

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane (State Lunatic Asylum)

and/or common Buffalo Psychiatric Center

**2. Location**

street & number 400 Forest Avenue not for publication

city, town Buffalo vicinity of

state New York code county Erie code

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Institution

**4. Owner of Property**

name New York State Office of Mental Health

street & number 44 Holland Avenue

city, town Albany vicinity of state New York 12229

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Erie County Court House

street & number

city, town Buffalo state New York

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Historic American Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1965  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state DC

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

This massive complex was built as the result of an informal competition to select an architect to design the regional state asylum. The city of Buffalo donated the site in 1869 and the board of ten managers appointed by the Governor proceeded in May of the following year to choose Henry Hobson Richardson to be the architect. Andrew Jackson Varner of Rochester was selected to be the supervising architect.

When the first plans were ready, Frederick Law Olmsted, determined the siting of the structures and designed the surrounding grounds (1871). Excavation at the site began in June 1871, the cornerstone being laid on September 18, 1872. By 1880, the Administration Building, Male Wards A, B, C, D, and E (see site plan) and all service buildings were completed. The Female Wards were finished between 1890 and 1900.

The final design was fixed in a meeting in 1871. (A mass of material and 62 sheets of original drawings exist at the Houghton Library at Harvard University.) The building program was slow and complicated by politics and materials changed from quarried stone to brick in the three outermost pavilions for the sake of economy.

The general plan consists of a main central pavilion in front, flanked by receding wards like a V of birds in flight. The wards are T and H-shaped and are connected by quarter-circle galleries. The low service buildings, (heating plant, laundry, green houses, and kitchens), form a subordinate group in the court at the rear. The total cost of the complex up to January, 1880, was \$1,285,785.56.

With its twin towers the administration building dominates the composition. This three-story building over a basement a half level below grade appears emphatically vertical because of its tall towers with their steep hip roofs and round corner turrets. The end bays of the administration building project slightly forward of the central section and are topped with gables, further adding to the verticality of the design.

The central section is marked by the three round arches of the entrance loggia and three dormers, one large and two small, at the attic level. This central pavilion and the two adjoining wards on either side are constructed of brown sandstone in random ashlar....

The wards are all connected by quarter circular passages. Interior features were simple and plain, reflecting the use of the buildings. The total length of the complex was about 2,200 feet.<sup>1</sup>

## 8. Significance

Period	National Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1870–1896      **Builder/Architect** Henry Hobson Richardson

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Buffalo State Hospital is a landmark in the history of American architecture. Not only is it an important transitional building in the developing style of one of our greatest architects, it was carefully sited and landscaped by Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) and Calvert Vaux, the foremost landscape architects of that time.

The hospital is also important in the history of medicine and particularly the case of mental patients.

The new asylum's rambling plan was to conform to the Kirkbride system, so-called after the Philadelphia physician who had invented it earlier in the 19th century. Dr. Thomas Kirkbride was one of the first physicians who treated insanity as an illness. Each pavilion was free standing, connected to the next building by a curved passageway and easily isolated in case of fire by large iron doors. Patients could be classified and placed easily by this plan and the wards, even today, are flooded with light and air. There was also maximum privacy.

Each pavilion provided a home-like atmosphere for the patients, many of whom were assigned private rooms on the north side. Sitting rooms and dining rooms were also included on many floors, and long, well-lit corridors on the south side of each ward served as recreation areas during the day. (The iron porches on the exterior of the buildings are later additions.)<sup>3</sup>

The original petition for more adequate facilities for the insane in western New York was generated in 1864 by two prominent Buffalonians, Dr. James P. White, and Mr. Ambrose Yaw. The county poorhouses were filled with mental patients unless they were considered so seriously ill that they were sent to the only existing state facility at Utica, established in 1843, then directed by the famous Dr. John P. Gray. Gray proposed an asylum for western New York to the state legislature in Albany.

Dr. White had counterparts in other sections of the State. The State Legislature had authorized the construction of four facilities for the insane during the late 1860s and early 1870s. In addition to the Buffalo asylum, the Willard facility at Utica was completed in 1869, the Hudson River asylum (at Poughkeepsie) in 1871, and the Middletown, New York, asylum in 1874.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 59  
Quadrangle name Buffalo Northwest

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	7	6	7	3	0	7	0	1	7	5	5	2	0	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B 

1	7	6	7	3	0	6	0	4	7	5	4	9	0	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

1	7	6	7	2	4	4	0	4	7	5	4	8	9	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

1	7	6	7	2	1	2	0	4	7	5	5	1	9	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Pitts

organization History Division, National Park Service date

street & number 1100 "L" Street NW telephone (202) 343-8172

city or town Washington state DC

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

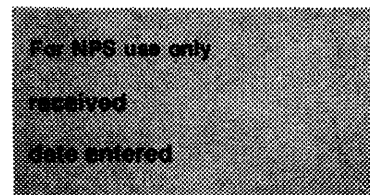
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The central pavilion is 160 by 170 feet. The flanking, receding wards form the V, the distance between the outer wards is 780 feet. The foundations are of local flintstone set in English cement mortar. The central pavilion or Administration Building, as well as Wards A and B and the four flanking wards are built of reddish-brown Medina sandstone that was quarried at Hulberton, Orleans County, New York. The spiraling construction costs in 1872 caused the three outer wards on the east to be built of common brick. This was repeated in 1878 when the outer western wards were constructed.

The interior and exterior walls are loadbearing combined with iron beams and lintels with wooden joists and rafters. Care was taken to use windows with wire grilles that look more like domestic windows than institutional ones.

The steeply pitched roofs are hipped and gabled and are covered with asphalt shingles. The towers have dormer windows for light and air. All buildings have one, two, or three stories, fully screened porches with iron columns, concrete floors, iron railways, and enclosures.

The 3-1/2 story Administration Building, on a raised basement, contains offices, reception rooms, dining room, and other service areas. All ward buildings have similar H-shaped or T-shaped plans with two dormitories, two parlors, two nurses' rooms, two baths, two washrooms, and two clothes rooms. In both the male and female wards, Wards A and B are three-story structures; Wards C and D are two-story structures; and Wards E are one-story structures. Tramways are located in the basements. The main stairway in the Administration Building has a wooden staircase with heavy Eastlake-derived ornament. Other enclosed stairways in the wards have ornamental iron elements. There are completely screened fire escapes at the north end of the center wing of each ward.<sup>2</sup>

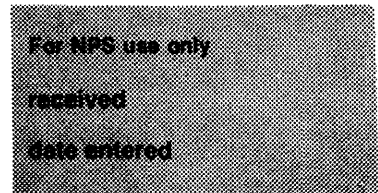
All the doors in the Administration Building are of solid walnut, oak, or maple.

In 1969, the three easternmost ward buildings were demolished. The central administration building continues to be occupied but the wards are currently empty.

The original landscaping and planning were done by Vaux and Olmsted in 1876. Olmsted sited the complex in 1871 when there were 203 acres of farmland surrounding the large complex. Today, the State College of New York at Buffalo is sited on the north and the Albright Knox Art Gallery is located on the east.

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White's continuing local efforts were finally successful in 1869. Early that year, White sent petitions advocating the construction of a Western New York insane asylum to leading medical practitioners in the region. He urged them to obtain signatures of influential citizens in their communities, and then forward these petitions to their representatives in the Legislature.

Not long after the petition drive began, Asher P. Nichols, the State Senator from the Buffalo district, introduced a bill authorizing Governor John T. Hoffman to appoint a five member commission to select a suitable site for an insane asylum in the Eighth Judicial District. In March 1869, Governor Hoffman did appoint the commissioners, White and Gray being among the five.

There was a spirited competition among the communities of Lockport, Batavia, Warsaw, Westfield, Mayville, and Buffalo to be chosen as the location of the asylum. Each community offered various incentives to the State of New York. For example, Buffalo offered 203 acres of land, and guaranteed a "perpetual supply of pure Niagara water." The incentives Buffalo offered, combined with the facts that Buffalo was a major transportation center and had Western New York's largest population, over 100,000 by 1870, made it the Commissioner's choice. The "perpetual supply of pure Niagara water" ended in 1968 when rising water costs made it necessary for the City to begin charging the State.

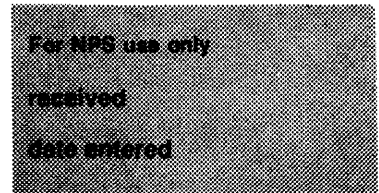
The State Legislature approved Buffalo as the asylum site on April 23, 1870, and authorized Governor Hoffman to appoint a ten member Board of Managers for the Buffalo asylum. Among these ten Board members were White, Gray, Warren, a local newspaper publisher, and Nichols.<sup>4</sup>

When the Board favored the designs of Richardson in February, 1871, it was acknowledged that he was by far the best choice. He also had an advantage over the other competitors in that he had successfully designed a residence (1869) for William Dorsheimer, an important man in both Buffalo and New York State. It was Dorsheimer and Asher P. Nichols who brought Frederick Law Olmsted to Buffalo to design its park and parkway system. Richardson also knew Olmsted prior to his work in Buffalo.

Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) took his undergraduate training at Harvard (class of '59). During the Civil War he studied in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and returned to open an office in New York City that he held in partnership with Charles D. Gambrill (1834-1880), also a Harvard graduate. As his practice increased in upstate New York and New England, he found it expedient to move his offices to Brookline, Massachusetts in 1874. He was supervising the construction of Trinity Church in Boston at that time, his first commission of national significance. His home in Brookline was part of an affluent colony of wealthy and

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intellectual New Englanders who would be instrumental in broadening his circle of clients. It was also in Brookline that Richardson became a colleague, neighbor, and close friend of Frederick Law Olmsted.

The first competition which Richardson won was in 1870 for the Brattle Square Church in Back Bay Boston. The building is Romanesque, not Victorian Gothic -- the first time this historic style appears in his work. At about the time the Brattle Square Church, was being designed a young draftsman entered the New York office, who had also been trained abroad -- Charles Folen McKim. McKim was very familiar with both medieval France and England, and was a trained draftsman who could translate sketches into finished drawings, a very much needed skill in the burgeoning practice Richardson was developing. The association lasted two years. The other great stylistically pivotal structure that came out of the firm at that time was the commission for a large lunatic asylum in Buffalo.

The original concept was French in derivation resembling in scale the Ivry Hospital des Incurables. H. R. Hitchcock observed that the hospital

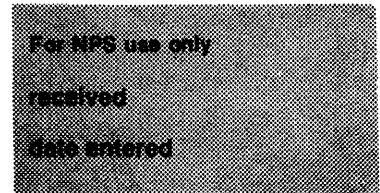
opens the line of monumental designs for utilitarian structures along which Richardson was to advance furthest. The dark rough stone; the great scale; the simple detail largely of structural character and only generically derived from mediaeval precedent; the bold silhouette and the solid mass; the adjustment of the parts of the complex programme, not only in plan, but in an exterior composition that expresses that plan: these are, in the best sense of the word, Richardsonian.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning in early stages with a Victorian motif, the final designs for the hospital show modifications and a simplification and adjustment of scale throughout. Since the evolution of the design took place over a period of years, a clarification of shapes and details finally took on a simpler, more coherent design. Since funds for buildings for public welfare must have been difficult to raise between 1873 and 1878, the complex rose slowly. It was built solidly and plainly of brick, iron, and solid wood. The lengthy building program also benefited Richardson. Since commissions were scarce for American architects during the depression of the 1870's, the Buffalo Asylum was a continuing source of income in lean times.

The Buffalo Asylum is an outstanding example of nineteenth century institutional architecture. It also represents the beginning of Richardson's mature style which shed the revivalism which typified nineteenth-century architecture in America.

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The Buffalo hospital is also the first major work on which Richardson collaborated with the landscape designer, Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted had already had extensive experience in Buffalo, having been commissioned in 1869 to lay out parkways and parks in the expanding north end of the city. On May 14, 1871, Olmsted, Richardson, and Warren (a board member) visited the grounds to locate the buildings. Ground was broken on May 25, 1871, and the structures sited according to Olmsted's plan on the available 203 acres. The northeast-southwest alignment of the buildings was Olmsted's suggestion in order to obtain the greatest amount of light, especially during the winter. In conjunction with his partner, Calvert Vaux, Olmsted also prepared plans for landscaping the grounds, preparing integrated gardens, "airing courts for excitable patients," and "pastured pleasure grounds" within the overall pastoral scheme. Thirty to fifty acres surrounded the buildings providing separate areas for men and women, securely enclosed, "to protect the patients from the gaze and impertinent curiosity of visitors and from the excitement occasioned by their presence in the grounds."<sup>6</sup>

Today, the Olmsted plans are being catalogued by the National Park Service at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

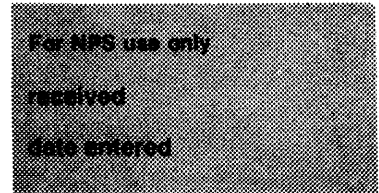
Footnotes

- 1 Ochsner, Jeffrey Karl. H.H. Richardson. Complete Architectural Works. Cambridge, Massachusetts. The MIT Press. 1982. p. 79.
- 2 Historic American Buildings Survey. Data Pages. Louis Goldstein, AIA. February 1965. p. 5.
- 3 Kowsky, Francis R. Buffalo Projects: H.H. Richardson Buffalo: Buffalo State College Foundation. 1980. p. 10.
- 4 "The Kirkbride Plan: Architecture for a Treatment System that Changed," Hospital and Community Psychiatry, July, 1976, Vol. 27, No. 7, pp. 473-477.
- 5 Hitchcock, Henry Russell. The Architecture of H.H. Richardson and His Times. Cambridge, Massachusetts. The MIT Press, 1936. p. 123.
- 6 Board of Managers of the Buffalo State Asylum. Annual Report. 1872.



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The Kirkbridge Plan: Architecture for a Treatment System that Changed." Hospital and Community Psychiatry, July 1976 Vol. 27, No. 7, pp. 473-477.

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Proceedings in Connection with the Ceremony of Laying the Cornerstone of the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane in the City of Buffalo, September 18, 1872. Buffalo: White and Brayley, 1872.

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Verbal Boundary

Beginning at a point 1000 feet from the northwest corner of the intersection of Elmwood Avenue and Forest Avenue, north along the entrance road 680 feet to the intersection with the Ring Road; northeast 160 feet along the Ring Road, then north 580 feet to Rockwell Road; west along Rockwell Road 1800 feet to the intersection with Rees Street; south along Rees Street 1420 feet to the intersection with Forest Avenue; east along Forest Avenue 1840 feet to return to the starting point. The area enclosed within this boundary is approximately 59 acres.



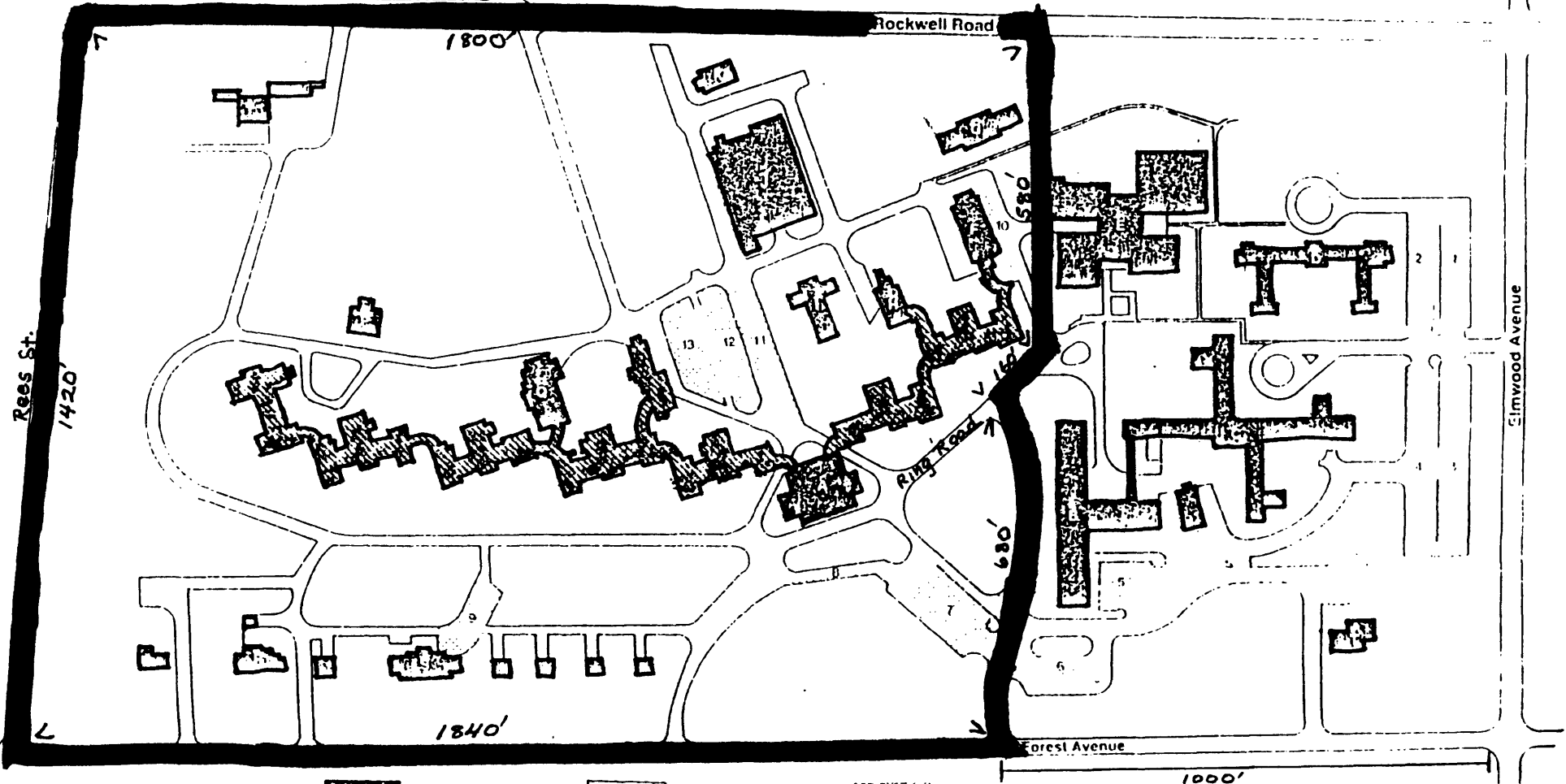
**BUFFALO PSYCHIATRIC CENTER**  
400 Forest Avenue - Buffalo, N.Y.



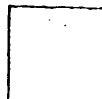
**Buffalo  
State  
College**

**MAP LEGEND**

A	Administration Building (#45)	L	Transportation Garage (#28, #29, #30)
B	Shozi Building (#62)	M	Powerhouse (#53)
C	Medical-Surgical Building (#52)	N	Storehouse (#54)
D	Cudmore Building (#4)	O	Laundry (#51)
E	Rehabilitation Services Building (#54)	P	Picnic Pavilion (#27)
F	Workshop Building (#13)	Q	Storage (#41)
G	Education & Training Building (#15)	R	Transitional Services, Emergency Unit (#35)
H	Grounds (#12)	S	Stulziman Alcoholism Treatment Center (#37)
I	Greenhouse (#11)	T	WNY Regional Office (#1)
J	Maintenance Shops (#22)		
K	Work Control Center (#20)		



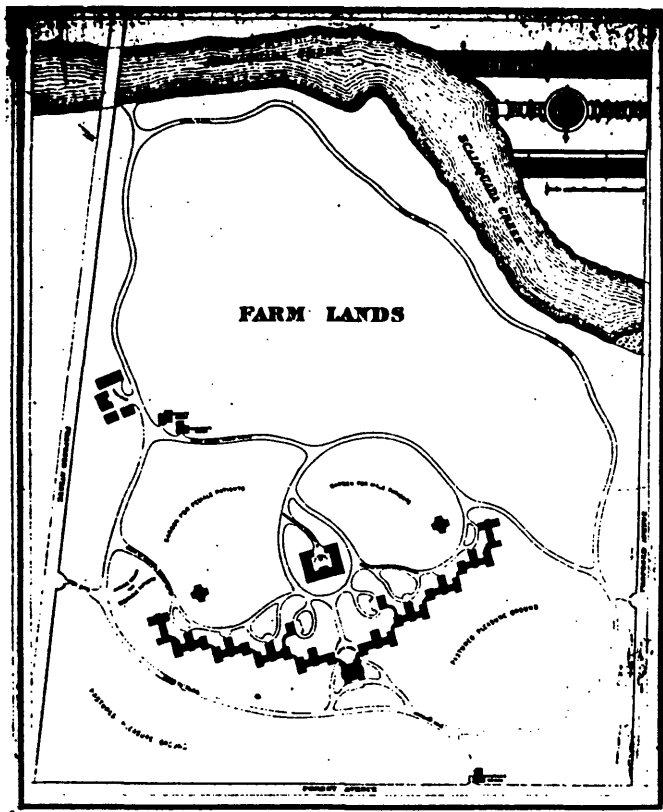
Buildings currently in use



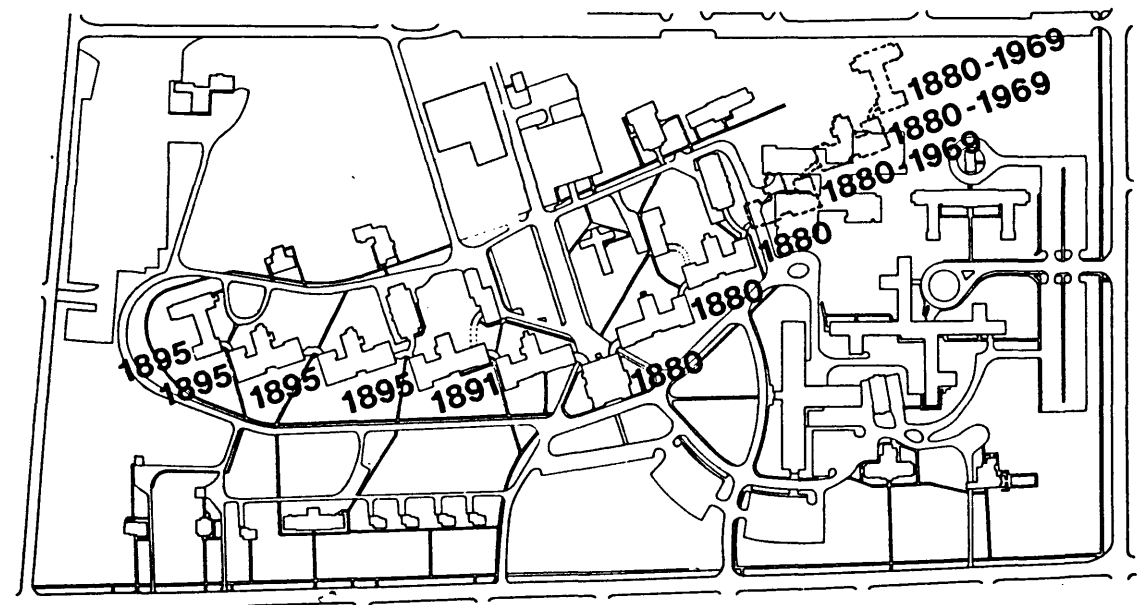
Buildings no longer occupied

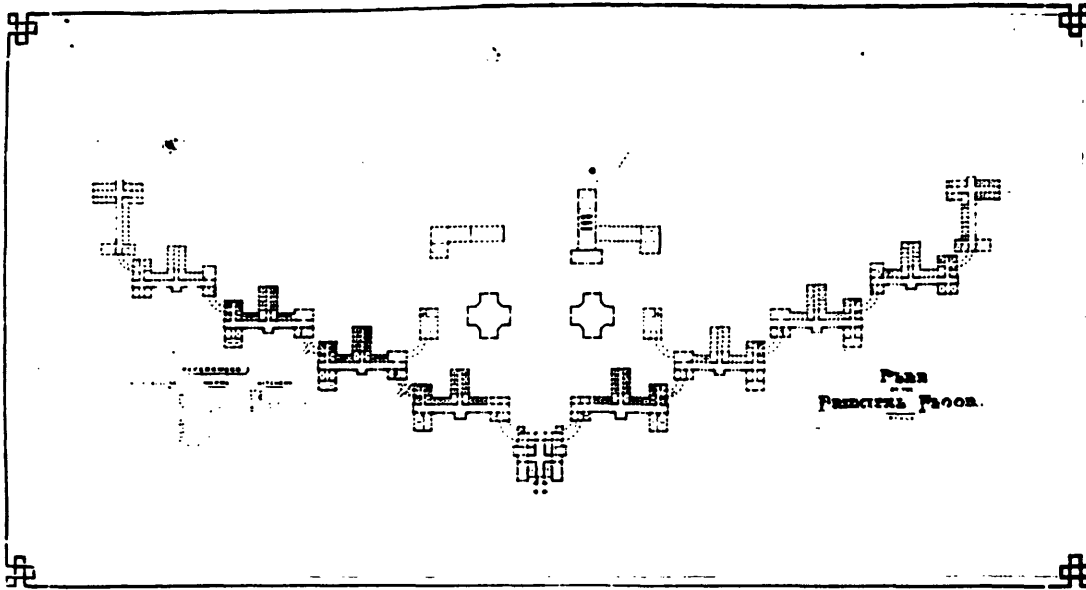


Parking lots 1-13  
Visitors may park in all lots except where spaces are designated

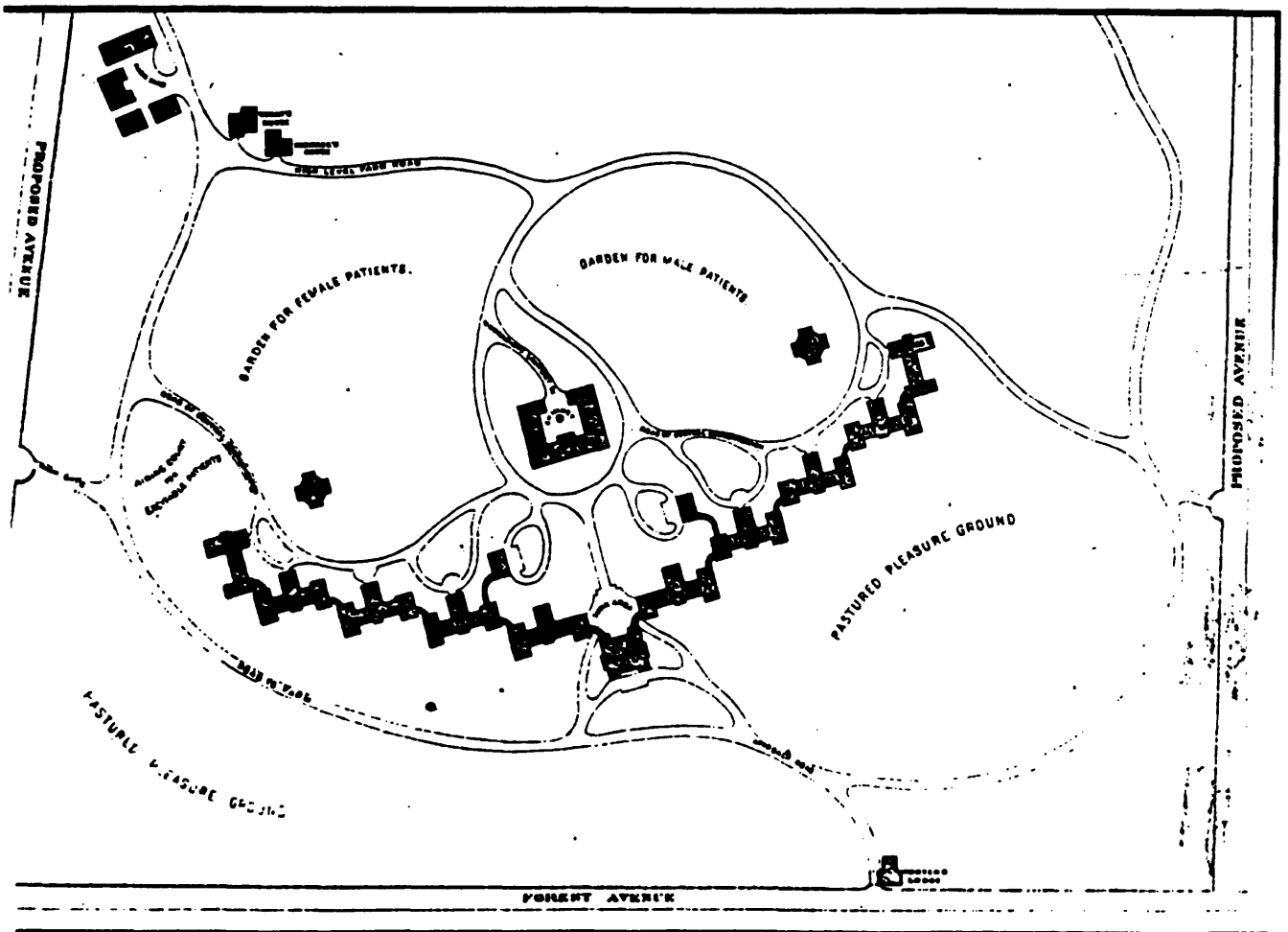


**PROGRESSION OF  
BUILDING CONSTRUCTION**





Plan of the principal floor. Richardson's preliminary plan, prior to Olmsted's influence shows buildings parallel to Forest Avenue. (Courtesy of The Burchfield Center.)



Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, general plans of grounds, ca.1871-72. Note the change in orientation from the original plan shown above. (Courtesy of Francis R. Kowsky.)