

History of Medicine

History of Mental Health Services in South Africa

PART IV. THE ORANGE FREE STATE

M. MINDE

SUMMARY

The only mental hospital in the Orange Free State is the Oranje Hospital, opened by the Republican government in 1884, after mental patients had been detained in a rented house for a number of years.

It has grown into a large institution, housing over 1 600 patients. The professor of psychiatry at the University of the Orange Free State is now the clinical head of the hospital.

S. Afr. Med. J., 48, 2327 (1974).

The earliest reference to insanity in the Orange Free State is found in *Notulen der Verrichtingen van den Hoogedelen Volksraad* — the minutes of the proceedings of the Free State Republic parliament for 1866: 'De Staatspresident vraagt hoe te handelen met krankzinnige personen die hier zyn zonder bloedverwanten te hebben'. The question was debated at considerable length, and finally a motion proposed by Mr Visser and seconded by Mr H. Cloete was adopted. It read as follows:

Claremont, Cape

M. MINDE, M.B. CH.B., *Psychiatrist*

Date received: 5 August 1974.

'De Raad draagt aan Z. H. Ed. den Staatspresident en Uitvoerenden Raad op om voorlopig op zooveel mogelyk eenvoudige wyze te doen voorzien in de zorg voor zieken en vooral krankzinnigen, hetzy door het laten bouwen van enige kamers, hetzy op enige andere wyze'.

The whole question remained quiescent for a number of years, and it was not until 1875 that the matter was again referred to. On 21 June 1875 the President told the Volksraad that there was a mentally disordered person at Caledonrivier and another at Kroonstad, and asked what provision should be made for looking after them.¹ More debate followed and it was finally decided to appoint a Committee which would draw up plans for a mental hospital at Bloemfontein. The President was empowered to convey any mental patients requiring care from outlying areas to Bloemfontein, and to have them looked after in a Government building or a house especially hired for the purpose.

The members of this Committee were Messrs Peeters, Collins and Steyn, and they issued a public appeal for funds, sending subscription lists to the leading citizens. The two Bloemfontein newspapers — *De Express* and *The Friend* — supported these appeals, while the Municipality donated a piece of land on which an asylum was to be built. This land, for various reasons, however, could not be made use of, so patients continued to be treated in a building rented by the Government.

By 1881 the available accommodation was overtaxed, and it became necessary to consider the erection of a building especially designed as a lunatic asylum. The building plans were delayed by financial stringency, but in 1883-84 the first building was constructed at a cost of £4 503. In later years other buildings were gradually added.

When the Free State was occupied by the British during the Anglo-Boer War a Commission of Inquiry was set up to investigate all state-aided Government institutions in Bloemfontein. The Report stated with regard to the Lunatic Asylum that: 'The present Administration had expended on this Institution between March 1900 and the end of April 1901 the sum of £4 164'.

In June 1900 the Military Governor appointed a Committee of Management consisting of Captain B. Burnett-Hitchcock (chairman) and Messrs J. G. Fraser, M. Anderson, E. E. Watkeys, Dr J. W. Dagleish and Dr B. O. Kellner.

This military control was followed by a short period of Crown Colony rule which came to an end with Union in 1910. During this period a special Ordinance vested the control of the hospital in a Board appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor.² At this stage too, the part-time medical officer, Dr Kellner, was replaced by a full-time physician-superintendent.

After Union the hospital continued to expand, and new buildings were erected as the existing accommodation became overstrained. The influenza epidemic of 1918 was a very trying time for the institution. Among the White staff of 64 there were 51 cases of influenza, with 6 deaths, including the matron. Out of 41 non-White attendants, 32 contracted the disease and 2 died. The very depleted staff had to cope with 83 White patients and 201 non-White patients with influenza, of whom 13 Whites and 28 non-Whites died.

In spite of these difficulties the Bloemfontein Mental Hospital grew steadily and new villas had to be built to satisfy the increasing demand for accommodation. But the number of patients always grew more rapidly than the beds available, so that with the years overcrowding increased. During the war years (1939-1945) the problem was accentuated by increased shortage of staff. Many male nurses went on active service, while the number of women pupil nurses dropped greatly because of the competition of the army, war industries etc., and even the lowering of the educational entrance level from Standard VII to VI did not overcome the difficulty. Nor did the end of the war bring immediate relief, and even in the 1950s this hospital, along with many others, was still suffering from severe staff shortages. According to the latest available report of the Commissioner for Mental Health, the hospital had a total of 301 posts in 1969, of which all but 8 were filled, although 173 of the posts were held by temporary staff.

BUILDING AND GROUNDS

The patients were first accommodated in a building rented by the Republican Government. In 1875 a special building was considered, and according to *The Friend* of 25 July

1875 prizes of £20 and £5 were offered for the best designs for a lunatic asylum—an amount considered deplorably low in view of the importance of the matter.

By 1881 the necessity for a special building was obvious, and on Friday 20 May 1881 the Volksraad considered 2 tenders for the erection of a 'Staatshospitaal en Krankzinnigen Gesticht'. The tenders were for £14 300 and £13 500 respectively, and such large sums were considered far beyond the means of the young Republic. After heated discussion, the usual parliamentary way out of the difficulty was found by a motion that 'De verdere behandeling dezer aangelegenheid word uitgesteld tot de eerstvolgende jaarlyksche zitting'.

The first building was finally erected and paid for by the OFS Government in 1883-84. In 1890 non-White quarters were added, while in 1898-99 a wing for women was built. In 1902 a section for White men and administrative offices were built, and in 1917 a new non-White hospital was erected and the old section reconverted for use by Whites.³

About 1910 a block called 'Rosebank' was built for private paying patients and was used as such till 1918. This building is now used as an occupational therapy centre for men.

In 1918 the following buildings and alterations were completed: Villa A for 38 White women, Villa B for another 38 White women; the conversion of the old non-White section into 3 villas for 109 White men, new kitchens, laundry, general bathroom and stores; and an administrative block containing offices and quarters for an assistant physician.

In the interval between the two World Wars an admission block for men and a block for old men were put up, as well as another ward for women and a Nurses' Home. Since the end of World War II a number of houses for medical officers have been constructed.

The most interesting building used by the mental hospital is the Fort, which is the criminal section for White men. It is situated in Monument Road, about a kilometre from the main hospital. It was taken over for its present purpose in 1916 when the use of Robben Island as a mental hospital was about to be terminated. It is the oldest building in Bloemfontein and of great historic interest. A plaque placed on it by the Historical Monuments Commission reads:

QUEEN'S FORT

This Fort was erected after the battle of Boomplaats by the British Resident Major H. D. Warden in 1848. Four nine-pounders were mounted inside. Here the flag of the Voortrekkers, the Batavian flag, was hoisted on 29 March 1854, and the new Free State Republican Flag on 23 February 1857.

In Republican days the Fort was the headquarters of the State Artillery, while after the Anglo-Boer War it was used by the military and the police. The building is surrounded by a sloping rectangular wall of vast thickness, and a terrace on top of the wall commands a view of the whole town. Just to the right of the entrance is an old ship's gun dated 1617, with the monogram J. R.

(Jacobus Rex) on it. It must originally have come from an English ship during the days of James I, but how it came to be in its present situation is a mystery which even the Orange Free State Archivist is unable to solve.

The original buildings were erected in 1883 on ground which was a free and unconditional gift to the Government by the Bloemfontein Municipality. The first ground given was a piece of land appropriately called Bedlam—Transfer No. 28155, registered 9 May 1883. In 1892 and 1898 further grants were made. In 1915 the Municipality again donated 77 morgen, while 9 morgen were taken over from the police.

The development of the grounds began at an early stage, largely because the medical officer, Dr Kellner, believed strongly in the efficacy of work as a curative agent in mental disorder. In 1895 he reported that the patients had planted a large orchard and vegetable garden, and had built a big dam.⁴ To counteract any possible impression that the patients were overworked, he adds in his report that one day a week was put aside 'for playing cricket and other games'.

In 1918 the Superintendent reported that the garden produced 121 832 pounds of mixed vegetables, valued at £500/13/6. The laying-out of the grounds and tree-planting had been actively pursued during that year.

In more recent years the hospital bred a herd of prize Friesland cattle which were famous all over the country, and won numerous prizes at agricultural shows. In 1943 it was second in the Orange Free State in the Government milk recording scheme, and produced 276 100 pints of milk. This herd was later transferred to the Witrand Institution at Potchefstroom in the Transvaal.

Among other fairly recent developments there has been the laying out of extensive playing-fields, a golf course, and a beautiful swimming bath.

FINANCIAL

The first building in 1883 cost £4 503. Non-White wards in 1890 cost £1 140. A house for the superintendent in 1893 cost £887. The average grant from the Republican Government was £3 000 per annum. These figures are quoted for comparison with today's astronomical building costs.

Some interesting figures are given in the early annual reports. Thus in 1889 the medical officer received £5 per month, while the chief attendant, Mr Adcock, received £10 per month, but had the useful perquisite of supplying the patients with food at 2/6d per day. The total cost of running the institution that year was £660/9/0 and by 1918 had risen to £25 948—a nett daily cost per patient of 2/2d. In 1944-45 the cost was £91 450, and in 1951-52 £191 660—the hospital had not increased in size. One shudders to think what the cost is now.

PATIENTS

Interesting items, throwing light on the clinical side, appear in the old annual reports. The earliest available report—1888-89—mentions that a patient spoke for the

first time for years on February 23, and thereafter never spoke again. Another died that year of 'verswering in zyne harsens'.

Dr Kellner was strongly opposed to all forms of avoidable force in the treatment of patients, and mentions in 1898 that his treatment was based on the 'no restraint system' a phrase which also appears in English in the Transvaal reports so it must have been a widespread principle at the time.

The hospital grew rapidly in size. The number of patients rose from 10 in 1889 to 89 in 1898. In 1918 it was 576, in 1923 it was 1 026, and in 1950 it reached 1 933. The latest figures for 1969 are 1 636 reflecting the effect of the new psychotropic drugs.

The 1897 report gives an interesting analysis of the nationality of the patients. The total of 81 included '30 Afrikaaners, 2 Duitschers, 4 Engelschen, 1 Belgier, 1 Russ, 24 Kaffers and 4 Hottentotten'.

The diagnoses of mental diseases include some terms which sound strange to modern ears. In 1897 they included dementia hysterica, dementia phthisica, and melancholia attonita. Of the 81 patients 16 were diagnosed as paranoic—an impossible proportion which probably included paranoid states and paranoid schizophrenia. The high proportion of imbeciles, 19 out of 81, disturbed Dr Kellner. He attributed them to marriage between blood relatives and called for legislation to ban such marriages.

STAFF

The first medical man mentioned in connection with the hospital was Dr C. J. G. Krause, who signed the 'Rapport van den Geneesheer van het Krankzinnigen Gesticht te Bloemfontein over den toestand der Patienten gedurende het dienstjaar eindigende met den 28sten Februarie 1889'.

He was soon followed by Dr B. O. Kellner who was still the medical officer in 1900 when the British authorities took over, and remained Chief Medical Officer until 1905 when Dr E. W. D. Swift became the first full-time medical superintendent. He held office until 1923 when Dr H. C. Watson took over and carried on until 1941. He was succeeded by Dr J. C. Twomey (1941-1943), Dr I. R. Vermooten (1943-48), and Dr T. E. Cheze-Brown (1948-52). More recent superintendents have been Dr D. S. Huskisson and Dr K. B. Wright.

As in the other provinces, the Oranje Hospital has now been linked with the University of the Orange Free State. The recently appointed professor of psychiatry in the young medical school in Bloemfontein, Dr J. H. K. Harms, is clinical head of the Oranje Hospital. There will also be a superintendent for administration. The Oranje will no doubt proceed to develop all those facilities necessary for a modern mental hospital.

LEGAL ASPECTS

Lunacy administration in Republican days was governed by the 'Wet over Krankzinnigheid' No. 4 of 1893.⁵ This apparently only codified existing practice. Its main provisions were: A Committee of five, appointed by the

President, governed the Asylum and drew up regulations for its control. For admission, certificates from a landdrost and 2 medical men were necessary, and on these the President, in consultation with the Committee, issued a reception order. In criminal cases the jury could bring in a verdict of 'Guilty but Insane'.

The laws against ill-treatment of patients were severe.

The two earliest medical certificates extant are preserved in the Bloemfontein Archives. They read as follows:

Heilbron, O.F.S.
Jan. 17, 1889.

We, the undersigned, certify that we have examined the Kaffir named Jack and find him to be of unsound mind.

Charles H. Blood M.B.
J. Evered Clayton
District Surgeons.

Heilbron
Dec. 31, 1888.

I, as acting District Surgeon, Heilbron, have been requested by the Landdrost to examine Kaffir 'Jack' in the goal here, and I find him insane and is (*sic*) quite capable of doing himself or others bodily harm, and I think him a fit subject for a Lunatic Asylum,

Chas. H. Blood M.B.

(originals both in English).

After the British occupation the original act was replaced by OFS Ordinance No. 13 of 1906. The chief innovations were:

1. Urgent cases could be admitted on one medical certificate together with an application form completed by a relative.

2. The magistrate could detain a person found wandering about at large and deemed a lunatic, for one month. The same held good for any person not under proper care.

3. Provision was made for the care and administration of a lunatic's property.

4. Voluntary boarders could be admitted and could leave on giving 3 days' notice.

5. Mechanical restraint was strictly limited and controlled.

6. An asylum Board with wide powers was instituted. It could make rules for (*a*) the guidance of visitors; (*b*) payment for and accommodation of patients; (*c*) duties and discipline of officials, and (*d*) the internal management of the Asylum.

This is noticeably at variance with the limited powers of present-day Hospital Boards. The Ordinance remained in force until it was replaced by the Mental Disorders Act of 1916.

REFERENCES

1. Hoogedelen Volksraad (1875): Notulen der Verrichtingen, p. 427.
2. Orange Free State Ordinance No. 13, 1906.
3. Annual Reports, Physician Superintendent, Bloemfontein Mental Hospital.
4. Rapport van het Krankzinnigen Gesticht te Bloemfontein over den toestand der Patienten gedurende het dienstjaar 1895 (in OFS Archives).
5. Notulen der Verrichtingen van den Hoogedelen Volksraad (1893): Appendix — Wet No. 4 over Krankzinnigheid.