspector O'Reilly to Clark, January 2, 1883; Clark to Provincial Secretary Gibson, January 3, 1883; Clark to O'Reilly, January 3, 1883; Clark Diary, April 1879, p. 57; May 24, 1882, pp. 256-259; May 8, 1879, p. 61; January 27, 1884, p. 201. An examination of the circumstances surrounding the case of Hugh Sproule, a night attendant ostensibly dismissed for his insubordinate reaction to the authority of the asylum superintendent, demonstrates the rigid hierarchy of power relations that existed between attendants and medical officers at the Toronto Asylum. See IC, file 6378, 1893.

76 IC, file 6400, "Attendant (John Druce) claim for damages incurred by patient", John Druce to R. Christie, September 18, 1899, and Clark to Christie, September 25, 1899. See also Clark's Diary entry for September 5, 1880, p. 123: "Visited the wards at 4 O'Clock A.M. Found night nurse Parsons lying on a bench. She explained that she had been kicked by Mrs. P. [patient] in the stomach and was in great pain. She was not asleep." See also IC, file 6918, Petition of the Female Employees, October 1881: "we have to ... bear patiently with abusive language, insults and even assaults" from patients.

Indeed, physical struggle can generally be seen as an important aspect of attendant/patient relations contributing to the creation of a complex asylum subculture. This is perhaps best demonstrated by a confrontation in which a patient working in the asylum laundry room was discovered to have a cut on her hand "and marks about her neck as if gripped by a hand". Ann Donohoe, who worked as both attendant and laundry maid for 17 years at the asylum, was accused by the patient of the assault.⁷⁷ However, when Clark investigated the incident, Donohoe and Catherine Foster, the head laundress, explained:

[T]he patient had seized Ann Donohoe by the hair of the head without any provocation, and was pulling the laundress very violently. Another patient came to the rescue and in the struggle to free herself Ann Donohoe says it is impossible to say what was done by herself and what was done by the patient.

Clark concluded that Donohoe was "candid in her statements & as it was impossible to know what injury was done by the laundress — if any — she was not dismissed."⁷⁸ This incident points to the existence of an intricate subculture of patient and attendant allegiances frequently shaped by the use of force, which was informed by the authority structure of the asylum's officers, but which was nevertheless not easily controlled by them.⁷⁹

Another reality of asylum life which further emphasized the complexities of the Toronto Asylum's "human ecology"⁸⁰ was patient suicide. Rosenberg describes patient suicide in American municipal hospitals in the nineteenth century as "an ultimately passive — but ultimate — mode of resistance" to the institution's "stewardship".⁸¹ The regular, if not frequent, pattern of suicide attempts at the Toronto Asylum suggests a similar form of "passive resistance". Because attendants served as the front line of patient care, preventing their insane charges from committing suicide was considered by asylum officials to be a crucial part of an attendant's job. In a "determined attempt at suicide", a male patient from Ward no. 14 took possession of a misplaced carving knife and "cut into his windpipe to the extent of one half of its diameter". This unsuccessful attempt prompted Clark to issue a warning to attendant supervisor McGuire "that in future he must see to it that all such weapons must be kept under lock and key when

77 Ann Donohoe is the attendant cited earlier who ended up at the House of Providence.

78 Clark Diary, July 27, 1880, p. 119.

79 For other examples, see Clark Diary, November 2, 1881, p. 191. See also the superintendent's entry for November 14, 1881, in which he reported that a female patient from Ward no. 7 pushed over a fellow patient causing a fracture which needed setting by Dr. Lett. The whole sphere of patient/patient relations within the asylum, of crucial importance to an understanding of asylum culture, would require a delicate methodological approach that dealt, at least on some level, with the concept of psychological disorder.

80 The phrase is taken from chapter 2 of Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*, entitled "The Human Ecology of the London Asylum".

81 Rosenberg, "And Heal the Sick", p. 434.

not in actual use on pain of dismissal".⁸² A year and three months later, a female patient in Ward no. 13

made a desperate attempt at hanging herself from the wire shutter by her sheet. She was discovered by night nurse Ellen Chandler who broke the sheet by throwing her weight upon it. She was taken into the corridor and cold water was thrown upon her. After a few minutes she recovered her consciousness.

In this case, Clark commended the night nurse for her "watchfulness and promptitude".⁸³

If suicide constituted an "ultimate mode" of patient resistance to institutionalization, escapes from the Toronto Asylum were a less extreme means of resisting custodial control. The frequent instances of escape also call into question the extent to which the late Victorian asylum operated as a successful "total institution": there were in fact plenty of opportunities for patients to "give leg bond" to the asylum.⁸⁴ Once again, Clark considered the prevention of escapes as an important part of the attendant's job. On May 22, 1878, for instance, a patient "working party" under the care of two attendants was on the way to the asylum farm when a patient "got away on one of the railroad tracks". Although an "immediate search" for the patient was made, "no trace of him could be found". By mid-July the patient had somehow made his way to Owen Sound, and the cost for his retrieval amounted to \$16.40. Clark considered the sum "large for the attendants who had charge of him to pay", but, in keeping with the asylum's policy for attendants who lost their patients, the superintendent charged them one dollar each "as a tangible incentive to vigilance in the future".⁸⁵ A female patient who "got possession of the keys of [attendant] Annie Davis [opened] the door with one and escaped". Fortunately for attendant Davis, the patient was found the same day on Queen Street near the asylum.⁸⁶ Patients also took their escape from organized walking parties, out open windows, and over the asylum wall.⁸⁷

Other employees of the Toronto Asylum, who served as "occasional attendants" while in charge of patients engaged in "work therapy", also occasionally had patients escape from their care. For instance, Marvyn, an asylum mason, who for years had a specific patient as an assistant, "allowed [him] to stray away". Clark sent attendants Noble and Keenan in pursuit, but they returned in the evening unsuccessful. The next day attendant supervisor John Scully was sent on horseback in pursuit of the escapee, but to no avail.

82 Clark Diary, May 3, 1880, p. 109.

83 *Ibid.*, August 13, 1881, p. 179.

84 The phrase was used by a physician explaining a similar phenomenon at the Cincinnati General Hospital. See Rosenberg, "And Heal the Sick", p. 434.

85 Clark Diary, May 29, 1878, p. 5, and July 20, 1878, p. 13. The amount of money charged to attendants who lost their patients depended on the discretion of the superintendent.

86 Clark Diary, August 30, 1879, p. 75.

87 *Ibid.*, August 23 and September 4, 1880, p. 123; October 11, 1880, p. 135; September 19, 1880, p. 187.

The patient was finally found 10 days later at Whitby Jail, from where he was retrieved at a cost of \$6.86 to the mason.⁸⁸

A brief examination of the attempt to introduce attendants' uniforms into the Toronto Provincial Asylum brings together many of those aspects of asylum dynamics discussed here. The uniforms were introduced as part of an effort to impose a greater sense of order and authority within the asylum. These goals were compromised from the outset by overriding concerns about the cost of running a large government institution; in the end, the initial failure of the experiment further undermined the control that uniformed attendants were intended to establish. In May 1878, Inspector Langmuir ordered uniforms to be made for the male attendants in the tailor shop of the nearby Central Prison. The uniform for the "ordinary" attendant was to be a suit of "blue serge and [that of] the attendant [supervisors] of a little better quality for the sake of distinction".⁸⁹ A short time later, caps were made to complete the outfit. By July 7, 1879, Clark was able to write happily to the inspector of the benefits resulting from the wearing of uniforms by his male asylum keepers. First and foremost, attendants in uniform were "distinctive from the patients". The uniforms were also "conducive to tidiness", they helped to impose discipline, and they provided a "small addition to small wages". On the basis of the early success of the men's uniforms, Clark strongly recommended a similar uniformity of dress for female attendants "including white aprons" and "white caps in the pattern worn by the Toronto Hospital Nurses".⁹⁰

Although the strategy appeared successful, there were nevertheless early signs of trouble. Justifying the need for two suits per year for his male attendants, Clark pointed out to the inspector:

[I]t is impossible for them to wear a suit of clothes the length of time a prison official can, because patients come in personal contact with attendants to a much greater extent than prisoners do. A dirty patient, a violent one, or a mischievous one, will lay hands on an attendant & dirty his uniform in spite of himself.

Clark further explained that even though "the uniform is not used in working on the farm nor each day until the morning work of the wards is done, nor is the coat worn at meal times, yet, it will be impossible to do with less than two suits a year if the attendants are to be respectfully dressed."⁹¹

Despite Clark's early warnings about the need for timely replacement of worn uniforms, by August 1880 he was complaining that "the ones now in use are very shabby." Attendants, too, called to Clark's attention that "some of the present uniforms are quite shabby" and that there was "no stuff to mend them".⁹² Part of the problem concerned a dispute between superintendent and

88 *Ibid.*, May 20 and May 31, 1882, p. 213. See also the escape of a patient from asylum fireman Mullen, May 20, 1882, p. 213.

89 IC, file 6907, Langmuir to Clark, May 9, 1878.

90 IC, file 6907, Clark to Langmuir, July 7, 1879.

91 IC, file 6907, Clark to Langmuir, April 27, 1879.

92 IC, file 6907, Attendants to Clark, no date.

inspector as to where the uniforms ought to be made. Clark thought that such a large undertaking was beyond the capacity of the asylum tailor shop and therefore insisted that the uniforms be made at the Central Prison tailor shop where the labour of convicted skilled workers was employed. However, Langmuir was equally determined that the uniforms be made as cheaply as possible with "the work of a greater number of patients in the [asylum] Tailor's Department".⁹³ This dispute further delayed the replacement of worn-out uniforms. By December 30, 1882, the asylum bursar informed Inspector O'Reilly that the attendant uniforms were "entirely worn out and the men are now wearing their ordinary clothing".⁹⁴ Two months later Clark informed O'Reilly that

so patched up, threadbare, and ragged did many of the uniforms become, that I have discarded eight of them and ordered those attendants, who are thus deprived, to wear their own clothes. The cast off ones are preserved for inspection.⁹⁵

At least until 1885, the financial constraints under which the Toronto Asylum operated determined that attendants' uniforms would do more to hinder than help "impose discipline" and order in the asylum.⁹⁶

Two final examples of patient activity within the parameters of the asylum will help to establish further the presence of a subculture operating beyond the moral and organizational control of Toronto Asylum officials. A female patient, whose daily chores involved looking after the asylum fowls, was discovered to be gaining advantage from her "work therapy" in a way decidedly antithetical to Clark's intentions. This patient was one day "found the worse of liquor", whereupon it was surmised that "she had sold eggs to buy whisky, ... a bottle of it [having been] found in her room by the matron". The patient quickly lost her source of income, but for a time, at least, she had managed a remarkable inversion of the official philosophy of work as moral therapy.⁹⁷

The second example, more fascinating still in its violation of the principles of the well-ordered late Victorian asylum, concerns a belated report by asylum fireman Clifford that he saw two patients in the blacksmith shop "in an improper manner together". Clifford admitted to Clark "that he stood and watched them for a time and made no effort to separate them until it was evident that sexual connection would take place, and then he separated them". Clifford was fired for failing to report the incident immediately.⁹⁸ It is difficult to establish the frequency with which these sorts of patient activities escaped the watchful gaze of Toronto Asylum attendants whose chief responsibility, in theory at least, was to be "in constant attendance upon" their insane charges. The foregoing analysis of those aspects of asylum subculture

93 The details of the dispute can be followed through the correspondence in IC, file 6907.

94 IC, file 6907, Tracy to Clark, December 20, 1882.

95 IC, file 6907, Clark to O'Reilly, February 5, 1883.

96 Correspondence concerning the state of the uniforms unfortunately ends after this date.

97 Clark Diary, October 8, 1879, p. 81.

98 *Ibid.*, November 29, 1881, p. 195.

which have become part of the historical record nonetheless strongly suggests that, as an institution which “cut [its inmates] off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time” and which exercised “a ‘total’ bureaucratic control over every aspect of the lives of its population”, the Toronto Asylum was wide of the mark.⁹⁹

The complexities of the subculture of asylum life and of the role of asylum attendants suggest a more general re-evaluation of the experience of the insane within the context of late nineteenth-century asylum development. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s analysis of the changing nature of insanity in the nineteenth century, Thomas Brown has argued that

in the Toronto Asylum ... “silence was absolute; there was no longer any common language between madness and reason...”. Not until after the turn of the century when Freud “abolished silence and observation” and began “to accept in all its seriousness the reality of the physician-patient couple” was a dialogue between insanity and reason re-opened at least in some asylums.¹⁰⁰

Yet in the late Victorian era, silence was not absolute in the Toronto Asylum nor, one might venture to add, had the dialogue between “insanity”¹⁰¹ and reason ever really ceased. The experience of asylum patients encompassed a space that, in a myriad of ways, frequently pushed beyond the asylum’s walls.

As the words of Inspector Langmuir quoted earlier suggest, attendants were to play a key role in the curing process of insanity in the late nineteenth century, through their practical administration of moral treatment — “their constant attendance upon insane people, closely observing their habits and practices, looking carefully after their wants, and keeping them employed, interested and amused”. However, the social and economic relations of late nineteenth-century development in Ontario did not lend themselves well to the effective practice of moral therapy, and the real role of attendants would thus be far from this therapeutic ideal. The pressures placed on officers of insane asylums in the late 1800s to keep the public costs of patient care to a minimum inevitably led to a high ratio of patients to attendants, long hours of work, and, above all, the maintenance of a cheap attendant labour force. In other words, they created a work environment for attendants that was most inconsistent with the principles of moral treatment. As many historians of asylums have argued, by the late nineteenth century, moral treatment — if it had ever existed — thus quickly became custodial management of the insane.

While the subculture forged from the close daily contact between attendants and patients within the asylum further hindered the achievement of the moral

99 Goffman, *Asylums*, p. xiii, quoted in Brown, “Living with God’s Afflicted”, p. 252.

100 Brown, “Living with God’s Afflicted”, p. 280. See Foucault, “The Birth of the Asylum”, pp. 241–278, in *Madness and Civilization*, for a fuller articulation of the argument.

101 Insanity in this context is, of course, a relative term. Many recent studies of insane asylums have convincingly demonstrated that the patients who filled asylum wards in the late nineteenth century arrived there for a variety of reasons, of which mental disorder — itself a largely social construction — was only one.

treatment for the insane espoused by asylum superintendents and inspectors, it did serve as a powerful link — non-medical and officially unrecognized — between insanity and reason. It is through an exploration of this attendant/patient subculture that the “language between madness and reason” within the late Victorian asylum is to be found.

