

Central State Hospital. Indiana's first state psychiatric institution, located on West Washington Street in Indianapolis. In 1844, the famous reformer Dorothea Dix inspected almshouses and jails near Indianapolis that housed mentally ill paupers. Her subsequent report helped persuade state legislators to approve funding for a "State Lunatic Asylum" to be located near Indianapolis so that legislators could oversee its operation. Even before its completion in 1848, the new institution's name was changed to the Indiana Hospital for the Insane. When state legislature approved the establishment of three other regional psychiatric institutions in 1889, it became the Central Indiana Hospital; in 1929, its name was changed to Central State Hospital.

The 19th century was a turbulent period for the new institution. Like most such hospitals, Central State was chronically underfunded and poorly staffed. It admitted its first five patients on November 21, 1848, and expanded to 300 within ten years. When the legislature failed to allocate funds for the hospital in 1857, its superintendent, James Athon, sent all of the patients back to their home counties. An appropriation was finally approved that autumn and the hospital reopened. Similar events recurred in 1863-1864 but this time monies for operating expenses were allocated from the general fund of the state and no inmates had to be discharged. Central State lacked a department for women until 1884; that year it also added its first female physician, Sarah Stockton, to the staff.

Nineteenth-century patients were offered a range of therapies. There was an initial commitment to the most popular antebellum treatment, moral therapy, but, as the hospital grew, its doctors increasingly relied on drugs to calm patients and substituted classification by ward for individualized treatment plans. Patient employment in farm and domestic work also was considered therapeutic. In 1885, a new superintendent, William B. Fletcher, burned the hospital's mechanical restraints in a public bonfire; he was subsequently fired and the hospital resumed its reliance on sedatives and restraints to control patients. Fletcher's dismissal suggests the extent to which, during the 1880s, Central State Hospital became a battleground for the partisan politics of the period. Its location in Indianapolis made the institution particularly vulnerable to political pressure. Increasingly, staff positions were awarded for political loyalty rather than professional competence. Superintendents changed with the governor. Eventually, in 1889, the legislature established a bipartisan Board of State Charities to oversee Indiana's benevolent institutions.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Indiana had four mental hospitals—Central (1848), Logansport (1888), Richmond (1890), and Evansville (1890)—scattered geographically so as to meet the needs of the various regions of the state. Central State, with an average population of 1,800, was by far the largest; the others held from 400 to 800 patients. Under the leadership of Superintendent George Edenharter, Central State had established a new pathology department in 1895 which, through its research and lectures, subsequently attracted international attention. But such innovations did not solve the perennial problems of patient abuse, overcrowding, and inadequate therapies. Throughout the 20th century, periodic newspaper exposes shocked politicians and taxpayers but produced few substantive reforms. During the "deinstitutionalization" movement of the 1960s, Central State Hospital discharged many of its long-term patients

and became involved in a broad range of mental health programs. During the early 1990s several patient deaths at the hospital once again brought Central State to public notice, and led to the Bayh administration's decision to close the hospital in 1994.

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