

# Developing Conceptualizations of Disabilities:

## From History to Tomorrow



A COURT-FOOL, OF 15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY.

Fac-simile of a miniature from a ms. in the Bibl. de l'Arsenal, Th. lat., n<sup>o</sup> 125.

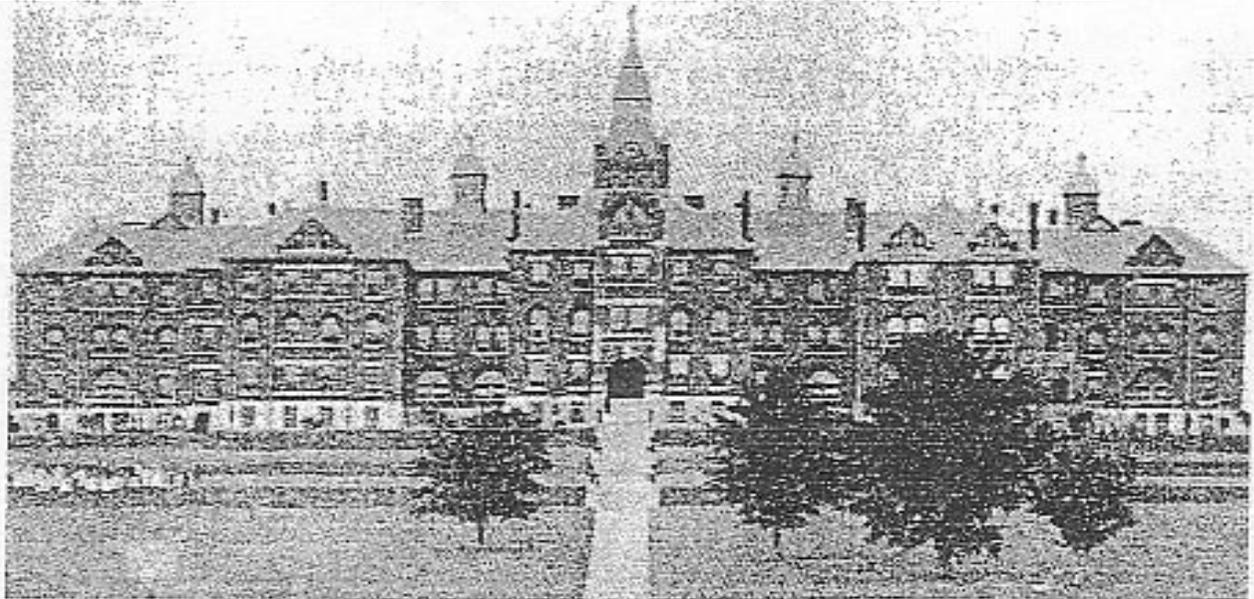
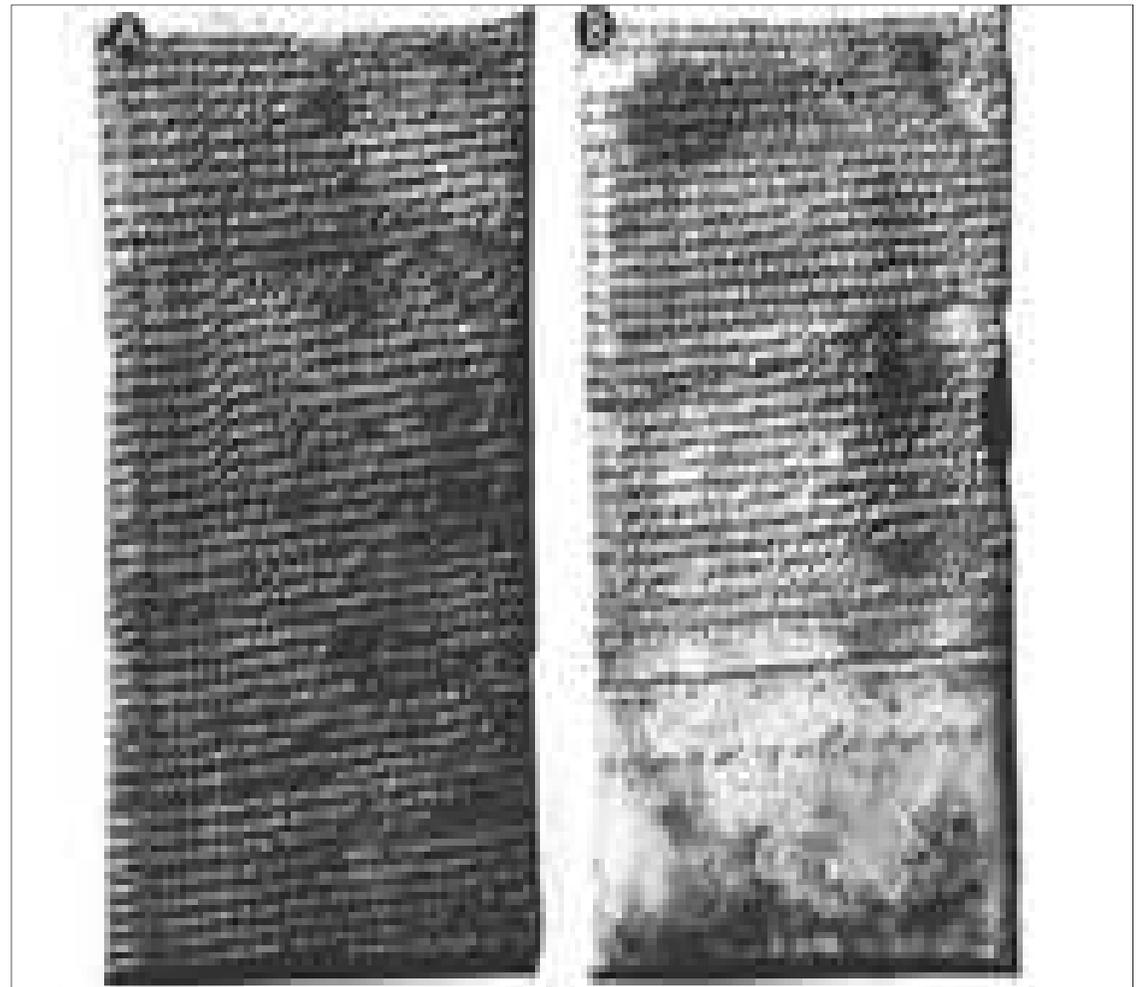


Figure 1: The Orillia Asylum (1914)

## Oldest written records

- Clay tablets
- Mouth of the Tigris River
- Tablet of Nineveh is approx.
- 4,000 years old
- Contains 62 malformations
- They were used to predict the future



Clay tablet from the Royal Library of Nineveh listing 62 human malformations and their interpretations (Warkany 1971).

## **For example:**

- **The future of the king**
- **The weather**
- **The year's harvest**
- **and...**

## **For example:**

**When a woman gives birth to an infant:**

- that has no mouth, the mistress of the house will die**
- whose upper lip overrides the lower, the peoples of the world will rejoice**
- that has no right hand, the country will be convulsed by an earthquake**

## **Philanthropic traditions in religions:**

- **Torah and the New Testament contain explicit instructions to treat disability with compassion.**

**Proverbs 31:8**

**Open your mouth for the mute,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.**

## **Philanthropic traditions in religions:**

- **Quran: Mohammed advised “to feed and house those without reason and to give them kindly words”**

## **But...**

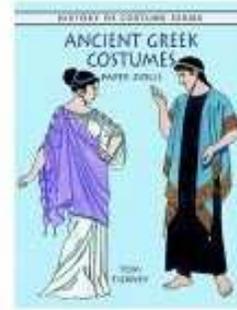
- **[Leviticus 22: 17] those who were “blemished” were considered to be unfit to “offer the bread of his God”**
- **Firstborn cattle and sheep, which were to be sacrificed and eaten, should be without “any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish” (Deuteronomy 16: 21).**

# Dwarves in Ancient Egypt

**Held in high esteem**

**Bes, the god of love, childbirth, and sexuality in ancient Egypt. Women were said to call out to him during labour.**





# Ancient Greeks





# Alexander the Great

- **Brother Arridaios intellectual disability**
- **Treated with kindness**
- **Travelled throughout Persia and India**
- **Others suffocated or disposed of at birth**

# Ancient Greeks

- Hippocrates demonstrated great concern for children with disabilities, and attributed certain disabilities to "natural causes" rather than possession by demons or wrath of the gods.
- Greek civilization believed that the birth of a child with a disability or other deformity was a show of anger by the gods. They were ignored or rejected.

# **Ancient Greeks, con't**

- In Sparta, children were the property of the state, not parents, and the abandonment of disabled babies was a legal requirement. Every baby was inspected by the community's elders straight after birth. Those robust and healthy were allowed to live. If the child was "ill-born and ill-formed," the father was ordered to expose it. This law of Lykourgos, the legendary Spartan leader, aimed to develop a master race.**



# Romans



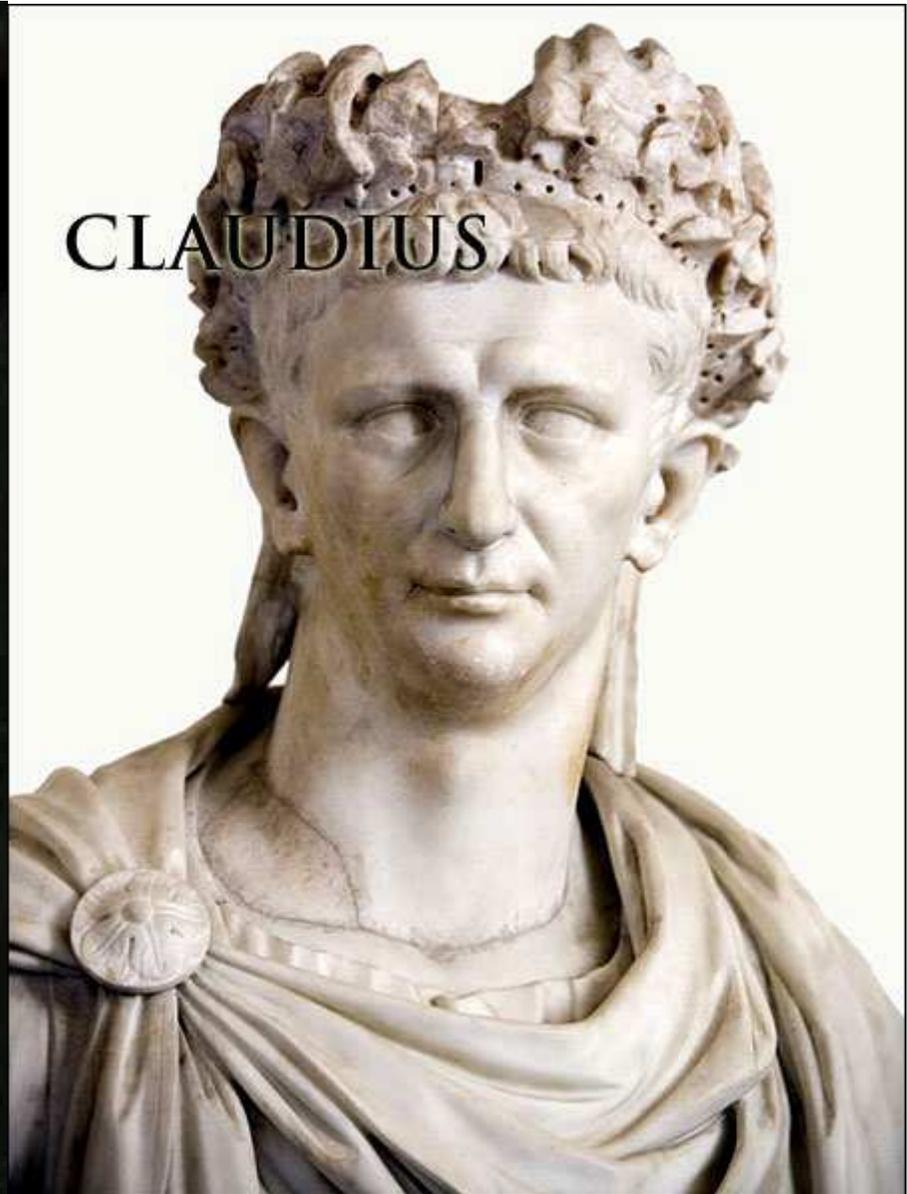
# Romans

- **No word for disability**
- **“Monstrum” used – the same word described mythological monsters\**
- **Latin “mutus” referred to both somebody who couldn’t speak and someone who is stupid**

# Romans

- **Medical procedures were advanced**
- **Physical and mental deformities were a source of amusement**
- **In the family, a great misfortune, divine punishment, impending disaster**
- **Disabilities as scourge**
- **People were ostracized, ignored, killed**

# Disability as NOT Physical Ideal



# Disability as Humour



- **Malformed infants will of the gods**
- **A way to show the god's power**
- **God at play, showing humor.**
- **Pliny: "Nature creates monsters [newborns with malformations] for the purpose of astonishing us and amusing herself."**

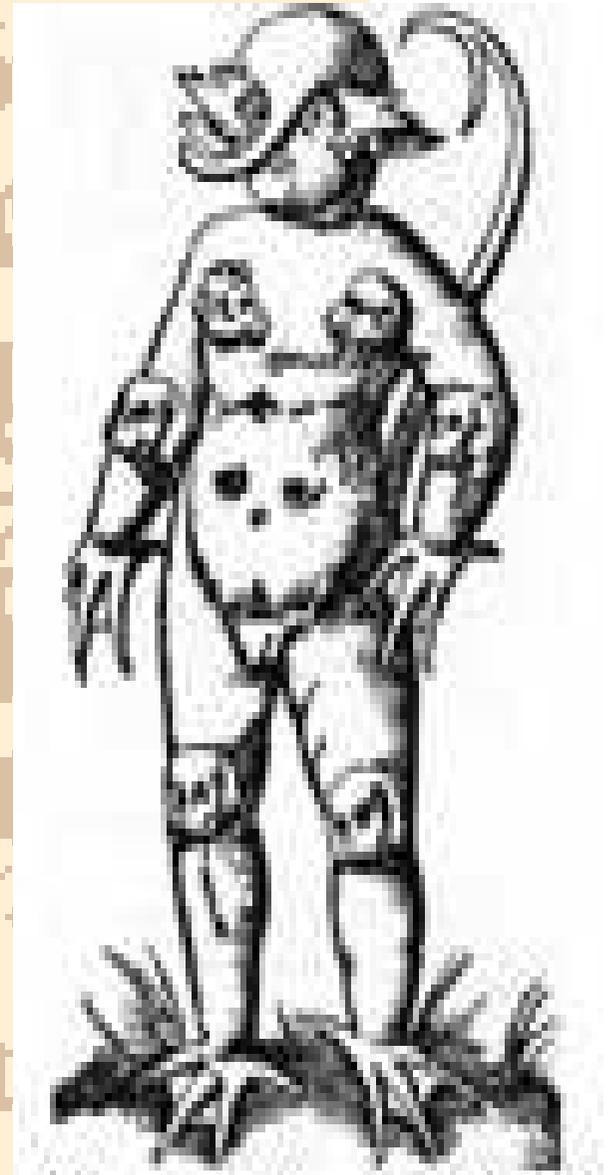
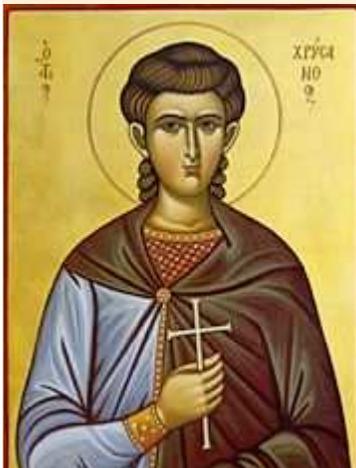
# **Disability and Humour**

- **Dwarfs and hunchbacks were in high demand as singers, dancers, musicians, jugglers and clowns**
- **Freak shows were popular**
- **Fashionable households had slaves who were hunchbacks, dwarves, mutes, etc.; good luck, entertainment, sexual favours**
- **Special disabled slave market**

# **Disability and Survival**

- **Jobs in history: People with mobility impairments sometimes earned a living as potters, leather workers, teachers and metal workers; spies and informers mixture of begging**
- **Usual survival: Petty crime, casual work, and charity from their family**

# Medieval Times



# Disability – Various Concepts

- A Subhuman Organism Animal-like or a “vegetable”
- A Menace An “alien” or a genetic threat to civilization
- An Object of Dread Sent as God’s punishment; possibly a “changeling”
- An Object of Pity An unfortunate person, deserving charity
- A Holy Innocent Sent by God for some special purpose and incapable of sin
- A Diseased Organism Sick and probably incurable
- An Object of Ridicule The “village idiot” or “court fool” or “jester”
- An Eternal Child Persistently “subnormal,” the victim of “arrested development”

# Disability as Legal Status

The 14th century English statute under Edward II, titled *De Prerogativa Regis*, or the Royal prerogative, now referred to as the *parens patriae* jurisdiction, imposed an obligation on the state to provide for those deemed incompetent to manage their personal or financial affairs. Chapter IX of the law states:

The King shall have the Custody of the Lands of natural Fools, taking the Profits of them without Waste or Destruction, and shall find them their necessaries.

- Determined by jury trials.

# Changeling Images



# Changeling Images con't



# Changeling Images



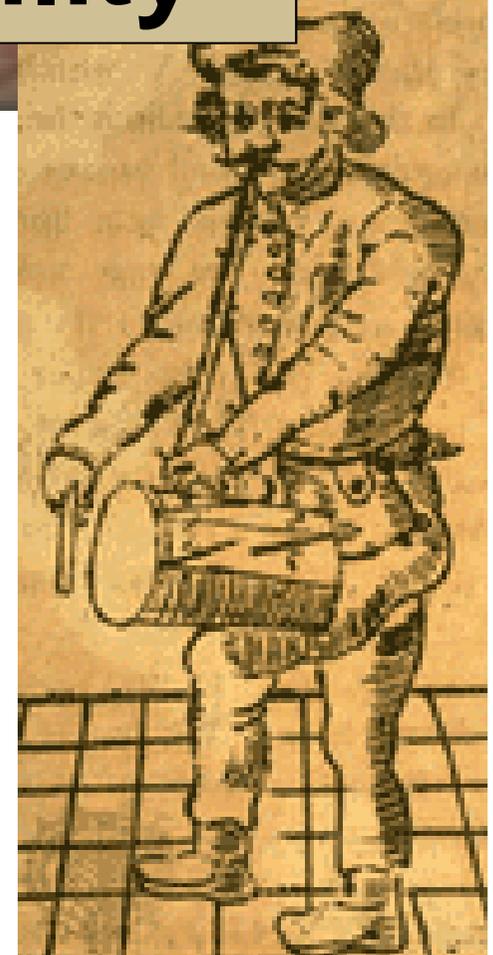
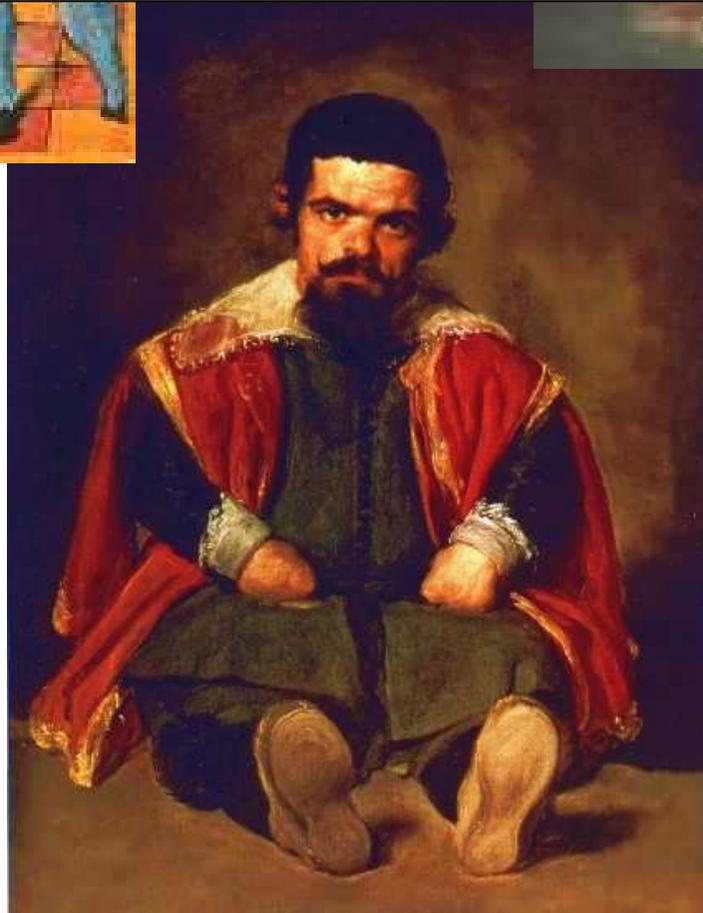
# Other “Causes” of Disability

- Being a witch
- Sexual congress with the devil or evil spirits
- Sexual congress with animals

# Early “Wheelchair”



# Humour and Disability



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- On Saturday evening, four blind people were led through Paris, all armed with sticks, a large banner in front, where there was a pig portrayed, and in front of them a man playing a bass drum.
- On Sunday, there took place an amusement, in which the four blind people, each armed with a stick, were put in a park, and in that location there was a strong pig that they could have if they killed it. Thus it was done, and there was a very strange battle, because they gave themselves so many great blows with those sticks that it went worse for them, because when the stronger ones believed that they hit the pig, they hit each other, and if they had really been armed, they would have killed each other.



# Fiddling Fool c. 1350



# Jesters & Clowns today



# The Enlightenment 1450-1800

## Key elements:

- Problems solved by rational thought
- Focus on: Science and natural law
- Shift to matters of state, not religion

## Key question and answer:

- How to make humankind happy and free?
- Discover laws through rational thought
- People become enlightened, society progresses



Der Wilde von Aveyron.

## Victor: The Wild Boy of Aveyron

# Institutional Era



## **Purposes:**

- **Training / Education**
- **Health**
- **Care**

# Normansfield



# Southwell workhouse (UK)



**established 1824**



**Poorhouse**



# Pennhurst State School (PA)



PENN HURST STATE SCHOOL  
PENN HURST PA

# Pennhurst grounds



# Eugenics

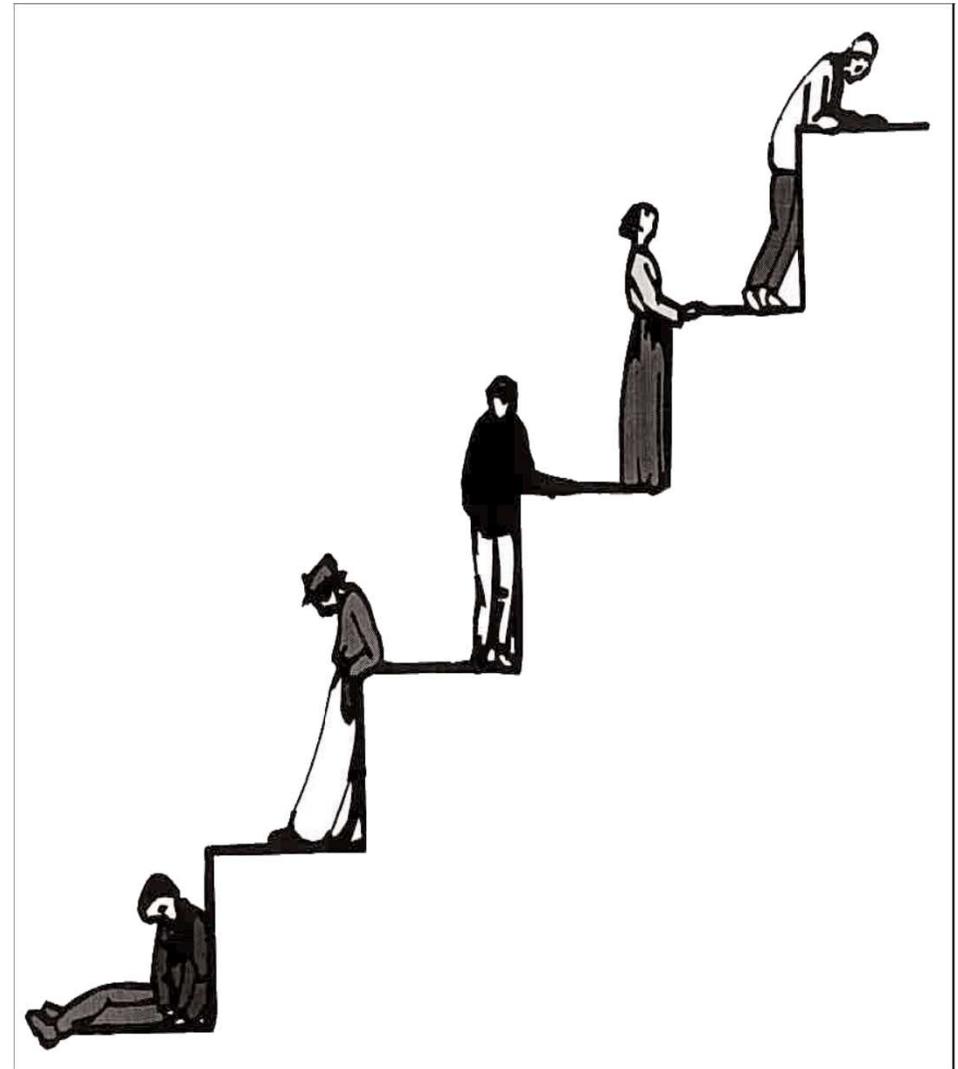
- Sir Arthur Galton 1852-1921
- Social Darwinism

# Intelligence Testing

- Alfred Binet
- Theodore Simon 1905
- Lewis Terman (Stanford University) 1916
- David Wechsler 1955
  - scales for adults, children, preschoolers
  - many subtests

# 1914 Classification: Mental Defective Individuals

- Moron  
Mentally 10 - 12 years old
- High Grade Imbecile  
Mentally 8 - 10 years old
- Medium Imbecile  
Mentally 6 - 8 years old
- Low Grade Imbecile  
Mentally 4 - 5 years old
- Idiot  
Mentally 3 years and under



# Orillia Asylum (1914)

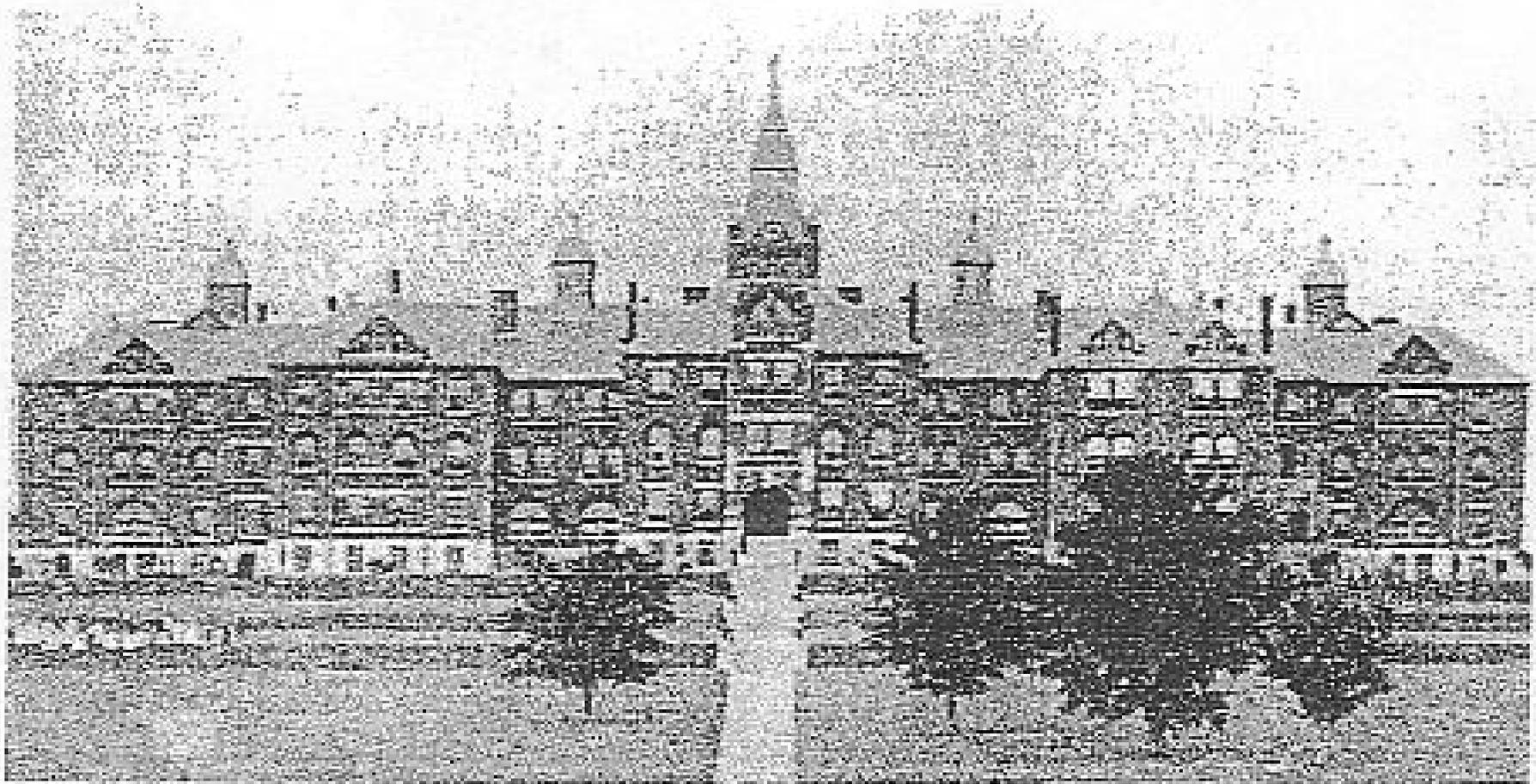


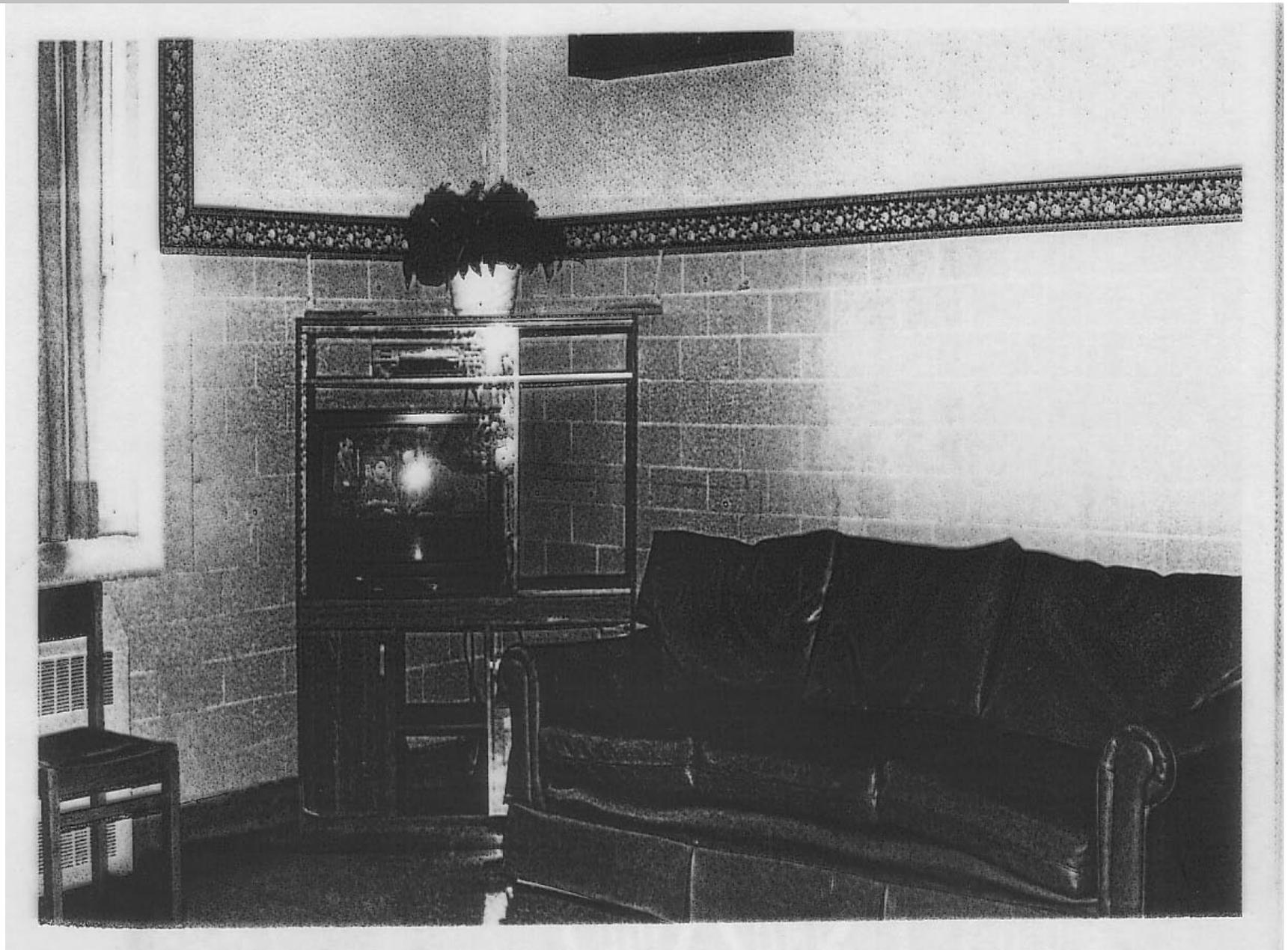
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1960

Residents resting in a dormitory and watching TV at the Huronia Regional C

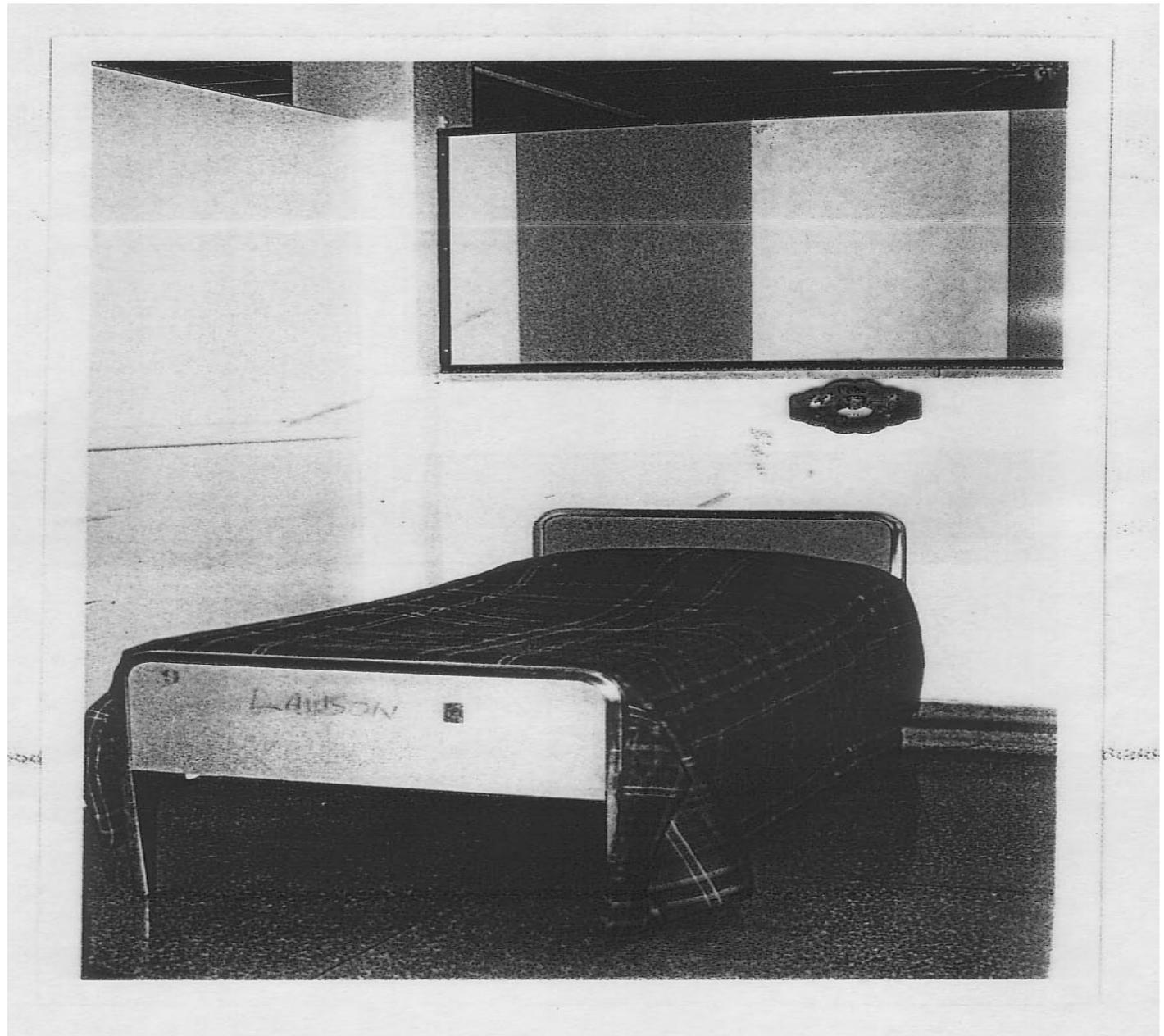
# Institutional Living Ontario 1996



# Institutional Living Ontario 1996



# Institutional Living Ontario 1996



# Institutional Living Ontario 1996



# Eugenics

- Nazism and Eugenics
  - mental illness, disabled
  - T4 (Tiergartenstrasse 4)

- 1939-1941 (1945)
- “Useless eaters”
- Kill those with “life unworthy of living”
- 200,000 killed in all

# Mental Health Institutions



**Schloss Hartheim  
8,000 killed**

# Sonnenstein Euthanasia Clinic, Sonnenstein Castle



**15,000  
killed**

# Children with Disabilities



**5,000 killed  
1939-1941**

# Developing Conceptualizations

## From History to Tomorrow

**In conclusion...**



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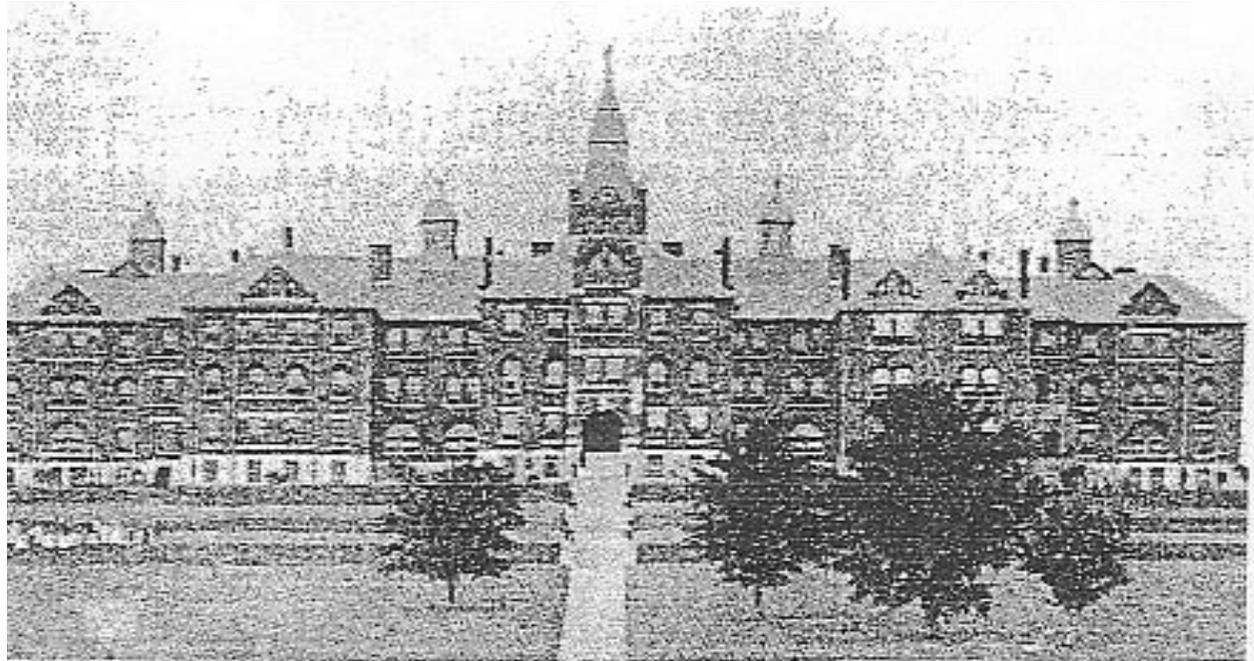


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