

## Education, Health and Welfare – Mental Health Records

Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) holds extensive records from many of the institutions which have provided some form of care or control over people with a mental illness and people with an intellectual disability. Most of these records are clinical records, documenting the treatment of individuals admitted to mental institutions.

As the records clearly demonstrate, medical and societal attitudes towards the treatment of people with a mental illness or an intellectual disability have changed enormously since the first institution was opened at Yarra Bend in 1848. It was not until the 1880s that any distinction was made between those termed "lunatics" (people with a mental illness) and "imbeciles" and "idiots" (people with an intellectual disability). Victoria's lunatic asylums were also used for the containment of inebriates until the late 1880s when separate licensed retreats were established.

### Institutions for which records are held by Public Record Office Victoria:

- Ararat** Asylum/Hospital for the Insane/Mental Hospital – [VA 2841](#)
- Ballarat** Asylum/Hospital for the Insane/Mental Hospital – [VA 2844](#)
- Beechworth** Asylum/Hospital for the Insane/Mental/Psychiatric Hospital – [VA 2842](#)
- Belmont** Licensed House – [VA 2854](#)
- Bendigo** Receiving Ward – [VA 2862](#)
- Brightside** Inebriate Retreat – [VA 2850](#)
- Cloverdale** Licensed House – [VA 2855](#)
- Collingwood** Asylum – [VA 2851](#)
- Cremorne**
- Glen Holme** Licensed House – [VA 2924](#)
- Hillcrest** Licensed House – [VA 2859](#)
- Janefield** Colony/Training Centre – [VA 2847](#)
- Kew** Asylum/ Hospital for the Insane/Mental/Psychiatric Hospital – [VA 2840](#)
- Kew** Idiot Asylum/Children's Cottages – [VA 2852](#)
- Landcox** Licensed House – [VA 2925](#)
- Lara** Inebriate Retreat – [VA 2849](#)
- Merton** Licensed House – [VA 2858](#)
- Mont Park** Hospital for the Insane/Mental/Psychiatric Hospital – [VA 2846](#)
- Mt Ida** Licensed House – [VA 2857](#)
- Northcote** Inebriate Asylum – [VA 2853](#)
- Pleasant View** Licensed House/Receiving House – [VA 2848](#)
- Royal Park** Receiving House/Hospital for the Insane/Mental/Psychiatric Hospital – [VA 2845](#)
- St Helens/Pleasant View** Licensed House/ Receiving house – [VA 2848](#)
- Sunbury** Asylum/Hospital for the Insane/Mental Hospital/Training Centre – [VA 2843](#)
- Sunnyside** Licensed House – [VA 2860](#)
- The Tofts** Licensed House – [VA 2856](#)
- Travancore** Special School/Development Centre/Psychiatric Development Centre/Child and Family Centre – [VA 2861](#)
- Yarra Bend** Asylum/Hospital for the Insane – [VA 2839](#)

### Types of Records Held

Most of the records of mental health institutions held by PROV were required by law to be created and maintained in a certain format. Listed below are some types of mental health records held by PROV which were common to all or most institutions and which are of most interest to family historians.

Admission Warrants which are the official documents authorising a person's committal to an asylum. Registers of Patients/Admission Registers in which the clerk of the asylum had to enter details of the patient being admitted. (See Online Records below).

Case Books (to 1912) and Patient Clinical Notes (from 1912) contain details of each patient admitted and were periodically updated to record the patients condition and treatment. (See Online Records).

Annual and Quinquennial Examination Registers record the regular medical evaluations of patient health for government reporting.

Trial Leave Registers record dates and periods of trial leave from asylums granted to patients.

Discharge Registers record the discharge, removal or escape of patients from asylum custody.

Nominal Registers of Patients are alphabetical listings of patients which provide access to Admission Registers, Case Books and Admission Warrants.

## Online Records

The following institutions have had record series digitised:

Institution	Series	
<a href="#">Ararat VA 2841</a>	VPRS 7427/P1	<a href="#">Nominal Register of Patients</a>
<a href="#">Ballarat VA 2844</a>	VPRS 7426/ P1	<a href="#">Nominal Register of Patients (Ballarat)</a>
	VPRS 7428/P1	<a href="#">Nominal Register of Patients (Ballarat/Sunbury)</a>
	VPRS 8236/P1	<a href="#">Register of Patients (Ballarat/Sunbury)</a>
<a href="#">Beechworth VA 2842</a>	VPRS 7395/P1	<a href="#">Case Books of Male Patients</a>
	VPRS 7396/P1	<a href="#">Case Books of Female Patients</a>
<a href="#">Bendigo VA 2862</a>	VPRS 7493/P1	<a href="#">Registers of Patients</a>
<a href="#">Collingwood VA 2851</a>	VPRS 7721/P1	<a href="#">Register of Patients</a>
Cremorne	VPRS 7446/P1	<a href="#">Alphabetical List of Patients in Asylums</a> (a series of volumes, includes Cremorne patients)
<a href="#">Kew VA 2840</a>	VPRS 7425/P1	<a href="#">Nominal Register of Patients</a> (includes patients at Kew Cottages <a href="#">VA 2852</a> )
	VPRS 7690/P1	<a href="#">Nominal Register of Patients</a>
	VPRS 7680/P1	<a href="#">Register of Patients</a>
<a href="#">Royal Park VA 2845</a>	VPRS 7423/P1	<a href="#">Nominal Register of Patients</a>
<a href="#">Sunnyside VA 2860</a>	VPRS 7490/P1	<a href="#">Asylum Records</a>
<a href="#">Yarra Bend VA 2839</a>	VPRS 7422/P1	<a href="#">Index to Male and Female Case Books</a>

## Access to mental health records

Because of the sensitive and personal information contained in the records, some, including almost all clinical records are closed to public access for many years after their creation. This means that only nineteenth and some early twentieth century records are currently available.

## Other sources of information about patients in psychiatric institutions

### [Records of the Chief Secretary \(VA 475\)](#)

There are many records within the Chief Secretary's correspondence system which provide information about the administration and staffing of asylums and about the admission, treatment and discharge of patients for the period 1851 to 1905.

### [Records of the Master in Equity/ Master in Lunacy \(VA 2624\)](#)

From 1851 until the 1940s the estates of people deemed to be insane were controlled and administered by the Master-in-Equity. Some of the records created by this office are held in PROV.

### [Inquest Records \(see \[PROVguide 71\]\(#\)\)](#)

Every patient of a mental institution who died while in care was the subject of an inquest. PROV holds records of inquests conducted in Victoria since the 1840s.