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Volume 32, numéro 1, 2009

Medical Sciences and Medical Buildings

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/037628ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/037628ar>

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Éditeur(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

0829-2507 (imprimé)

1918-7750 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Flis, N. (2009). Images of the Toronto Provincial Asylum, 1846-1890. *Scientia Canadensis*, 32(1), 21–50. <https://doi.org/10.7202/037628ar>

Résumé de l'article

Construit en 1850, l'asile provincial de Toronto a jadis été le plus grand hôpital psychiatrique du Canada. L'édifice principal a été démoli en 1975, et le terrain de la rue Queen accueille maintenant un Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale. Bien qu'il y ait toujours des vestiges de l'institution du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, incluant la majeure partie du mur d'enceinte, le seul rappel visuel persistant de la propriété dans son ensemble est un nombre restreint d'images artistiques. Dans le dernier quart du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, probablement dans le but d'apaiser les préoccupations du public à propos de la fonction de plus en plus 'incarcérative' de l'institution, les sources médiatiques victoriennes présentent à répétition une description immuable de l'asile de Toronto. S'appuyant sur les plans architecturaux conceptuels des années 1840, les images des années 1870, 80 et 90 dépeignent un asile neuf, propre et ayant aussi fière allure qu'au moment de son ouverture. Sans doute, ces images constituent ce que le public victorien souhaite voir : elles préservent l'optimisme du début du siècle posant un taux élevé de guérison pour ces institutions, et elles supportent l'idée que le soin des malades mentaux doit être aux mains de la profession médicale.

# Images of the Toronto Provincial Asylum, 1846-1890

Nathan Flis

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**Abstract:** Built in 1850, the Toronto Provincial Asylum was once the largest mental hospitals in Canada. The main building was demolished in 1975, and the property is now home to the Queen Street branch of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Although there are remnants of the nineteenth-century institution, including most of the perimeter wall, the only lasting visual reminder of the property as a whole is a small group of images. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, perhaps in order to ease public concern over the increasingly custodial function of the institution, Victorian media sources repeatedly presented an unchanging or immutable depiction of the Toronto Asylum. Drawing upon the architectural concept drawings of the 1840s, which contained an ideal vision for the building, pictures from the 1870s, 80s and 90s depict the asylum as the new, clean, and proud-looking structure it was when it opened. Arguably, these images are what the Victorian public wanted to see: they preserved the early-century optimism that such institutions would yield high cure rates and they supported the view that the care of the mentally ill belonged in the hands of the medical profession.

**Résumé :** Construit en 1850, l'asile provincial de Toronto a jadis été le plus grand hôpital psychiatrique du Canada. L'édifice principal a été démoli en 1975, et le terrain de la rue Queen accueille maintenant un Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale. Bien qu'il y ait toujours des vestiges de l'institution du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, incluant la majeure partie du mur d'enceinte, le seul rappel visuel persistant de la propriété dans son ensemble est un nombre restreint d'images artistiques. Dans le dernier quart du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, probablement dans le but d'apaiser les préoccupations du public à propos de la fonction de plus en plus 'incarcérative' de l'institution, les sources médiatiques victoriennes présentent à répétition une description immuable de l'asile de Toronto. S'appuyant sur les plans architecturaux conceptuels des années 1840, les images des années 1870, 80 et 90 dépeignent un asile neuf, propre et ayant aussi fière allure qu'au moment de son ouverture. Sans doute, ces images constituent ce que le public victorien souhaite voir : elles préservent l'optimisme du début du siècle posant un taux élevé de guérison pour ces institutions, et elles supportent l'idée que le soin des malades mentaux doit être aux mains de la profession médicale.

The May 21, 1870 issue of the *Canadian Illustrated News* included a large engraving of the "Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto"; the accompanying article noted that the "illustration, taken from the north-east angle of the building, shows the whole of the frontage and the eastern wing."<sup>1</sup> Although the engraving was intended to be an accurate visual description, a comparison with other contemporary images of the building suggests that the anonymous

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1. This periodical was published in Toronto, Montreal and Halifax, which gave it a wide readership. "Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto," *Canadian Illustrated News* 1, 29 (1870): 458.

artist who created it likely never stepped onto the asylum grounds. Rather, the illustration is a composite or assemblage of different aspects of the asylum taken from much earlier prints, drawings, and photographs.

Like many other mid to late nineteenth-century depictions of the asylum, the image in the *Canadian Illustrated News* is a positivistic, even proud portrayal of the asylum that Victorian Canadians expected to see. The 1870 article described the asylum as “one of the [architectural] lions—and one of the greatest of the lions of Toronto...—it ranks third in point of size and number of inmates in the whole Continent of America, and... [is] one of the wonders of the West.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, by the close of the nineteenth century, the institution was the largest mental hospital (and the largest non-military edifice) in North America. In a way continuing this legacy, the Queen Street branch of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Canada’s largest “leading addiction and mental health teaching hospital” and one of the largest psychiatric research facilities in the world, is located on the site of the former asylum.<sup>3</sup>

Following the demolition of the main building in 1975, what remains is a group of visual depictions that record the evolution of the building’s exterior over the course of fifty years (1850-1900). Because images of the asylum existed before the building itself (in the form of architectural concept drawings) and have outlasted the institution, these pictures are valuable as historical documents, arguably as important as the asylum’s admission registers and patient casebooks. Of course, the visual documents of history must not be taken at face value; images are just as constructed and as subject to the same sorts of manipulations or destabilizing factors as written accounts. As historian Peter Burke asserts, we must be wary of the “pitfalls” of using images as historical evidence.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, we must be careful about how we use historical images to illustrate our histories.

The images interpreted in this article were created between the year the newly built Toronto Asylum opened its doors in 1850 to the turn of the century, when the face of the aging institution began to recede from public consciousness. Across the western world, this period was an age of optimism about scientific, technological, and industrial progress. For countries like Canada, an extension of the British Empire, this was a time of economic growth in many respects, and a time for the expression of pride over that growth. Contemporary images of asylums across North America and Great Britain all tended to look similar: bright, well kept, stately, and proud.

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2. Renamed the Asylum for the Insane, Toronto, in 1871. H.M. Hurd, *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1916), vol. 3, 137; “Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto,” 458.

3. “About CAMH,” [www.camh.net/about\\_camh/index.html](http://www.camh.net/about_camh/index.html) (accessed May 11, 2009).

4. Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 9.

The repeated images frequently borrowed from architect John George Howard's (1803-1890) concept drawings of the 1840s, pictures that contain an ideal vision for the building. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the Toronto Asylum was increasingly crowded with so-called 'incurable' cases, these images seemed to preserve the early nineteenth-century optimism that such institutions would yield high cure rates and that, in general, the care of the mentally ill was safely in the hands of medical professionals.<sup>5</sup> However, with the promised cure rates nowhere near realized, institutions such as Toronto's were overcrowded and served almost completely custodial functions. In this context, the clean and bright image of a strong and silent edifice seems contradictory, and even misleading.

I suggest that the immutable image of asylum continuously presented by Canadian periodicals and newspapers reflects the Victorian public's confidence in the asylum as the best possible means for solving the problem of mental illness. After all, Ontario taxpayers were financially invested in the asylum: the cost of building and maintaining such grand structures was immense.<sup>6</sup> But the images demonstrate interest in the asylum not only as a healthcare facility, but also as a landmark, a site of wonder and curiosity, and a source of civic pride. Accordingly, Janet Miron has recently shown how Victorian Torontonians as well as tourists included the asylum—and the people who dwelled within it—on their lists of attractions to visit.<sup>7</sup>

The numerous nineteenth-century depictions of the asylum are evidence of what the public was interested in seeing, or how they expected the asylum to look. By contrast, the relative paucity of images of the asylum after the turn of the century attests to the institution's retreat from public consciousness and view.

### **Images in the History of Mental Health**

A broad and varied literature has grown up around the peculiar artifact known as the lunatic asylum; it is still the prime setting for the histories of 'madness' set in motion by Michel Foucault's description of the rise of these institutions for the incarceration of the disordered of mind in *History of Madness in the Age of Reason* (1961).<sup>8</sup> T.E. Brown's 1980 dissertation

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5. The most notable early critic of the building of asylums was architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852), who believed that those with mental illness were no better off in asylums during his own time than they had been in madhouses a hundred years before. A.W.N. Pugin, *True Principles of Christian Architecture* (London: John Weale, 1841).

6. The cost to build and maintain nineteenth-century asylums was fairly equal across the British Empire. A.T. Scull, *Museums of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 115-116.

7. Janet Miron, "'Open to the Public' Touring Ontario Asylums in the Nineteenth Century," in *Mental Health and Canadian Society: Historical Perspectives*, eds. James Moran and David Wright (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2006), 19-48.

8. Originally, Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie à l'âge Classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

on the Toronto Asylum was framed by this early wave of literature that includes the work of Gerald Grob, Andrew Scull, David Rothman, Edward Shorter, and Roy Porter.<sup>9</sup> Brown concluded that the asylum in Toronto, like so many similar institutions worldwide, came to “serve purposes antithetical to [its] original objectives,”<sup>10</sup> and where incarceration and coercive treatment were tantamount to a forfeiture of rights. Institutions that were originally intended to provide a solution for mental illness instead became unhealthy places in which to live.

The asylum remains an extraordinary point of tension in the history of medicine in Canada and abroad, and an increasingly nuanced picture of these institutions is emerging, thanks to the meticulous analysis of asylum admissions records.<sup>11</sup> Confronted by images of these grand feats of architecture, we may ask what meaning these institutions had before they were closed and demolished by the thousands. Using the Toronto Asylum as an example, this article attempts to provide a picture of these institutions as they were seen by the Victorian public, while asking the question of why a particular way of representing the asylum held sway for so long.

A relatively small number of works stands at the intersection of the history of mental health and the history of art. Sander Gilman’s *Seeing the Insane* (1982) was one of the first works in the history of mental health to take images seriously. Geoffrey Reaume’s work, *Remembrance of Patients Past* (2002), provides an unparalleled intimate portrait of the inner

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9. T.E. Brown, “‘Living with God’s Afflicted’: A History of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum at Toronto, 1830-1911” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 1980), 18, 27-8; G.N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973); idem, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America’s Mentally Ill* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 103; idem, “Marxian Analysis and Mental Illness,” *History of Psychiatry* 1, 2 (1990): 223-232; Roy Porter, “Madness and its Institutions,” in *Medicine in Society: Historical Essays*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 277; D.A. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971); A.T. Scull, *Social Order/Mental Disorder: Anglo-American Psychiatry in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); idem, *Museums of Madness*, 30; E. Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998).

10. Brown, 18, 27-8.

11. W. Mitchinson, “Reasons for Committal to a Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ontario Insane Asylum: the Case of Toronto,” in *Essays in the History of Canadian Medicine*, eds. W. Mitchinson and J.D. McGinnis (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988); J.E. Moran, *Committed to the State Asylum: Insanity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Quebec and Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000); S.E.D. Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy: Richard M. Bucke and the Practice of Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Psychiatry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); C.K. Warsh, *Moments of Unreason: the Practice of Canadian Psychiatry and the Homewood Retreat, 1833-1923* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989); D. Wright, J. Moran, and S. Gouglas, “The Confinement of the Insane in Victorian Canada: the Hamilton and Toronto Asylums, c. 1861-1891,” in *The Confinement of the Insane: International Perspectives, 1800-1965*, eds. R. Porter and D. Wright (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 100-101.

workings of the Toronto Asylum, and includes a fascinating collection of photographs that bring life to a few of the names and records of its 7000 or more Victorian patients.<sup>12</sup> The most recent investigations into the structure and construction of the institution include *The Provincial Asylum Toronto* (2000), a volume of insightful essays edited by Edna Hudson, and a related exhibit in the Toronto Market Gallery (2004), as well as Cyril Greenland's celebratory work, *The City and the Asylum* (1993), which helped to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> year of the establishment of Toronto (then York).<sup>13</sup>

Carla Yanni's recent work on asylums in the United States is perhaps most closely allied to what is presented in this article. Yanni identifies a distinct nineteenth-century preoccupation with architecture as a means of solving social problems then labeled as madness and degeneracy.<sup>14</sup> As Yanni demonstrates, the proliferation of these monumental structures to combat what were commonly called the 'ills of society' became a cultural obsession. The repetition of a particular image of the Toronto Asylum must be understood in this context.

### Plans for the Toronto Asylum

An investigation of the visual legacy of the asylum must begin with the building's origins. Following a period of nine years of temporary patient housing at the former York Gaol, the "permanent" Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto opened its doors to 211 patients on January 26, 1850.<sup>15</sup> The English-born John Howard oversaw the design and construction of the asylum, its Neoclassical design inspired by the National Gallery in

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12. Geoffrey Reaume, *Remembrance of Patients Past: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also Annmarie Adams and Thomas Schlich, "Design for Control: Surgery, Science, and Space at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, 1893-1956," *Medical History* 50, 3 (2006): 303-324; Annmarie Adams, *Medicine by Design: The Architect and the Modern Hospital, 1893-1943* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008).

13. C. Greenland, *The City and the Asylum: Celebrating the Bi-Centennial of the City of Toronto, 1793-1993* (Toronto: Museum of Mental Health Services, 1993); E. Hudson, ed., *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto: Reflections on Social and Cultural History* (Toronto: Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy, 2000).

14. C. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). See also C. Stevenson, *Medicine and Magnificence: British Hospital and Asylum Architecture, 1660-1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); J. Taylor, *Hospital and Asylum Architecture in England 1840-1914: Building for Health Care* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1991). For brief discussions on Canadian asylum architecture, see S.E.D. Shortt, *Medicine in Canadian Society: Historical Perspectives* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1992); Moran and Wright, *Mental Health and Canadian Society*.

15. Early works by Burdett and Hurd are veritable encyclopedias of asylum descriptions, illustrations, and architectural plans. H.C. Burdett, *Hospitals and Asylums of the World* (London: Churchill, 2 vols., 1891-93); Hurd, vol. 3, 136.

London's Trafalgar Square, the construction of which Howard had observed just prior to his emigration in 1824.<sup>16</sup> Born out of the Enlightenment and dubbed the 'architecture of reason', this classical revival style was thought to inspire 'moral behaviour' in the average citizen. In the form of rigid and palatial Neoclassical structures, asylums symbolized the "virtues of order and discipline," standing as imposingly visible reminders to *behave* rationally.<sup>17</sup> Howard also compiled "the best information" regarding dwelling-places for the "mad" on a recent tour through the United States, although many of the designs he admired (including their sprawling acres of garden and farm) were based on images of the first English "Retreat" for the mentally ill built at York, England in 1813.<sup>18</sup>

Howard was also influenced by the movement for moral or humane treatment of the mentally ill—a philosophy or approach that at least paid lip service to Enlightenment ideals, including the lack of restraints or manacles, which had previously been common in 'mad-houses'. Undoubtedly, the Toronto architect consulted the physician John Conolly's popular treatise, *The Construction and Government of Lunatic Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane* (1847). Conolly's work, which included instructions for the construction of hospitals, was predicated on the philosophy of moral treatment. Recommendations were provided for the structural division of patients according to the classification of disorders, as well as suggestions for planning the outlying property and therapeutic gardens in foldouts at the back of the book.<sup>19</sup> Famous asylum superintendents such as Thomas Story Kirkbride of the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane regularly published reports on their patients' progress in these settings, supporting and thereby legitimating moral treatment rationales for institutionalization.<sup>20</sup>

### **A Vision for the New Asylum: Images prior 1850**

Two architectural concept pictures reflect John Howard's vision for the asylum. One is a plain, predominantly green and beige watercolour produced in 1846, which is featured on the cover of Greenland's *The City and the Asylum* and in large format outside the CAMH Archives (fig. 1).<sup>21</sup> A poster advertising the 2004 exhibit at Toronto's Market Gallery also

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16. Steven Bell, "Howard vs. Tully: Contrast and Comparison," in *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto*, ed. E. Hudson (Toronto: Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy, 2000), 138.

17. C. Clifton-Mogg, *The Neoclassical Source Book* (New York: Rizzoli Inter. Pub., 1991), 7.  
 18. Bell, 137; Greenland, 8; Shirley Morriss, "John George Howard: Architect," in *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto*, 109.

19. J. Conolly, *The Construction and Government of Lunatic Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1847, [1968]), preface.

20. N. Tames, *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum-keeping, 1840-1883* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 132.

21. Greenland, book cover.

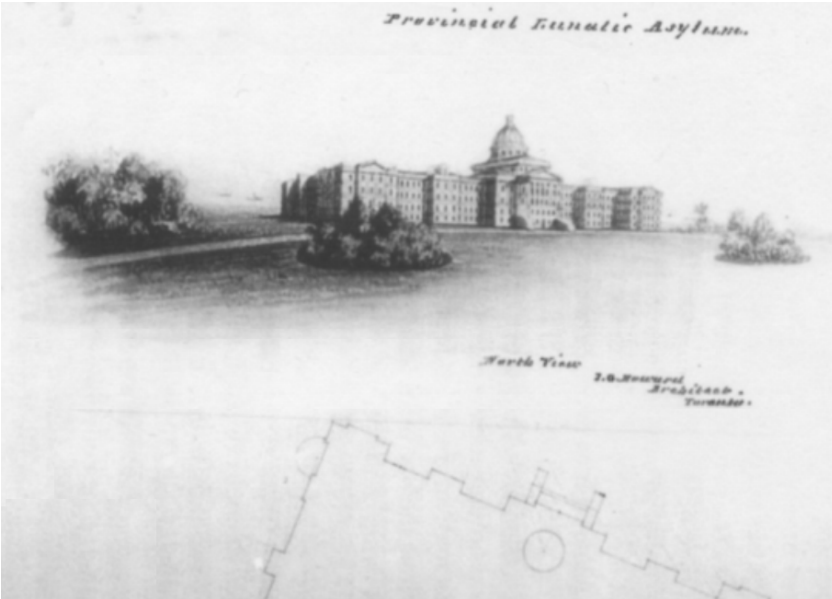
featured the painting, suggesting its enduring popularity as the prevailing image of the asylum. The second concept picture is a remarkable perspective drawing executed by Howard in the same year, probably for the purpose of providing the asylum commissioners with a more comprehensive picture of their investment (fig. 2). What sets this image apart is that perspective drawings produced *as part of an architectural plan* were rare during the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 1. John G. Howard's Design for the Provincial Lunatic Asylum (Concept Drawing), Watercolour and ink on paper, 1846.



Source: Image courtesy of the CAMH Archives.

Figure 2. Perspective Concept Drawing for the Toronto Lunatic Asylum, North View, Pen and Ink, 1846.



Source : Image courtesy of the CAMH Archives.

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22. Hudson, *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto*, 103, 105.



Before exploring the concept pictures more closely, an earlier work of Howard's also deserves comment. The architect's 1835 watercolour of the "North Side of King, Toronto to Church Streets" illustrates the Anglican Church of St. James, the Firehall (another of Howard's designs), and the second York Gaol, which, along with two other structures in the city, served as the temporary asylum during the years 1841-50 (fig. 3-A).<sup>23</sup> A cropped greyscale version of this painting appears in Cyril Greenland's book, although this does no justice to the original picture (fig. 3-B). This modified version looks ominous, and appears alongside the following description by J. H. Tuke (brother of the well-known alienist Dr. D. Hack Tuke), who visited the temporary asylum in 1845:

It was one of the most painful and distressing places I ever visited. The house has a terribly dark aspect within *and without*, and was intended for a prison. There were, perhaps, 70 patients, upon whose faces misery, starvation, and suffering were indelibly impressed...<sup>24</sup>

Pairing this account with the cropped, colourless version of Howard's 1835 watercolour produces a somber effect, although arguably the painting is quite warm when it stands alone.

Howard's painting in fact predates the York Gaol's use as an asylum by six years. It is a colourful picture: a blue-violet sky with hints of white, wispy clouds is juxtaposed to the reddish-brown shades of the jail, church, firehall, and dirt road. The foreground consists of a busy street scene with various figures on horseback, a horse-drawn cart, and the quaint image of a herdsman leading his cattle through the traffic. Despite the distracting figures, the shape of the old York Gaol dominates the landscape left of the midpoint; it is the first shape caught by the eye. An unused cart sits in the building's triangular shadow. The light source, emanating from the right, illumines the proud, redbrick and white-stone façade, at the base of which stands a figure ready to mount the stairs (another less visible figure stands right before the door).

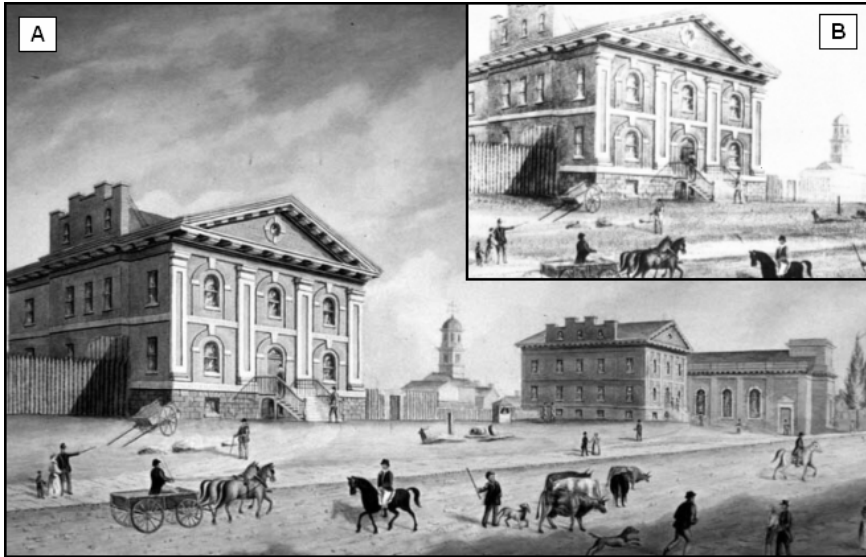
This warm, inviting image of what would shortly become the Temporary Toronto Lunatic Asylum is an interesting contrast to the frightful image of the building "painted" by Tuke's words in 1845. From its first year of use as the Temporary Asylum, it took only six years for the image of this building to be transformed from something warm and friendly into something seemingly sinister.

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23. "The old jail, which seems to have afforded accommodation for barely 100 patients, in a few years was found inadequate to meet the demands for admission. Additional quarters were therefore sought elsewhere in 1846. The old red-brick Parliament buildings situated on Front Street, between Simcoe and John streets (built 1824-33)... [and] a rough-cast dwelling-house with a veranda[h] on three sides, the property of Mr. Dunn, which stood at the southwest corner of Front and Bathurst streets." Hurd, vol. 4, 132.

24. The italicization is my own. Greenland, 7.

Figure 3. A) “North Side of King, Toronto to Church Streets,” Watercolour, 1835. Illustrates the Anglican Church of St. James, the Firehall (Howard’s own design), and the second York Gaol, which, along with two other structures in city, served as the temporary asylum during the years 1841-1850. B) Cropped, greyscale version of Howard’s 1835 watercolour, depicting, according to the caption, “The Temporary Asylum, 1841-1850.”



Source: A) Image courtesy of the CAMH Archives. B) Cyril Greenland, ed., *The City and the Asylum: Celebrating the Bi-Centennial of the City of Toronto, 1793-1993* (Toronto: Museum of Mental Health Services, 1993).

Neither of Howard’s concept pictures represented an actual building when they were created, and so the critical observer tends to search for elements in the pictures that were never realized in the actual building. For example, both works include an extended Parthenonesque portico supported by six columns over the entranceway. The north or right—facing angle—placement of the building in both renderings allows the visibility of one of the rear wings, the building of which would not in fact commence for another twenty years (according to Kivas Tully’s design, not Howard’s). In addition, the semi-cylindrical verandah on the left side is not as bulbous or pronounced in the perspective drawing as it was in reality.

Oddly enough, it is the watercolour (fig. 1), which lacks much of the building detail contained in the perspective drawing, that contains the larger, and thus more realistic, depiction of the verandah as it was built. In the watercolour, closer inspection reveals a fascinating detail: Howard has indicated, in muted blues and reds, the presence of asylum patients within the bars of the half-cylinder! While the initial discovery of this image

within the image seemed at first objectionable—the bars readily connoting involuntary incarceration—the verandah aspect of the watercolour is, in fact, a picture of the patients enjoying the fresh air, where they apparently had a “splendid view of the bay and lake in the distance.”<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, due to the ever-increasing need for patient rooms in the early twentieth century, the verandahs were permanently sealed to the outside.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from this interesting feature, Howard’s watercolour is quite plain. The sky is empty, except for a faint mass of pinkish cloud, and there are no tufts of trees or bushes present in the mid-ground of the painting, as in the perspective drawing. Also missing from the watercolour is the architectural ornamentation (including pediments and chimneys), features visible in the perspective drawing. The hard lines of the imposing façade are only softened by the painterly indication of a forest on either side.

Howard’s perspective drawing is more of a meditation on the idea of the building in its landscape than the watercolour. Perhaps as a result of its fullness or completeness of vision, the drawing allows the viewer to think beyond the asylum. In the words of Edna Hudson, Howard’s perspective “encourages romantic reflection.”<sup>27</sup> The architect took great care to demonstrate the view of Lake Ontario, upon which float three ships; two on the building’s left, and one on the right. These spaces, between the edifice and bits of forest that bookend the picture allow the asylum breathing room, and allow our eyes to look beyond the hard lines of the building, across the water.

Similar to the 1846 watercolour, clouds are only subtly visible in the perspective drawing. Howard usually painted clouds in this manner, as his earlier painting of the York Gaol suggests. Undoubtedly, he was following the prevailing conventions for landscape painting, which encouraged the draughtsman or painter to study treatises on cloud formation and topography.<sup>28</sup> The drawing is finished with a floor plan, testament to the fact that the image was meant for the eyes of the commissioners.

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25. Anonymous, “At the Asylum, A Visit to a Great Provincial Institution, etc.,” *The Saturday Globe*, 5 April, 1890 (Toronto: transcribed by CAMH, Sept. 2004), 1-6; Compare the equally minor detail in John-Smith Thomas’s engraving of Bethlem Hospital, London, in which a “pathetic hand” holds a windmill-toy from between the bars of a high-story window. John Thomas Smith’s “unique view [1812] of Bethlem’s south side, hard by London Wall, shows a building about to be demolished.” Stevenson, 63.

26. Bell, 148.

27. Hudson, *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto*, 105.

28. See Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2003).

Prior to the building's completion in 1850, the only image of the Toronto Asylum apparently painted from life is a drawing in pen and ink over pencil with grey wash by August Köllner (1813-1906), dated August 15, 1848 (fig. 4). The work depicts the asylum in mid-construction with the commissioners and architect (to the right, separate from the main grouping) in the foreground.<sup>29</sup> Curiously—curious because it was not done by Howard's hand—Köllner's picture seems the most realistic depiction of what was actually constructed until the first photographs were taken in the late 1860s. Note that the rear wings, envisioned by Howard but not completed until 1869 by Tully, are not depicted.

Figure 4. "Building the Asylum," Watercolour on paper by August Köllner, August 15, 1848. Pictured is Premier Baldwin with three asylum commissioners, and at far right, the architect J.G. Howard.



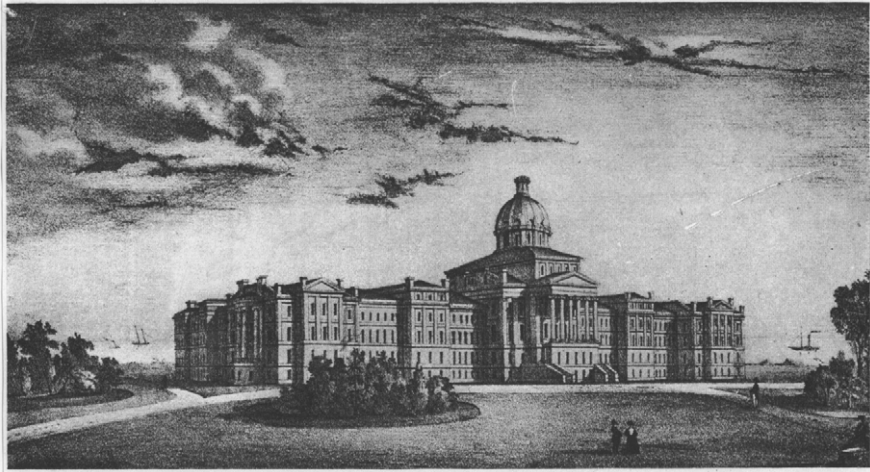
Source : Image courtesy of CAMH Archives, but held in the Government Archives.

29. Köllner was born in Dusseldorf in 1813 and trained in Frankfurt in lithography, map-making and book illustration, before emigrating from Germany to the United States in 1839 or 1840. He traveled widely and spent time in the Toronto area, dying at age 93 in 1906. This image is reproduced in A. Keefer, "Building Canada West," in *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto*, 95; "Augustus Köllner fonds," 5 watercolours, all of c. 1848, in the Library and Archives, Canada, online catalogue at [http://mikan3.archives.ca/pam/public\\_mikan/](http://mikan3.archives.ca/pam/public_mikan/) (accessed May 11, 2009).

### A String of Derivative Images, ca. 1850-1870

Two additional north facing angular views of the asylum are developed from Howard's concept drawings, including an 1850 lithograph by Toronto printers Scrobie and Balfour (fig. 5) and an anonymous engraving of 1870 produced to accompany a fairly positive public report on life at the asylum in the *Canadian Illustrated News* (fig. 6).<sup>30</sup> It seems that the only images of the asylum building produced during this period, while Joseph Workman was superintendent (1853-75), are either reworked versions of the concept drawings or reworked versions of the prints based on the concept pictures.

*Figure 5. "North View of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto, Ontario," Lithograph developed from Howard's concept drawing, Scrobie & Balfour, publishers, c.1850. Published with a separate engraving, "Plan of the Principal Story," the print is an "indisputable record of Howard's good business sense in publicizing the building form" (Shirley Morriss).*



*Source: Image courtesy of the CAMH Archives.*

Scrobie and Balfour's lithograph was commissioned by Howard in order to publish the "building form," and it exactly replicates the building as it appears in the architect's perspective drawing, including the unrealized classical portico, the visible rear wing, shrubbery in the front garden, and three sailing ships on the water.<sup>31</sup> Here however, the asylum takes up a proportional space that is closer to that of Howard's concept in

30. "Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto," *Canadian Illustrated News* 1, 29 (1870): 456.

31. At the request of J.G. Howard, the lithograph was produced about the time of the building's completion, along with an engraving of the building's layout, and a rear-view image of the building, all demonstrating the architect's "good business sense in publicizing" his work. Morriss, 118-119.

watercolour. Thus, although Shirley Morriss notes that the lithograph is solely an adaptation of Howard's perspective drawing, it seems more likely that the image was produced with reference to both concept pictures.<sup>32</sup>

Historians that required an illustration of the Toronto Asylum *as it looked* have frequently used Scrobie and Balfour's illustration of the asylum. For example, along with an accompanying rear-view image, the lithograph was the only illustration of the Toronto Lunatic Asylum used in Henry Hurd's work on North American institutions.<sup>33</sup> Although it seems a minor note, this is problematic since the lithograph includes major features of Howard's vision for the asylum that were not constructed (ever, or at least by 1850).

Figure 6. "The Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto," engraving by an unknown artist.



Source: Canadian Illustrated News 1, 29 (1870): 456.

What sets the lithograph apart from Howard's concept images is the romantic depiction of the clouds, whose jagged edges and points appear to move together, bird-like, over the asylum. Contrasting Howard's very

32. Morriss, 118.

33. Canadian historian Jacalyn Duffin uses the 1850 lithograph to illustrate a chapter on the history of psychiatry in her book, *History of Medicine: A Scandalously Short Introduction*. Duffin correctly labels the image "Design for the Provincial Lunatic Asylum." However, the date she provides (ca. 1854) is incorrect, and the lithograph has been curiously cropped and reversed. J. Duffin, *History of Medicine: A Scandalously Short Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 285; Hurd, vol. 2, 428, 432.

subtle depiction of clouds, this feature may be due to the different marks achievable in lithography. Regardless, the result is a much more dramatic effect.

The lithograph is also the first visual description of the Toronto Asylum grounds that includes human figures, a motif that is repeated in subsequent pictures. Dwarfed by the building, the two figures in the foreground are probably visiting members of the public as opposed to asylum patients, simply for the reason that they are too far away from the building to be intimately associated with it. Adhering to pictorial conventions of the time, the placement of human forms in the landscape also impresses upon viewers the sheer scale of the building, while at the same time tempering the hard lines of the architecture.

The human aspect in the lithograph—or in any other depiction of the asylum—may also lead us to contemplate the meaning of the walls of the asylum, the strong physical boundaries that divide the people standing in the green pasture outside of the asylum from those who dwell within. Thus, the human element in the picture reminded the Victorian viewers of the humanitarian intention of the institution, as laid out in the Asylum Act of 1839: to “provide humane care... [and] cure ninety percent or more of the insane.”<sup>34</sup>

In the course of an address he gave in 1880, five years after his retirement as superintendent of the asylum, Joseph Workman felt the need to remind University of Toronto medical students about the values that the medical profession—and the asylum—stood for. He noted that

It is too easy to forget that the ends we serve [are] not our careers, to rise in our profession and receive accolades from our peers, but humanity. If we are no better than pedlars seeking profit, albeit in honours not dollars, then we should leave medicine. The easiest thing to do is to lock the insane in cells and feed them and forget them. The hardest is to find that spark of humanity that dwells in each of us.<sup>35</sup>

The effectiveness of moral treatment and the dream of a high cure rate for mental illness was far from being realized when Workman’s successor, Daniel Clark, sadly admitted in 1886 that the Toronto Asylum was a “veritable Home for Incurables.”<sup>36</sup>

According to T.E. Brown, a variety of factors explain why the Toronto Asylum came to house incurable (chronic) inmates by the 1880s; these include a marked decrease in funding for the entire system of Ontario Asylums over the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the constant

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34. Brown, ii.

35. C. Johnston, “Joseph Workman,” in *The Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto*, 132.

36. “Percent recoveries on admission” were 40.0% for 1883, 33.3% for 1884, 46.5% for 1885, and upon Clarke’s retirement in 1909, a low 16.5%. Brown, 286, 296.

growth in the number of patients living in the asylum, and common abuse of the 1873 “warrant process” of insanity certification, whereby ‘undesirable’ family members and societal degenerates were incarcerated following the ‘doctoring’ of their certification and admissions papers.<sup>37</sup> The primary reason for the overcrowded asylum was that the material cause of mental illness (and the possibility of a cure) eluded medical science. While the discoveries of scientists like Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch attracted the confidence and enthusiastic support of the international public for medical science, no similar breakthroughs occurred in the context of mental ‘disease’.<sup>38</sup>

With the patient numbers rising steadily, the May 21, 1870 issue of *Canadian Illustrated News* calmly reported that the internal workings of the Toronto Asylum are as sound as the external grounds appear in the accompanying illustration:

The whole of the asylum is kept wonderfully neat and clean. Not a speck of dirt or dust is to be seen throughout the building, and the dress of the patients, though coarse, is clean and tidy.... What most strikes the visitor to the Asylum is the perfect understanding that appears to exist between the Medical Superintendent and the patients. Dr. Workman must be congratulated upon the perfect success—for such it appears to outsiders—of the system he has followed. He has succeeded in making his patients, or the majority of them, look upon him rather as their friend than their superintendent... Not only does he possess a moral power over those in his care but he has so far won the respect—the affections even of his “pupils,” that there seems to be but little need for exerting his power.<sup>39</sup>

The 1870 steel engraving that appeared with this particular report is by the hand of an anonymous engraver (fig. 6).<sup>40</sup> Upon first impression, the print appears to have been created with reference to the 1850 Scobie and

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37. Under the Inspector of Prisons, Asylums and Public Charities of Ontario, each individual institution, including Toronto’s Asylum, was administered to “as inexpensively as possible,” with the system of asylums being treated as a whole. The “yearly per capita cost of each patient” in Ontario’s asylums was lowered from 1867-70: \$140.70 to 1897-1900: \$126.76. Brown, 254. Patients in residence at Toronto Asylum in 1850: 211, 1853: 347, 1870: 528, 1881: 673, and 1914: 1045. Brown, 266; *Canadian Illustrated News* 1, 29 (1870): 458; Hurd, vol. 3, 136, 138, 145. One of two “routes” to the asylum (the other being the “ordinary” or “certificate” process), the “warrant process” was abused by local officials and private citizens alike. When they behaved disagreeably, the “indigent poor,” “senile,” or “aged pauper(s)” would be placed in the local jail, and were often subsequently sent to the Toronto Asylum (system accorded with Asylum Acts, 1871, 1873). Brown, 267-268.

38. Porter and Bynum provide insightful accounts of the enthusiasm and confidence that attended the rise of medical science during this period. Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997); W.F. Bynum, *Science and the Practice of Medicine in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

39. “Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto,” *Canadian Illustrated News* 1, 29 (1870): 458.

40. John Harper is a likely candidate, whose 1878 engraving of the “Falconwood Lunatic Asylum Near Charlottetown, P.E.I.” bears a close compositional resemblance.



Balfour lithograph (fig. 5), rather than Howard's 1846 perspective drawing (fig. 2). If this is case, the picture is a reworking of an adaptation of Howard's original drawing, that is, an adaptation of an adaptation. Two circular shrub beds in front of the building, one of which is only partially visible at left, survive from the earlier lithograph and the perspective drawing. Two of the three ships from the lithograph are also reused on the left side in the 1870 engraving, almost twenty-five years after they were first placed in Howard's concept pictures. Some of the numerous figures depicted in the engraving even appear in the same orientation as the Scobie and Balfour lithograph. It is unclear why the bushes and ornamental shrubs in the front beds have not grown an inch in twenty years, or why the sailing ships of 1846 are still passing by in the bay.

For an illustration meant to display the actual asylum in 1870, inaccuracies abound. The depiction of the building itself is even more problematic than the repetition of the ship and garden details. The rear wings of the building, as well as a fountain for the front—all designed by Irish-born architect Kivas Tully (1820-1905)—were complete by 1869, providing the engraver of 1870 with the opportunity to depict the grand edifice in its newly revised state. In fact, the recent addition is discussed in detail in the article that the engraving accompanies.<sup>41</sup>

This is not to say that the rear wings are not present in the depiction. The left rear wing is visible; however it is *not* representative of Tully's design. Instead, it is directly copied from the 1850 lithograph. In other words, the 1870 engraving depicts the rear wing only as Howard had envisioned it years before, not as it was actually constructed. In fact, the asylum with its new wings would have looked quite different, with the wings protruding from the main section, resulting in a façade significantly longer at each end than Howard's original design.

On the other hand, the anonymous engraver of 1870 attempts to update the older image by finally disposing of the entrance portico that was never built, and also by accurately adding ornamentation to the central section of the roof, about the dome. Again however, the engraver fails to erase the portico *completely*, and the two staircases that were a part of Howard's portico design (but never built) are placed in the same orientation as the early lithograph. Examined closely, the right set of stairs does not even appear to meet the wall. Because it is placed in

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41. "In 1865 the Legislature appropriated the sum of \$25,000 for the erection of wings, which have since been built under the direction of Kivas Tully, Esq., the architect appointed to succeed Mr. Howard, who in 1856 retired from his profession. A noticeable feature about these wings is the manner in which they are connected with the main building—by a two-story iron passage, 16 feet long." "Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto," *Canadian Illustrated News* 1, 29 (1870): 458.

approximately the same orientation as the older print, as if the rest of the portico structure were present, it appears too far to the right, and misses its connection with the central section of the building. The inclusion of the staircases leads one to wonder if the engraver had ever visited the asylum to observe it firsthand.

*Figure 7. Silver albumen photo by the Notman & Fraser Studio, 1868.*



*Source: Image courtesy of the CAMH Archives.*

But how did the artist know to depict the proper ornamentation in the central part of the asylum, about the dome? The answer is provided if one compares the 1870 engraving to William Notman and John Fraser's famous silver albumen photograph of 1868, which shows two figures making their way along the winding road towards the building entrance (fig. 7). Notman and Fraser's photograph places the asylum edifice on

roughly the same angle that the earlier prints and drawings did. However, only the central part of the building with its dome, and the rest of the façade on the right are included in the frame. In the 1870 engraving, while the left part of the façade and the rear left wing are directly reworked from the 1850 lithograph, the central segment and right section of the façade are drawn directly from the photograph.

The lack of roof ornamentation throughout the whole left part of the building is the result of the collaging of previous works to form the 1870 engraving. The engraver likely included the imaginary staircases because in the Notman and Fraser photograph, bushes and trees obstruct the lower part of the central section of the asylum. If the artist had not visited the asylum, for all he knew these staircases *were* a part of the actual building. Thus the illustration of the May, 1870 issue of *Canadian Illustrated News* is an almost imaginary depiction of the Toronto Asylum—insofar as the closest thing to firsthand observation are the elements the illustrator drew from the Notman and Fraser photograph.

As a final comment, the 1870 engraving includes several figures, a motif mimicking the 1850 lithograph. Almost all of them face the building, as if drawn to it by some force; these well-dressed figures are public observers of a grand and curious place. As already mentioned, the Toronto asylum was considered by many Victorian visitors to be a worthy tourist destination, much like the contemporary international expositions or world's fairs.<sup>42</sup> At the time this image was produced, the asylum and its function were, perhaps, at the forefront of public consciousness.

### **'Popular' Images of the Asylum, 1868-1890**

Most depictions of the asylum prior to the late 1860s are either based directly on Howard's concept pictures or on previous prints that were adapted from them (the first known photographs of the asylum were taken in the 1860s). The result of the process of copying and borrowing from images is that the string of depictions produced before 1870 produces essentially the same image of the architecture as Howard envisioned it before 1850. Howard's original concept, popularized by the 1850 Scrobie and Balfour lithograph, and again (partially) repeated in the 1870 composite engraving, depicts an asylum which, for its first thirty years of existence had no rear wings (nor a columned portico at the front).

There is a further discrepancy about the date of the asylum perimeter wall, although Geoffrey Reaume has written about patient participation in

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42. Miron, "'Open to the Public' Touring Ontario Asylums in the Nineteenth Century," in *Mental Health and Canadian Society*, 19-48.

its *re*-building during the early 1880s (the original wall was presumably completed with the rest of the main building in 1850).<sup>43</sup> Reaume also describes the use of outbuildings such as the laundry room behind the main building, and the tilling of the earth by patients who had plots of land for vegetable gardens. Ironically, the non-visual records offer a richer mental image of the busy asylum, compared to the stagnant image of the main building represented in the prints.

Notman and Fraser's 1868 photograph (fig. 7) merits analysis quite apart from its role in the formation of the 1870 engraving. In the very year that the picture was taken, the well-known photographers William Notman (1826-1891) and John Fraser (1838-1898) set up a studio together in Toronto after running a shop in Montreal. In the photograph, the central portion and front left wing comprise a unique vertical portrait of the Toronto Asylum, practically cloudless like Howard's concept drawings. The cropped close-up offers a more intimate view of the asylum than any of the previously discussed images. Somehow, the incomplete presentation of the building is less imposing, or even less intimidating. The photographic 'study' of the building provides the opportunity to appreciate the finer details of Howard's building, such as the roof ornamentation and stylized chimneys. After looking at the picture for a time, we once again observe evidence of human interaction with the building; there are carriage-wheel marks in the dirt laneway and a white puff of smoke emerges from the left chimney in front of the dome. Details such as these suggest an institution that is invitingly warm and alive, rather than cold and clinical. By the same token, we also witness the sorts of imperfections invisible in the earlier prints; dead trees and brambles, the pile of leaves in the gutter.

Viewers of this photograph are also introduced to what one assumes to be individuals who live within the walls of this place. If the two fellows captured within the frame are not patients, with their seemingly awkward gait, they were certainly models emulating patients. We are invited to follow these slow-moving individuals up the winding road to the entrance of the building. Near the figures, just ahead on the left, is a stone bench that reminds us of the increasing 'unrest' within the asylum walls. The bench presents an opportunity for repose from this anxious life—rest for the patient, for the member of staff at the asylum, or for the public visitor.

Again, viewers can contemplate the "typical day in the life of the Toronto Asylum." In an article that appeared in the *Canadian Methodist Magazine* in 1879, Daniel Clarke described the routine:

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43. See the discussion of "Patients' Labour" in Reaume, *Remembrance of Patients Past*, 132-180.

Following breakfast many of the men went off to work in the gardens, various asylum shops or on the asylum farm, while many of the women occupied themselves in the laundry and the sewing room. Others simply returned to their wards where they ensconced “themselves in a favorite corner, many of them returning daily to the same place and sitting day after day in the same posture.”<sup>44</sup>

The image of the leaves, clustered together and crowded against the edge of the sidewalk is reminiscent of the growing number of patients “ensconced” in the corners of the pictured building.<sup>45</sup>

Passing from an image of autumn to one of winter, Notman and Fraser’s c.1877 photograph of the north face of the asylum is a less intimate or colder depiction (fig. 8).<sup>46</sup> The snow-covered edge of Queen Street West is just visible at the base of the outer wall, which distances the viewer from the building. The posts of this wall serve as visual extensions of the building’s height, making the asylum appear taller and more imposing than in previous pictures. About mid-ground, amidst a cluster of naked trees, a gas lamp can be seen, one of many that were installed in the year the photograph was taken. Also visible, at right, is the new fountain for the gardens designed by Kivas Tully and installed with the construction of the asylum’s rear wings in the late 1860s.

John Fraser probably developed the c.1877 photograph into the steel engraving that appeared in the June 12, 1880 issue of *Canadian Illustrated News* accompanying an article that once again spoke to the public about life in the asylum (fig. 9).<sup>47</sup> Instead of the winter scene, the same north view showing the outer wall is converted into a full-blown image of spring. Here, however, the asylum and its wall are pushed further into the background, so that a space is afforded on the dirt thoroughfare for a cluster of public spectators. A man in a top hat, his bonneted wife, and their daughter stand with their backs to us, much like the patients walking up the lane-way in the 1868 photograph. This cluster of human forms is similar to the groupings of asylum visitors in the 1870 engraving. Immediately behind the family on Queen Street West are the markings left by carriages and, perhaps, by some of the earliest cars of the Toronto Street Railway Company.

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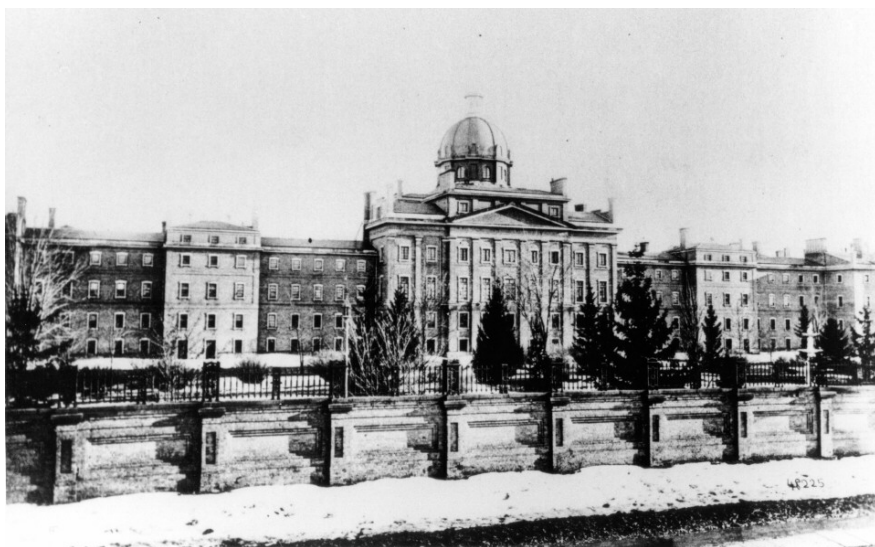
44. Reaume, 271-272.

45. *Ensconced* means 1) To settle (oneself) securely in a secure place, or 2) To place or conceal in a secure place. Dictionary.com, An Ask.com Service, “Ensconced,” <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=ensconced> (accessed May 11, 2009).

46. Reproduced in P.K. Crawford, “Asylum Landscape,” in *The Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto*, 78.

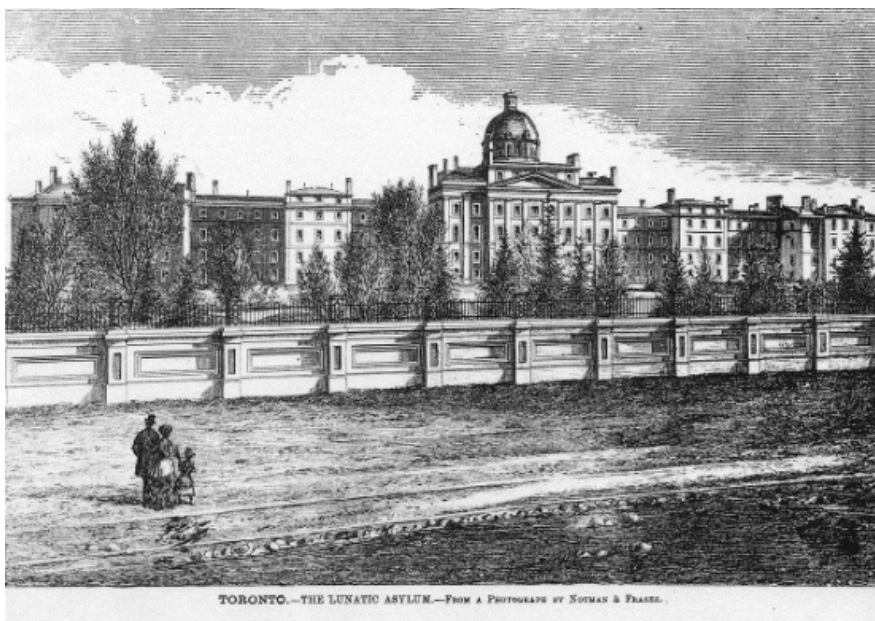
47. Aside from his photographic ability, Fraser was an accomplished painter and draughtsman.

Figure 8. "View of the Provincial Asylum's north (front) façade and fence with gas lighting," Photograph, c.1877.



Source : Image courtesy of the CAMH Archives.

Figure 9. "Toronto. — The Lunatic Asylum. — From a Photograph by Notman & Fraser."



Source: Engraving based on the photograph in *Canadian Illustrated News* 21, 24 (1880): 377.

Unlike either photograph by Notman and Fraser, a profusion of white cloud has been added to the engraving, which, leading the eye right across the image, cascades behind the edifice. Huddled together quite a distance from the building and separated from it by the outer wall, the orientation of the ‘family’ may speak to the increasingly elusive or mysterious image of the asylum near the end of the nineteenth century—perhaps a result of the custodial function it had come to serve. Yet, like the 1870 engraving with its visitors picnicking on the grounds, the figures in the 1880 engraving face the asylum. They are drawn to the wonder of the stately building, still invested in the goings-on there. The proud, bright depictions of the Toronto Asylum continue a decade later, in 1890.

### Images at the Close of a Century

In 1890, the artist William James Thomson (1858-1927) composed two images of the Toronto Asylum; a pen and ink drawing and a watercolour, both depicting a similar but unique aerial view of the asylum (figs. 10-A and -B).<sup>48</sup> On April 5 of the same year, the monochrome drawing was adapted into an engraving for *The Saturday Globe*, where it accompanied a detailed article about “life at the asylum.”<sup>49</sup> Born in Guelph, Ontario, Thomson was described by the *Globe* as the “dean” of Canadian printmakers when he died in 1927. When he drew and painted the Toronto Asylum, he was embarking on an exciting artistic career that would culminate after 1910 in internationally acclaimed shows of his work at the Canadian National Exhibition and the Winnipeg Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>50</sup> The *Globe* had just hired Thomson as illustrator, and he had married in the previous June. These were likely very happy times for Thomson, and the warmth of the final watercolour seems to reflect this.

The draftsmanship of the pen and ink drawing—a study for the engraving, but also a preliminary work for the watercolour—is slightly inferior to that of the painting (fig. 10-A). While the sketch is signed, the watercolour is not, and so the painting is only *attributed* to Thomson. Upon close comparison of the sketch to the watercolour, it appears that the artist adjusted the view of the asylum by a skillful foreshortening of the back wings (this is visible when copies of the sketch and watercolour are superimposed upon one another and held up to the light). Crooked

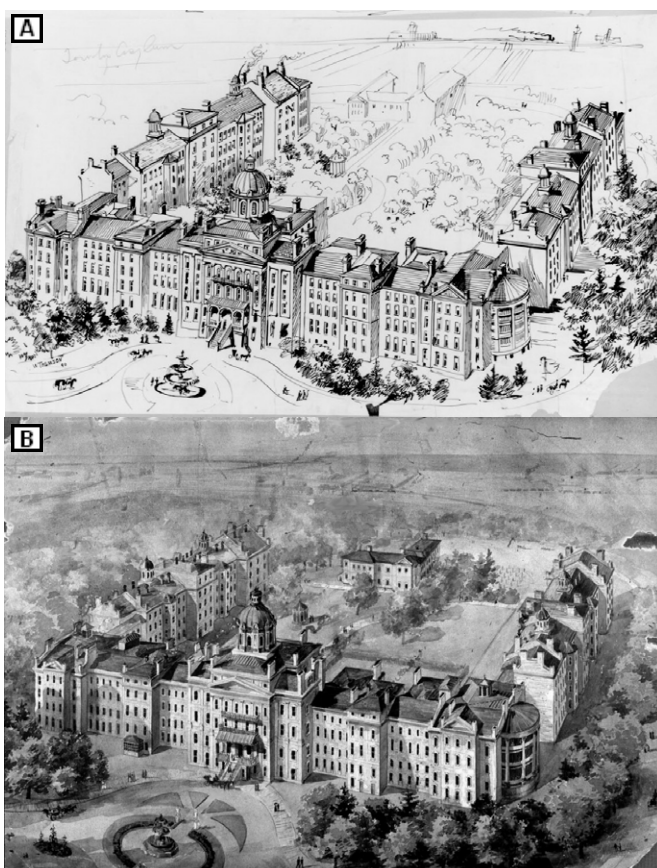
48. William James Thomson, born in Guelph, Ontario in 1858 (died in Toronto in 1927), was “staff artist for the (Toronto) *Globe* in the late 1880’s and early 90’s,” and “president of the Society of Canadian Painters-Etchers.” Keefer, 166.

49. Anonymous, “At the Asylum. A Visit to a Great Provincial Institution, etc.,” *The Saturday Globe*, 5 April, 1890, 1.

50. “Thomson, William James” (1857-1927), *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, Library and Archives of Canada, at <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?Bioid=42523&query=> (accessed May 11, 2009).

lines visible in the building's façade in the monochrome work were straightened in the more finished work. Further changes in the watercolour include the provision of a greater distance between the main building and Tully's fountain in order to include a moon-shaped cluster of flower beds or lawn. There is also a greater abundance of vegetation which seems to be an embellishment of the number of trees that were actually present in 1890. Further distinguishing the finished watercolour from the ink sketch, light washes representing shadows cast by the building were probably added in the final stages of painting.

Figure 10. A) "The Provincial Asylum, Toronto," Pen and ink sketch by William James Thomson (signed). Thomson (1858-1927) was an artist for the *Globe* from the 1880's through the early 1890's, as well as the founding president of the Canadian Society of Painters-Etchers. B) "The Provincial Asylum, Toronto." Watercolour with ink attributed to William James Thomson (unsigned), c.1890.



Source: A) *The Saturday Globe (Toronto)* 5 April 1890. B) Image courtesy of the CAMH Archives.



Two carriages are seen arriving, and the ant-like people can be seen strolling through the garden. The bright blue chimney smoke and other vibrant colours used by the artist indicate a *living* institution, suggesting that the site was a focal point of Toronto life during the nineteenth century. Indeed, Toronto's growth was such that, by this time, the city practically engulfed the asylum.

As in previous prints and photographs, the human element in the watercolour invites those who have seen the print to visit the asylum gardens as a sort of tourist attraction, to see the "spreading trees and rich colored [sic] flowers and fountains whose waters sparkle in the sun... the orchard and garden, a never-failing source of delight."<sup>51</sup> Clusters of trees—almost a forest—comfortably fill the space around the building, their various shades of green creeping into the asylum courtyard. In the distance, where details become progressively blurred, Thomson provides a view of the farm that Daniel Clark mentioned in his 1879 account of life at the asylum. Adding further action to the scene, the artist indicates a very tiny west-traveling steam locomotive, a reminder of the recently-completed Canadian Pacific Railway, built 1881-1885 and linking central Canada to the Pacific coast.

Thomson's fairly large watercolour (31 x 43.6 cm) blushes a yellow-orange, probably largely owing to the colour of the paper used (a reproduction of the image in full colour is on display at CAMH). As a result, and also due to the nature of the all-encompassing, free-exploring view provided, Thomson's work is probably the warmest depiction of the Toronto Asylum. Even the outbuilding used by the patients at the rear is fully visible. Unlike previous images in which the asylum seems to loom over the viewer, everything outside of the asylum is exposed to the viewer from an aerial view—an *empowering* image, rather than an imposing one. Much like John Howard's visionary perspective drawing, Thomson's depiction shows the "glow of the setting sun" on the north façade of the building.<sup>52</sup> Though, whereas the architect's carefully calculated perspective drawing is devoid of any human form, Thomson's soft-lit picture is full of activity, suggesting the end of a busy summer's day—more akin to Howard's 1835 picture of the York Gaol (fig. 3-A). Again, however, unlike the noise implicit in the foreground of Howard's watercolour, the distant perspective of Thomson's painting muffles the bustle.

While Thomson's picture offers a better view of the entire building than any of the previous images, this image also places the most distance between the viewer and the asylum. And despite the lovely features of the picture, the glow of which seems to stretch for miles across the surrounding

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51. Anonymous, "At the Asylum," 3.

52. Hudson, *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto*, 105.

land, it was well understood, even up to twenty years previously, that the fifty acres upon which the building stood was far too little space, both for the enormity of the edifice in a fast expanding city and for the ever-growing number of patients.<sup>53</sup> Thus, while the edifice is presented neatly and compactly in Thomson's image, as in Howard's perspective drawing which was contemporary to the dreams of a "ninety percent cure-rate for the insane," the 1890 image is deceiving—a solid, calm, and colourful false front to an increasingly crowded and chaotic interior.

The idealized asylum images of the late nineteenth century do not seem to depict what historical accounts typically describe as an unhealthy, overflowing institution in crisis. Instead, four years after Daniel Clarke's confession that the Toronto Asylum had become a home for incurables, the public depictions of the building analyzed here still reflected the earlier sentiment of hope for the inmates, and hope for the asylum as a solution to mental illness.

It is difficult to say if artists like William Thomson possessed much knowledge of the internal life of the asylum. It is unlikely that artists commissioned to depict the institution were familiar with cure rates or advances in therapeutic reforms. The fact that the later depictions still appear warm is due to the artists' replication of the previous illustrations, many of them based on the original concept drawings, which reflected prevailing pictorial conventions as well as the public's confidence in the asylum. Arguably the unchanging image of the asylum was what the Victorian public expected to see. But, in 1890, the days of the stately and calm image of the asylum were numbered. Even in Thomson's watercolour, there is a sense that the sun is setting on the face of the proud, bright asylum.

### **The Meaning of the Toronto Images since Demolition**

When the Ontario Ministry of Government Services sought to dismantle the former Toronto Provincial Asylum (then nicknamed '999 Queen Street West') in 1975, the Ontario Heritage Foundation opposed the move, debating for a year the costs of either restoring or "recycling" the historical building.<sup>54</sup> Dr. Frederick Lowy, chairman of the University of Toronto's

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53. Only twenty years following the inception of Howard's building, complaints were common about the shortage of land upon which the asylum stood, with reference to the "limited space available for providing out-door occupation for so great a number, and (that the land shortage was) also... proving a serious draw-back to the profitable and economical management of the affair of the institution." "Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto," *Canadian Illustrated News* 1, 29 (1870): 458.

54. Published two years after the demolition of the oldest (Howard) part of the Toronto Asylum, Baird and Hill's article highlights different aspects of this controversy: 999 Queen was one of the most prominent historic buildings to be demolished in recent memory. Its numerous well-known, outspoken defenders could not muster enough public

Department of Psychiatry, affirmed that the edifice was a “highly visible reminder of a previous era of treatment of the mentally ill from which, thankfully, we have emerged.”<sup>55</sup> Others, including many historians, urged the public to recognize that the origin of the Toronto Asylum had been part of a positive attempt to reform the harsh pre-Enlightenment treatment of the mentally ill, an episode worth remembering.<sup>56</sup> This latter sentiment is readily identifiable with Henry Hurd’s reflection (1917) on what he perceived to be the close of an era for the nineteenth-century institution:

As the last days of the old Toronto Asylum approach it is felt that one of the most important of the Canadian insane institutions, historically, is about to disappear, and though this account but indicates in a brief way some of the incidents of good work it accomplished, none the less we say that its name will always have a prominent place in the history of psychiatry in Canada.<sup>57</sup>

Sixty years following Hurd’s positive memorialization, government officials and many psychiatric care professionals personally associated with the building supported its demolition.

When the asylum originally opened, the print media epitomized the grandeur of the new edifice as a symbol of a new age of innovation in healing the mentally ill. Howard’s building boasted

a well-planned layout of each corridor, with sleeping and day-rooms, a dining room and a visiting room, and cold, hot, and shower baths... special ventilation arrangements... advanced hot-water heating system to ensure comfortable warmth, the fifty acres of grounds that would provide attractive gardens healthily to affect the minds of the insane... exceeding[ly] handsome, commodious, healthful and safe... a monument to the Christian liberality of the people.<sup>58</sup>

From the visionary architectural concept drawings, through the many prints that accompanied stories of “life at the asylum,” to the last ‘warm’ depiction of the Howard building in the dimming sun painted by Thomson, the images are all, in some way, idealized depictions of the building praised in 1850.

All of the nineteenth-century pictures of the asylum have one thing in common: they may be interpreted as statements that the internal situation at the Toronto Asylum was as well kept as the solid-looking exterior. This positive image may have put the public viewer at ease about how the

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support for the edifice’s preservation. G. Baird and R. Hill, “999 Queen: A Case Study of Government Demolition,” in *The Second City Book: Studies of Urban and Suburban Canada*, eds. J. Lorimer and E. Ross (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1977), 70-95. 55. *Ibid.*, 75.

56. S. Wise, “The Place of 999 Queen Street in the History of Canadian Psychiatry,” in *The Second City Book*, 76.

57. Hurd, vol. 4, 145-146.

58. J.M.S. Careless, “A History of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum,” in *The Second City Book*, 78.

‘unfortunate’ (and often shunned) members of society were being cared for. At least on a superficial level, the repeated image may have served to legitimize the place of the care of the mentally disturbed in the hands of the medical profession. But this well-groomed image was only true to form until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when, in light of unavoidable admissions by spokespeople such as superintendent Daniel Clark, the increasingly custodial function of the asylum, and hence, the increasingly degraded provision of care, was revealed.

After the Thomson watercolour, depictions like his were never again repeated. Aerial photographs of the 1950s show that the main building was then quite hidden by a forest, which provided a barrier between the hospital and the sprawling metropolis. As the asylum began to retreat behind a forest of trees, so too did its face retreat from public consciousness.

One hundred years after the Toronto Asylum was constructed, in Canada and elsewhere, the mental institution was “increasingly seen as a bankrupt instrument of public policy.”<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the early 1960s witnessed the beginnings of “deinstitutionalization,” a complex phenomenon that reflected the advent of pharmacological treatments for some of the symptoms of mental illness in the 1950s. There was a marked decrease in the state’s dependence on the former institutions. Nestled among the trees and cluster of newly built outbuildings, the original asylum—like so many other grand mental hospitals of the world—was an artifact (and to some, a relic) of an earlier time.

Whether the asylum merited preservation—perhaps as a memorial to its thousands of former patients—is not a question that this paper can answer. Indeed, there is further work to be done regarding the mid twentieth-century phenomenon of asylum demolition.<sup>60</sup> Suffice it to say, there is something about mental illness and its complex history that made most people in the mid twentieth century want to obliterate and forget. Thus, the impetus to demolish the asylum in 1975 paralleled changing attitudes in the history of mental health, just as the present move to preserve the remaining sections of perimeter wall is tied to the perceptions and beliefs driving the consumer survivor movement (which is largely about

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59. Brown, 1.

60. A study that investigates the recent history of asylum demolition—as the remarkable worldwide phenomenon that it has been—would be appropriately framed using the historiography of memorialization—that group of philosophical histories championed by scholars like Pierre Nora, that seek to explain the construction of monuments (and the construction of the historical narrative) as a function of remembering or forgetting. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, eds., *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Krizman, *Realms of Memory*, 3 vols., transl. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-98); Pierre Nora, ed., *Rethinking France*, 2 vols., transl. David P. Jordan and Mary Seidman Trouille (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001 and 2007).

*remembering*). To this end, Geoffrey Reaume, himself a consumer-survivor as well as a faculty member of the Disability Program at Toronto's York University, frequently gives educational tours of the asylum grounds, pointing out the reminders, including the original spiral staircase that led up to the water-tower contained in the central dome, and now partially preserved outside the treatment centre's cafeteria.

In the art historical analysis of a selection of Toronto Asylum images, what seems to matter most is whether the illustrators created a picture that faithfully documented the building's physical form, that is, whether each image of the asylum approximates the reality of the place as it really looked in the nineteenth century. What we end up with, after blurring together all of the similar images of the building's exterior, is one composite 'image' in our minds that is ideal and stable, yet ultimately untrue to the natural decay of the building and to its escalating internal problems.

The idealized images seem to have fulfilled the expectations of the Victorian public. There is no evidence that anyone was conspiring to promote the medicalization of mental illness through propagandistic images. Rather, these images are a reflection of Victorian interest and popular taste. On Sundays during the late nineteenth century, many parents in Hamilton, Ontario took their children to spend their afternoon of rest strolling or lunching on the asylum grounds, much like a visit to the zoo. This public interaction with the asylum is a part of a popular culture far enough removed from our own to be called distinctly Victorian—behaviour that we might now construe to be inappropriate, disrespectful, or just plain odd. Pictures like the 1870 composite engraving with its visitors picnicking on the grounds, or the print from 1880 showing the 'family' grouped in front of the asylum, depict a public fascination and interest in the asylum that deserves its own history.<sup>61</sup>

That the asylum continued to be characterized in an optimistic light for so long seems remarkable. The unchanging image of the asylum was almost rhetorical in function, so that each subsequent engraving drew from a previous photograph, drawing or engraving. Perhaps this was the way the artists themselves wanted to 'see' the asylum.

One aspect of this Victorian pride in the asylum does resonate with our own time: in everything, as it is now, *image* was important. Around 1890, just before Thomson depicted the asylum for *The Globe*, superintendent Daniel Clark ordered the construction of a wooden staircase from the ground outside to the first floor of the building. Previously, visitors to the asylum and incoming patients and staff had to first pass via the dank basement before ascending an indoor staircase to the main floor.<sup>62</sup> The new

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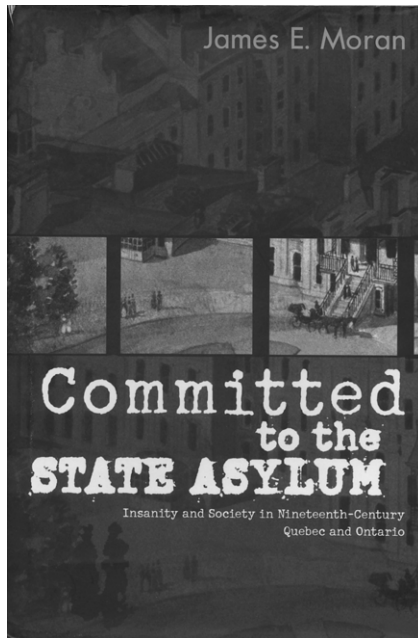
61. Miron, 19-48.

62. I am grateful to John Court of the CAMH Archives for this information.

exterior staircase, with porch and awning, pictured in Thomson's watercolour, demonstrates just how conscious Clark was of the asylum's image.

After a hundred years of debate over various aspects of the history of the asylum, it is difficult to comprehend the repetition of the idealized image of the nineteenth-century asylum. The pleasant nineteenth-century image has even been subverted to convey a different meaning. The cover of James Moran's *Committed to the State Asylum* (2001) is a case in point: it displays a heavily modified version of Thomson's watercolour. The majority of the picture is 'ghosted' by a dark film, and the four 'windows' through which the original colours of the image are visible serve to focus our attention on a sort of narrative, presumably, the ominous pathway to the asylum (fig. 11).

Figure 11. From the cover of James Moran's book, *Committed to the State Asylum: Insanity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Quebec and Ontario*.



Source : James Moran, *Committed to the State Asylum: Insanity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Quebec and Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001).

In the third 'window' from left, we witness—almost as if we were watching the scene through binoculars or a telescope, reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Rear Window*—the delivery, by carriage, of a patient to the doorstep of the asylum. Accompanied by the shivery 'cold case files' font used for the book title, the meaning of Thomson's painting of a sunny view of the asylum is utterly transformed to suit the cover design.

We must account for the proper historical context of the nineteenth-century images of the Toronto Asylum. These unchanging depictions were the product of an age that was confident in the institution in which it was invested. The end of the heyday of the Victorian lunatic asylum in the early 1900s also saw the end of the publication of such images. The public fascination with the asylum was a disappearing aspect of Victorian culture; the asylum—and its image—had served their purpose. By the 1950s, when these institutions were being torn down by the hundreds in favour of “modernizing” mental health care, most people welcomed the change, and with it, the promise of a new image.

Now, almost thirty-five years after the old asylum was demolished, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) has begun the “most daring redevelopment” and “modernization” of its services in its 159-year history. In a special report, CAMH CEO Paul Garfinkel explained that the 400 million-dollar project will see many of the twentieth-century buildings at the Queen Street site torn down so that a new facility can be created that will integrate organically with the surrounding neighbourhood.<sup>63</sup> The renovated mental health and addiction treatment centre will become almost invisible in the made-over community. Of course, there is an ongoing fight to preserve the original asylum wall, as well as one of the original outbuildings, which dates to the 1860s. The supporters of preservation consist mainly of historians, the Friends of the CAMH Archives, and members of the consumer-survivor movement.

In true twenty first-century fashion, the new image of mental health care promised by the present redevelopment will be a careful compromise between all parties. And, like the Victorian images that depicted a proud-looking, bright and beautiful asylum, the new mental health centre, hidden away in an increasingly gentrified Toronto neighbourhood, will be seamless, spotless, and beautiful once again.

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63. Leslie Scrivener, “Breakout at the Asylum” and “Breaking Down Barriers on Queen St. W.,” *Toronto Star*, February 25, 2007, A2, A8 and A9.