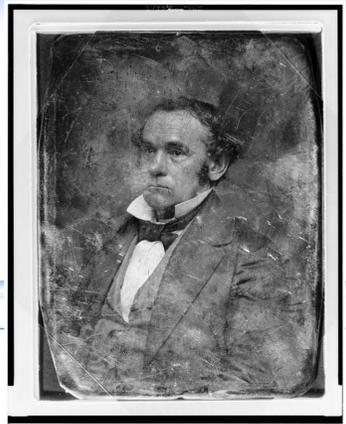


TransAtlantic Asylums: Pliny Earle, A Visit to Thirteen Asylums for the Insane in Europe, and the American Asylum

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Dr. Pliny Earle

CONCLUSION

Dr. Earle's trip had clear impacts on his psychiatric treatment based on his application of treatment at the asylums he worked at in the first decade of his career. Not only did the elements of asylums he described most positively in his book *A Visit to Thirteen Asylums for the Insane in Europe* appeared in the asylums he worked at, even practices he harshly criticized we altered to be more effective in his treatment plan. Further, Dr. Earle's influence was not limited to his own asylums, as early American psychiatrists were a close-knit community, not only because they relied on one another's research for the latest information on treatment, but many also shared a common religious, social, and economic background. Directors of new asylums, such as John Evans, who, in June 1843 was in the process of preparing a report for the Indiana State Legislature "to induce them to act and advisedly upon the subject of the establishment of a Lunatic Asylum for our state," asked Dr. Earle to forward to him a plan of Friends' Asylum, the cost of the building, and the latest report on the Asylum. Asylum-keeper with more establish careers, such as Dr. William Fisher, the medical superintendent of the Maryland Hospital in Baltimore, wrote to Dr. Earle discussing improvements that had been made at the hospital since it had been built over thirty years prior, writing that the "patients labor at gardening" and had "lately introduced Divine Worship on Sundays, it has thus far, we think, with good effort." Both of these instances suggest Earle and other doctors communicated regularly about efforts to apply moral treatment and their success, giving Earle the opportunity to pass on the information he learned in Europe. Additionally, he cites both Samuel Tuke and Jean-Etienne Esquirol in *History, Description, and Statistics of the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane*, showing their influence and the influence of his trip was long standing and impactful on his career as a physician.

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Map of Dr. Earle's travels in Europe

ABSTRACT

Using the contents of his book, *A Visit to Thirteen Asylums for the Insane in Europe*, as well as archival materials, this project explores the influence of Pliny Earle's 1837-1839 tour of European Asylums had on his view of psychiatry and the impact this had on the asylums he worked at. Earle was an early American psychiatrist, doctor, asylum superintendent, and prolific writer, who was one of the thirteen founders of what is now the American Psychiatric Association. While Earle left behind a plethora of primary source material, there has been little scholarly research on his individual contributions to the field of psychiatry; the only secondary writings on his life and his contributions specifically that could be found were a 2016 article, a 1971 thesis, and an 1898 memoir. Though he was on par with contemporary psychiatrists in terms of writing, education, and employment, he has become little more than a side-note in publications about his colleagues. By showing how Earle's trip shaped him and the asylums he worked at, as well as how he passed this information on to his peers, this project aims to bring Earle's contributions to his field forward as worthy of recognition.

PLINY EARLE, PSYCHIATRY, AND MEDICAL SCHOOL, CIRCA 1835

The early nineteenth-century was a transitional period for ideas about mental illness and its treatment. Psychiatric care in America in the late eighteenth-century was marked by the ideas of Dr. Benjamin Rush. Rush advocated for treatments such as blood-letting, purges, and warm and cold baths. These treatments were meant to "shock" the body and relied on a somatic explanation of madness. However, around the same time in Europe, doctors were publishing books which attributed mental causes to insanity and unchaining patients held in asylums. The most famous case of this happened in France where Dr. Phillippe Pinel unchained the patients first in in La Bicêtre and then in La Salpêtrière. Pinel also began a new regimen of treatment called *traitement moral*—moral treatment. This concept was quickly picked up and implemented by William Tuke, who founded the Retreat at York in England. This form of treatment rested on the idea that insanity could be cured by retraining the minds those afflicted in 'proper' values, morals, and ethics. To do this, patients should be encouraged to socialize, exercise, engage in work of some variety, and treated with kindness and care as rational beings. The old ideas of chaining up the mad like animals were being done away with and being replaced with asylums with gardens for exercise and work and chapels for religious services.

Though it took these ideas longer to reach America, by the time Dr. Earle was beginning his career, at least one asylum (Friends' Asylum, 1813) had taken up moral treatment, basing their treatment on the York Retreat. However, at the time Dr. Earle attended medical school (1835-37), not a single medical school in America offered a formal education in psychiatry. This meant that doctors choosing to specialize in this field had to learn their trade through practical experience or through communications with other doctors via letters or publications. Despite this Earle had already begun to learn about psychiatry before he finished his schooling, writing an article about it the year he graduated. However, he would soon have hands-on learning experience in his chosen field where moral treatment began by touring Europe in his own way—attending lectures and visiting asylums.

A VISIT TO THIRTEEN ASYLUMS

Less than a month after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, Dr. Earle departed the United States on a ship bound for England. His intention was to study under doctors in Paris after a short stay in England, however, he began his learning early, by speaking with Samuel Tuke, the grandson of the founder of and, at the time, the manager of the York Retreat, about psychiatry and touring several asylums, including the Retreat, taking notes on his observations and the treatment methods he thought were effective or ineffective.

As he traveled onward to France, he attended lectures by acclaimed doctors at a hotel in Paris, as well as visited asylums in the area—La Bicêtre, La Salpêtrière, and Charenton Asylum. While he gave a very positive review of Charenton Asylum and would continue to reference the work of the doctor there, Jean-Etienne Esquirol, even a decade after his visit, his descriptions of La Bicêtre and La Salpêtrière were less enthusiastic. Dr. Earle was particularly critical of Dr. Ferrus's use of a cold shower at La Bicêtre, using it to attempt to relieve one patient of his delusions and coerce another to work after he had failed to do so the day before. Earle made it very clear that he did not find this treatment appealing, saying it was "not only destitute of utility, but absolutely and decidedly injurious" and believed it was no better than the old abuse of chaining the men whom Pinel had released.

After attending a winter's worth of lectures in Paris, Dr. Earle returned to England briefly before returning to the continent to complete a European tour in his own way, visiting asylums in nearly every country he visited. From England, he first traveled to the Netherlands, then on to Belgium, where he visited asylums at Amsterdam and Antwerp, respectively. He found the flaw with the asylum at Amsterdam to be that while other asylums such as those in Great Britain and France, it had now. Instead, he described the place as overcrowded, in want of cleaning, and having "six dungeons" for imprisoning the patients who sometimes had their hands and feet fastened or were put in a straitjacket as a means of punishment or coercion. While he described the asylum at Antwerp a little more positively, few patients were engaged in any form of labor or amusements and the old building, with bolts on the doors and minimal furnishings rather resembled a prison than a home and community for patients to live and be treated in.

After a brief stay in Paris again due to illness, Dr. Earle continued on through Switzerland to Italy. Here he visited both St. John's Hospital in Milan, the civil hospital in eastern Venice. Though showers and restraints such as straight jackets and confining straps at the foot and side of patient beds were used as means of both coercion and punishment at St. John's, which would likely have reminded Dr. Earle of the use of the shower as he had seen it used at La Bicêtre, many of the patients were involved in some form of manual labor or employment, as promoted in moral treatment. This showed a combining of new and old treatment methods, either due to convenience or transition. The Venice asylum was similar to St. John's in Milan in lay out and also had many patients engaged in work as other asylums did.

From here he traveled onward to Greece, and finally to Constantinople in the Ottoman Empire. Here he visited Timar-hané Asylum where he was most critical of patient conditions. Upon entering he noted, "From between the bars of the iron grating with which this was defended, a heavy chain, ominous of the sad reality within, protruded, and was fastened to the external surface of the wall. It was about six feet in length. The opposite extremity was attached to a heavy iron ring, surrounding the neck of a patient who was sitting, within the grating, upon the window-seat. . . . It was a most cheerless apartment." The other patients were held in a similar state.

At the end of his two-year tour of Europe, Dr. Earle had visited no less than thirteen asylums in seven countries. Though he expressed no intention of publishing his findings initially, within 2 years of his return to American soil, he was convinced of the need for him to share his experience. In 1841, he published *A Visit to Thirteen Asylums for the Insane in Europe*, adding both brief descriptions of similar institutions in transatlantic countries and the United States, as well as an essay "On the Causes, Duration, Termination and Moral Treatment of Insanity."

APPLICATIONS IN AMERICAN ASYLUMS

Using his notes on Friends' Asylum in the brief notices of similar institutions section of *A Visit to Thirteen Asylums for the Insane in Europe* as well as his description of Bloomingdale Asylum in *History, Description, and Statistics of Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane*, the influence of Dr. Earle's trip on his opinions of psychiatric treatment are clear. He subscribed to the moral treatment plan and held the tenant of manual labor in particular regard, saying, "Some employment for the hands, of a description requiring a degree of exercise of the body sufficient to preserve and increase the activity and vigor of all its organs, as well as to promote sound and healthful sleep, is acknowledged by all . . . to be most effectual of restorative measures not purely medical."

The first asylum he worked at after returning the States was Friends' Asylum in Frankford, Pennsylvania, now a northeast suburb of Philadelphia. By the time Dr. Earle arrived, the asylum had already had a fair amount of European influence as its practices from the time it had been founded were based on those of the York Retreat. As such, at the time Earle arrived, the asylum had already been practicing the principle of non-restraint and implemented manual labor and recreational and educational activities as prescribed by the moral treatment plan, however, Dr. Earle would also implement new ideas of his own during his time there. Within a year of working at Friends' he published *A Visit to Thirteen Asylums for the Insane in Europe*, and in it, he described Friends' as he knew it. In addition to the main building, the asylum had a farm containing sixty-one acres "divided into airing courts, and garden, tillage and woodland. The airing courts and the grounds in front of the building are well shaded with large and beautiful trees." During the warm season, many of the patients worked in the garden and on the farm, and in the winter, "they [would] work in two shops, one devoted to basket-making, the other to carpentry." In the afternoon each Sabbath, scripture would be read, and there was a library with over 300 volumes which was regularly used by patients. While he did also say that cold showers were being used for patient treatment, he emphasized that "in no instance . . . [was it] employed as means of coercion or of punishment," and many patients who experienced this treatment even had it applied to their heads daily and voluntarily "on account of the refreshment and relief" it produced. Many of these traits were mentioned at asylums Dr. Earle visited in Europe, however, one unique addition he made was to implement a series of lectures on topics such as Natural Philosophy and Chemistry. This innovative practice seemed to encompass all that moral treatment was--it not only attempted to reeducate those "deprived of their reason" but also treated patients as rational human beings, capable of learning and enjoying lectures, just as the general population outside the asylum might.

In 1844, Dr. Earle gave up his position at Friends' after four years there to take charge of the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane in New York. Here he continued many of the treatment methods he had used at Friends' and further developed his own ideas of treatment. Having already expressed dissatisfaction with it, he did away with the practice of blood-letting entirely. He continued to encourage work among patients, but used no compulsory methods to force it upon them. Similarly, to the jobs listed for patients at the asylums he saw in Europe, patients at Bloomingdale found work on the asylum farm, in the kitchen and laundry, as well as in the carpentry shop. Many female patients also sewed in their apartments. The only restraint methods still in use in 1848 were the straitjacket and leathern muffs, and even these were rarely used. Further, similarly to how he described the parlor at Charenton Asylum, a variety of games and musical instruments were provided for patient use, and during the cold months, groups of patients were invited to socialize with the asylum officers weekly. Formal balls were even held monthly for patient entertainment! Further, in the summer months, patients were not only encouraged to walk outdoors, but even allowed to go to the nearby river to swim or fish. Dr. Earle also continued with his lectures, giving a series of thirty-eight lectures in winter 1846-47, the topics of which not only varied widely, but also showed that his European voyage still lingered on his mind almost a decade after he returned, with no less than six of the thirty-eight being topics directly related to his trip and the places he visited.