

## **2007-2008 ONTARIO GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP – *Plan of Study***

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My Ph.D. thesis will focus on the history of Asylums for the Insane in Ontario from 1850 to 1900, continuing the research I began at the M.A. level. While my M.A. thesis studied women patients treated at the Kingston Asylum from 1878-1906, it is now my intention to do a comparative study of the staff that worked in Ontario's four major asylums at Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton and London. I intend to explore the medical and administrative ideas of asylum physicians as well as the working lives of attendants and general labourers. This will enable me to identify factors contributing to positive or negative environments for both employees and patients, and will indicate the way the behaviours and attitudes of asylum staff affected treatment and patient care during the period.

I am presently in the second year of my Ph.D. program at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Dr. Wendy Mitchinson. I have recently completed my major field reading seminar in Canadian History and this year (2006-2007) I will complete two minor fields in the History of Science/Medicine and Gender History to complement my interest in asylums and psychiatry. The thesis research will formally begin in the summer of 2007.

The majority of the required primary source material is located at the Archives of Ontario in Toronto. Collections are available for each major asylum, containing information regarding their patients, finances, and daily activities. The Annual Reports of the government asylum inspector provide details of changes to asylum properties and facilities, as well as commentary on the condition of the institutions. Correspondence relating to matters of staffing and asylum structure can also be found in the papers of the inspector, available at the provincial archives. Additional writings by a number of asylum physicians are located at the Media Commons library at the University of Toronto.

The introduction to the thesis will offer a brief history of each asylum, comparing their physical size, population, and facilities. This information will provide sufficient background to later compare the circumstances of the various categories of employees in the body of the thesis. The first section will study the medical superintendents who were the asylums' head administrators and physicians, analysing their medical practices and conceptualizations of asylum management. It will assess the way these psychiatrists put theories into practice at their respective institutions, and how patient care and the working conditions of other employees were influenced as a result. The second chapter will look at asylum attendants providing daily patient care, investigating the circumstances through which they came to work in asylums to determine whether their employment was by choice or a lack of alternative positions. I will then study their working conditions at the four asylums and assess the extent to which caregivers directly or indirectly affected patient treatment and rehabilitation. The third chapter will study other general labour positions using government reports and the Inspector's Correspondence to track the variety of positions and to gain insight into the numerous skills required to operate an asylum. As with the attendants, I will attempt to gather information about the working lives of the staff in these positions and their reasons for working at an asylum.

Since most asylum studies to date have focussed on medical theories, techniques and patient experiences, it is my intention that this thesis will introduce additional factors influencing patient treatment. It will also contribute to the literature on labour history, since little has been published on the Canadian medical workers who were not doctors. Many of the historical topics addressed, such as workers' safety, hours of work, staff-patient interactions, and professional training, are also of significance to our current mental healthcare system, demonstrating the continuing relevance of studying these issues.