

The Cleveland Poorhouse and Infirmary

When the city of Cleveland took over the small township poorhouse in 1855, it became the *Cleveland Infirmary*. In 1889 the medical department of the poorhouse became the independent institution, City Hospital.

At this time Americans believed that in the land of opportunity the destitution of able-bodied adults must be the results of individual failings, and that “outdoor relief simply fostered pauperism by allowing recipients to remain in their own homes, free to pursue the vices and bad habits that made them poor in the first place.”

The poorhouse, therefore, would serve several purposes. Within its walls officials could control and improve inmates’ behavior. Vice would be forbidden, and virtues, especially industry, would be encouraged. The absence of amenities and the rigorous discipline would discourage dependence upon taxpayers, thereby saving money in the long run.

Because illness was a primary cause of dependence, poorhouses were also hospitals where doctors and medical students provided free health care in return for clinical experience. And at the very least, poorhouses would keep the growing number of poor out of sight behind high fences or brick walls.

In 1864 a reporter for the *Cleveland Leader* on a tour of the Infirmary described it this way: “Our infirmary is at once an asylum for the aged and infirm, a hospital and a house of correction. In the basement are confined the dangerously and violently insane. Above there are the separate rooms for the little boys, and above them the old men, old women, and little girls.”

Infirmary registers often attributed poverty to “bad management,” “dissipation,” or “bad habits.” In an 1856 Infirmary report Superintendent Miller bemoaned the difficulties of his job: “To enforce obedience to the rules of the house – to compel those to obey law who have spent their whole lives following their own inclinations regardless of the law – to compel the unclean to be clean, and the quarrelsome and turbulent to be gentle and quiet – the indolent to become industrious and the profane to cease their profanity.”

Source: *And Sin No More* by Marian J. Morton



The Cleveland Infirmary in the 1800’s

Cleveland Infirmary Inmates 1880

Name	Age	Born	Health
Archibald, Mary J.	34	US	Inebriate
Bletch, John	15	Ohio	Feeble Mind
Brewer, Nick	29	Denmark	Rheumatism
Brinhautb, F.	51	Germany	Rheumatism
Brummer, Barbara	29	US	Idiotic
Carroll, Lewis	72	France	Old Age
Craig, Mary	30	US	Debility
Day, Thomas	32	Ireland	Insane
Dolan, Daniel	76	Ireland	Old Age
Drudick, Mary	36	Germany	Sick
Edmund, Maggie	21	France	Inebriate
Elciser, Pauline	41	Germany	Cancer
Fitzgerald, William	61	Ireland	Insane
Frist, Philopena	43	Germany	Insane
Gantson, Angelina	27	US	Sprained Knee
Hamilton, Margaret	42	US	Insane
Higgins, Edward	63	Germany	Sore Eyes
Hughes, Thomas	20	US	Epilepsy
Jacobs, Samuel	13	Canada	Paralysis
Kehoe, Thomas	48	Ireland	Rheumatism
Kelly, Charlie	77	Ireland	Sore Leg
Kelly, Janes	16	US	Burned
Lisinger, Mary	18	US	Idiotic
Lockwood, Jane	40	US	Sick
Luhr, Charles D.	59	Germany	Insane
Mahoney, Ellen	69	Ireland	Old Age
Mason, Thomas	16	US	Debility
McGiven, Carmie	43	US	Fits
McNally, Mike	70	Ireland	Infirm
McNamara, Margaret	32	Canada	Insane
Minarty, John	44	Ireland	Insane
Mortrotzsz, Otto A.	49	Germany	Sick
Muker, Agnes	48	Germany	Sickly
Murchal, David	59	England	Lung Disease
Murphy, Ann	36	Ireland	Sore Hand
Nickolas, Ferderick	36	Germany	Insane
Omalia, Julia	61	Ireland	Insane
Pants, Hattie	17	US	Fits
Payne, F. O.	23	US	Injured by car
Raney, William	45	US	Lost Leg
Reese, Emily	60	Wales	Old Age
Runele, Frank	26	US	Syphilis
Scovil, Harriet	46	US	Insane
Stadford, James	73	Ireland	Old Age
Starick, Martin	61	Germany	Debility
Thumpdredt, Frank	60	Germany	Insane
Weatherspoon, A.	60	Germany	Old Age
White, John	42	England	Sore Eyes
Wilson, George	32	US	Insane

Total Count is 4,485 for the year 1880; From the 1880 Federal Census, Cleveland 13th Ward; Series 79, Roll 1008, pg 482