

Casebook A of the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum: patient demographics and diagnoses as a reflection of early colonial Queensland

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Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum, the original institution established for the care of the mentally unwell within the colony of Queensland, continues today as the Park Centre for Mental Health. Woogaroo's initial record is Casebook A which documents, following the opening of the asylum on 10 January 1865, those patients admitted between 1865 and mid-1869.¹ The casebook, now digitised and held at the Queensland State Archives (QSA), was accessed with the permission of Queensland Health in order to better understand the asylum and the demographics, treatment, and care of its first patients. This paper sets out that information in order to illustrate how it can inform multiple perspectives of early Queensland history, including its medical knowledge, racial and gendered viewpoints, and the place of the asylum in its legal and political frameworks.

Casebook A is a large volume, with each facing, formatted page devoted to a single patient with their name, age, sex, admission date, form of disease, causes, disease duration, social state, occupation, last residence, and dates of discharge or death, as well as notes regarding admission history, clinical progress, and treatments undertaken. Few patient records are complete, with many entries having no history, demographic detail, treatment information, or potential reasons for admission to Woogaroo. Each entry was written in ink in a cursive script.² For the purposes of this research, the data was transcribed into categorised digital Excel files.³

Prior to the construction of Woogaroo, patients were usually confined in a rudimentary system of gaols and hospitals before being transferred to institutions in New South Wales. After the colony of Queensland was established in 1859, patients were remanded within the Brisbane Gaol.⁴ Ostensibly, Dr Kearsey Cannan, the gaol surgeon, was operating a separate Lunatic Asylum within the gaol. This situation continued through Queensland's initial years until, after several government committees, publicised mishaps including erroneous admissions, and international pressure, the government

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Goodna Asylum (formerly Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum), 1938. (State Library of Queensland)

decreed the need to found a Queensland-based asylum.⁵ Thus, on 10 January 1865, 65 patients were transferred from their previous confinement within the Brisbane Gaol to the newly built Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum under the care and supervision of Cannan, who became its first Surgeon-Superintendent and one of the most likely contributors to Casebook A. This marked the establishment of an institution that was for many years the cornerstone of mental healthcare in Queensland.⁶

Patient details and demographics

Casebook A lists 395 patients, with the first 65 records noted as those transferred from the Brisbane Gaol to the asylum in January 1865.⁷ The final patient record in Casebook A arrived on 4 September 1869 with further Woogaroo casebook records to be found in other QSA files. As demonstrated by Table 1, there were more than twice as many male as female admissions during the first five years of Woogaroo, with the bulk of the admissions in 1865 and 1866.

Table 1: Male, female, and total admissions to the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum from 1865 to 1869, as recorded in Casebook A.

Admission year	Male	Female	Total
1865	99	34	133
1866	73	29	102
1867	46	19	65
1868	49	20	69
1869	15	11	26
Total	282	113	395

Between 1865 and 1869, there were 282 male and 113 female admissions (total 395) with male and female patients averaging 35 and 30 years-of-age respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Patient ages upon admission to Woogaroo.

	Male	Female
Youngest age (years)	16	9
Oldest age (years)	70	60
Not recorded	16	9
Average age (years)	35	30

Of the patients with social status recorded, men were more likely than women to be single. Although a number had children upon admission to Woogaroo (Table 3), the majority of patient records in this section were incomplete.

Table 3: Social status of patients admitted to Woogaroo.

Social status	Male	Female	Total
Single	69	20	89
Married	37	36	73
Widowed	6	2	8
Had children	30	34	64
Not recorded	170	55	225

Of the 282 men recorded in Casebook A (Table 4), most were employed in agricultural (69) or labour-intensive pursuits (83). Some were professionals, while others were employed in commercial or domestic activities. Shepherds and labourers were the two most common professions.

Table 4: Employment status of male patients admitted to Woogaroo.

Professional and commercial	17	Agricultural	69	Domestic	18	Labour intensive	83	Other	95
Gentleman	1	Bullock driver	2	Baker	2	Bricklayer	1	Police constable	2
Accountant	1	Bushman	9	Baker's boy	1	Brickmaker	2	Prisoner	3
Chemist	1	Bushman, publican	1	Butcher	1	Builder	1	Not recorded	90
Clerk	4	Dairyman	1	Butcher's boy	2	Cabinet maker	1		
Commercial traveller	2	Farmer	5	Domestic servant	1	Carpenter	6		
Cotton trader	1	Gardener	1	Publican	6	Chainman	1		
Engineer	1	Grazier	1	Servant	1	Digger	2		
Merchant	2	Groom	1	Store-keeper	1	Gold digger	4		
Messenger, audit officer	1	Sheep overseer	1	Tailor	2	Labourer	50		
Photographer	1	Shepherd	42	Watch-maker	1	Lumberer	2		
Printer	1	Shepherd, former engineer	1			Miner	2		
Solicitor	1	Squatter	2			Painter	2		
		Station worker	1			Painter, glazer	1		
		Stockman	1			Plate layer	1		
						Sailmaker	1		
						Sailor	2		
						Ship steward	1		
						Smith	1		
						Stone-breaker	1		
						Tin plate worker	1		

Three-quarters of the female patients had no employment recorded (Table 5). For those who did, most were in domestic activities while others were defined by their husband's employment.

Table 5: Employment status of female patients admitted to Woogaroo.

Domestic	30	Wife of:	7	Other	76
Barmaid cook	1	Chinaman	1	Not recorded	76
Cook	1	Coachbuilder	1		
Domestic servant	15	Farmer	1		
Farm servant	1	Poundkeeper	1		
Immigrant	2	Publican	1		
Nurse	1	Shepherd	2		
Prostitute	1				
Seamstress	1				
Servant	5				
Shop girl	1				
Washerwoman	1				

Regarding the origins of the patients, most came from the major population centres of Queensland at that time, as well as from its medical and legal institutions (Table 6).

Table 6: Recent origins of patients admitted to Woogaroo.

Recent Origin	Male	Female	Total
Not recorded	104	37	141
Brisbane	22	18	40
Brisbane Bench	6	7	13
Brisbane Hospital	4	2	6
Brisbane Benevolent Asylum	2	0	2
Immigration Ship	3	5	8
Colony of Queensland	2	0	2
Bush	7	0	7
Outback Station	3	1	4
Itinerant	3	0	3
Banana	0	2	2
Bowen	3	1	4
Caboolture	1	0	1
Clermont	1	0	1

Dalby	1	0	1
Darling Downs	2	1	3
Gayndah	1	0	1
Gladstone	2	0	2
Gympie	5	2	7
Ipswich	5	11	16
Ipswich Bench	10	2	12
Ipswich Hospital	1	0	1
Ipswich Gaol	0	1	1
Logan River	2	0	2
Mackay	0	1	1
Maryborough	4	0	4
Maryborough Bench	1	2	3
Moggill	1	0	1
Nanango	1	0	1
Nerang Creek	1	0	1
Pine River	1	1	2
Rockhampton	31	8	39
Rockhampton Bench	5	0	5
Roma	2	0	2
Story Creek	1	0	1
Taroom	1	0	1
Toowoomba	4	5	9
Toowoomba Bench	9	1	10
Toowoomba Gaol	1	0	1
Wallumbilla	1	0	1
Taroom	1	0	1
Warwick Hospital	0	1	1

Reflecting the primary sources of migration to colonial Australia, most patients were originally from the British Isles (Table 7). However, there were a number from continental Europe, India, China, and the colonies of Australia. One Aboriginal man was registered in Casebook A.

Table 7: Nativity of patients admitted to Woogaroo.

'Of Late' Origin	Male	Female	Total
Not recorded	96	42	138
Aboriginal	1	0	1
Brisbane	0	1	1
Ipswich	0	1	1
New South Wales	1	1	2
England	53	20	73
Wales	2	1	3
Scotland	25	7	32
Ireland	59	32	91
France	1	0	1
Italy	1	0	1
Gibraltar	1	0	1
Germany	26	8	34
Poland	1	0	1
Norway	1	0	1
St. Domingo	1	0	1
India	1	0	1
China	12	0	12

Patient diagnoses and reasons for admission

Casebook A records individual diagnoses for almost 300 of the male and female patients admitted to the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum between 1865 and 1869 (Table 8). The major diagnostic categories included dementia, mania, melancholia, amentia, and imbecility. Some of the entries are sub-categorised.

Table 8: Diagnoses of male and female patients admitted to Woogaroo.

Diagnosis	Male	Female	Total
Total recorded	218	80	298
Not recorded – see Table 9	66	31	97
Dementia	83	15	98
Paralytic Dementia	1	0	1
Mania	32	17	49
Acute Mania	2	2	4
Delusional Mania	2	1	3

Dypsomania	4	0	4
Hereditary Mania	1	0	1
Hysterical Mania	1	3	4
Kleptomania	1	0	1
Religious Mania	2	1	3
Suicidal Mania	2	1	3
Violent Mania	2	2	4
Mania (no symptoms)	1	0	1
Monomania	7	4	11
Religious Monomania	6	2	8
Melancholia	18	14	32
Melancholia and Febrile Debility	1	0	1
Religious Melancholia	1	1	2
Amentia	18	10	28
Hereditary Amentia	1	0	1
Imbecility	13	4	17
Delirium Tremens	6	0	6
Debility	1	2	3
Paralysis	2	0	2
Dying State	4	0	4
Not Fit For Lunatic Asylum	2	0	2
Not Insane – Drink	1	0	1
Poor Health	1	0	1
Pregnant	0	2	2

For those with a recorded diagnosis, Table 9 summarises reasons for their admission to Woogaroo, the major categories being associated with delusional, strange behaviour, or the effects of alcohol.

Table 9: Associated reasons for admission to Woogaroo.

Reason	Male	Female	Total
Not recorded	14	3	17
Age	2	0	2
Amenorrhoea	0	2	2
Delusional, Incoherent, or Strange Behaviour	10	4	14
Domestic Irritation and Disorderly Life	1	1	2

Effects of Drink and Intemperance	19	4	23
Emaciation	1	3	4
Epilepsy	2	1	3
Excitable, Irritable, and Violent	5	2	7
Extreme Debility	1	1	2
Fever	1	3	4
Financial Trouble	1	0	1
Melancholia	2	4	6
Nervous System Injury	1	0	1
Organic Disease, Syphilis	2	0	2
Pregnancy and Childbearing Issues	0	2	2
Prisoners of the Gaol – Escape Attempts	3	1	4
Sun and Exposure	2	0	2
Vegetarian	1	0	1

Casebook A and early colonial Queensland

Casebook histories are an important tool for historical research. Warwick Anderson notes that they can be used to examine both individual patient cases and stories, probe the writer and the institution they support, and reflect representations of medical knowledge and the power of the physician and casebook recorder in a healthcare setting.⁸ As well, casebook histories can support gendered interpretations of mental illness, both in an Australian context as well as in our appreciation of such illnesses in the nineteenth century. Jill Matthews' *Good and Mad Women* notes how there could be multiple interpretations of madness as it applies to women, such as being the antithesis of a 'normal' woman in domestic, respectable, and feminine roles.⁹ Casebook A, and the diagnostic information of Tables 8 and 9 and how they differ between sexes, can be used to support such enquiries into colonial understandings of mental illness, as well as examine the role and knowledge of Cannan himself. Exploring such topics in relation to the first years of colonial Queensland, and the myriad gendered, societal, and medical frameworks through which they can be viewed, demonstrates the value of these casebooks for future research.

Aside from more nuanced investigations, casebooks can be used to examine the people and population of the regions their institutions serve. Casebook A demonstrates that the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum was a central body within Queensland. Table 6, depicting 'recent origins' of the patients, reflects that the asylum was the endpoint of a sophisticated system of hospitals, gaols,

and courts that stretched throughout the colony, and was supported by legal, political, and medical frameworks that facilitated the need for transport and admission of patients in need of its treatment. Even after its physical separation from the Brisbane Gaol, the penal and the asylum systems were intertwined as many people were committed to Woogaroo after arraignment before magistrates and legal officers. The Central Police Reports in the *Brisbane Courier* shared these admissions with the public, and Cannan notified the government and press with regular updates of patient numbers and statistics.¹⁰ The Queensland government subsequently formalised the admission procedures to Woogaroo in the 1869 *Lunacy Act*, with general instructions that at least two Justices of the Peace, together with separate recommendations of at least two medical professionals, were to assess and give permission for confinement in the asylum.¹¹

Casebook A can also serve to illuminate the diagnostic classification of mental illness that was available to the medical profession in the 1860s, and specifically to Cannan and his patients at Woogaroo. The three most common diagnoses were ‘mania,’ ‘melancholia,’ and ‘dementia’ (Table 8). The key attributes of mania included overactivity, excitement, and spontaneous violence; possessive of a degree of periodicity and variation; and closely linked to delusions and hallucinations as well as to the moral and physical cleanliness of the patient.¹² Melancholia was the condition of mental illness associated with sadness, despondency, and fear without any cause; was potentially cyclical; and was something qualitatively different from mere sorrow.¹³ Dementia marked the radical separation of mind from body into madness, lunacy, and insanity, and was regarded much differently from the present-day concept of a physiological, age-related cognitive brain disease.¹⁴ Through these major categories and the various subtypes and individual specific diagnoses, Casebook A demonstrates the power of these labels, its effects on patients, and how the medical profession perceived mental illness. Furthermore, the place of Woogaroo in Queensland society can be extrapolated. For example, patients were admitted to the institution with ‘hereditary amentia,’ in a ‘dying state’ or in ‘poor health,’ or indeed for being ‘pregnant.’ This record emphasises Woogaroo’s importance to the medical and social fabric of Queensland.

The period of 1865 to 1869 was punctuated by several government commissions dedicated to particular aspects and incidents at the asylum. They have been reviewed by Wendy Madsen and Julie Bradshaw’s investigation of gender and domesticity at Woogaroo, as well as Cannan’s politically ignominious removal from his post as Surgeon-Superintendent in 1869.¹⁵ Further avenues of research and investigation are apparent. For example, the story and treatment of the lone Aboriginal man would help to inform an

understanding of race, mental illness, and institutional structures in early colonial Queensland. Moreover, a deeper investigation of the free-text additions in the medical categories of Casebook A, the comments regarding treatment, prognosis, and care with respect to individual patients, would help to place Woogaroo in the mental illness genre of the nineteenth century.

Endnotes

- 1 Queensland State Archives [QSA], ITM 292592, Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum, Casebook A. Male and Female Admissions, 5 November 1860 – 4 September 1869.
- 2 QSA, ITM 292592, Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum, Casebook A.
- 3 Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA.
- 4 RA Patrick, *History of Health and Medicine in Queensland*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1987; RL Evans, *Charitable Institutions of the Queensland Government to 1919*, Brisbane, The University of Queensland, 1970.
- 5 M Finnane, 'Wolston Park Hospital, 1865-2001: a Retrospect', *Queensland Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2008, pp. 39-58; 'Public Works', *Brisbane Courier [BC]*, 16 April 1864.
- 6 Patrick, *History of Health and Medicine in Queensland*; S Garton, *Medicine and Madness: a Social History of Insanity in New South Wales 1880-1940*, Kensington, New South Wales University Press, 1988; J Bradshaw and W Madsen, 'Gender and Domesticity in Woogaroo Asylum 1865-1869', in B Knight, B Walker-Gibbs, J Delamoire, eds, *Research into 21st Century Communities*, Teneriffe, Post Pressed, 2007; 'Telegraphic Correspondence, BC, 14 January 1865.
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- 8 W Anderson, 'The Case of the Archive', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2013, pp. 532-47.
- 9 J Matthews, *Good and Mad Women*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1984; C Coleborne, D MacKinnon, eds, *Madness in Australia: Histories, Heritage and the Asylum*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2003.
- 10 K Cannan, 'Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum', *BC*, 28 September 1865; 'Central Police Court', *BC*, 18 April 1864.
- 11 *Lunacy Act 1869*, (Qld) Vic. No. 12.
- 12 E Hare, 'The Two Manias: a Study of the Evolution of the Modern Concept of Mania', *British Journal of Psychiatry: the Journal of Mental Science*, vol. 138, no. 2, 1981, pp. 89-99; S Hill and RD Laugharne, 'Mania, Dementia and Melancholia in the 1870s: admissions to a Cornwall Asylum', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, vol. 96, no. 7, 2003, pp. 361-3.
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- 14 Hill and Laugharne, 'Mania, Dementia and Melancholia in the 1870s', pp. 361-3; G Berrios, "'Depressive pseudodementia" or "Melancholic dementia": a 19th century view', *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry*, vol. 48, no. 5, 1985, pp. 393-400.
- 15 Bradshaw and Madsen, 'Gender and Domesticity in Woogaroo Asylum 1865-1869'; 'Papers in Reference to an Inquiry with Regard to a Charge of Improper

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