



*New York State Archives*

**Syracuse State Institution for Feeble-Minded Children  
Building Plans and Drawings for the New York State Idiot  
Asylum B1643**

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## Overview of the Records

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<b>Repository:</b>	New York State Archives
<b>Summary:</b>	An 1851 law provided for the state to undertake the care and teaching of "idiots" (the contemporary term for people with certain developmental disabilities). The New York State Asylum for Idiots, with a capacity for 100 residents, was completed on August 10, 1855. The series consists of 19th century watercolor renderings and pencil and ink drawings of the original building. The asylum was the first public facility in the nation for the care and treatment of persons with mental retardation.
<b>Creator:</b>	Syracuse State Institution for Feeble-Minded Children
<b>Title:</b>	Building plans and drawings for the New York State Idiot Asylum
<b>Quantity:</b>	1 cubic foot
<b>Quantity:</b>	11 sheets
<b>Inclusive Date:</b>	1850-1897
<b>Series:</b>	B1643

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## Administrative History

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An 1851 law provided for the state to undertake the care and teaching of "idiots" (the then accepted term for people with retardation). That year, Dr. Hervey B. Wilbur opened an experimental school, with 20 pupils, at a private residence in Albany, New York. Two years later the legislature appropriated funds to buy land and erect a new institution. A group of Syracuse's most prominent citizens wanted the school located in their city, and offered the trustees 18 acres of free land. The offer was accepted, and on September 8, 1854 the cornerstone was laid for the New York State Asylum for Idiots. The building, with a capacity for 100 residents, was completed on August 10, 1855.

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## Scope and Content Note

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The series consists of 19th century watercolor renderings and pencil and ink drawings of the original New York State Idiot Asylum (renamed in 1891 as the Syracuse State Institution for Feeble-Minded Children), which developed over 150 years into the Syracuse Developmental Center. The asylum was the first public facility in the nation for the care and treatment of persons with mental retardation. The original structures (and the facility's subsequent expansion and development as "colonies") were widely studied and emulated; these historic building plans document the earliest public institutional architecture of its kind.

The drawings were mounted for exhibit in the facility's history center, probably in the late 1970s. There are eleven sheets in all, originally mounted in six displays. Sheets were trimmed for mounting between plexiglas, and as a result some information is lacking at the edges. Although several of the plans have titles, only two are dated. Sheet sizes range approximately from 9 x 12 inches to 28 x 32 inches.

Included are a drawing on tracing cloth of the "Proposed Purchase" of the "State Farm and adjoining properties in the Towns of Camillus and Geddes" (ca. 16 x 26 inches); a group of six drawings (each ca. 9 x 12 inches) originally mounted as one display of the "Brick Hospital for New York State Idiot Asylum," showing exterior elevation and interior floor plans, dated 1886; a plan of the second story (ca. 16 x 20 inches) labeled as "No. 3"; a plan of the third story (ca. 28 x 32 inches) labeled as "No. 4"; a "Map of Idiot Asylum Grounds" (ca. 18 x 40 inches); and a "Plan of the Building and Premises of the Syracuse State Institution for Feeble-Minded Children" (ca. 28 x 32 inches) dated 1897.

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## Use of Records

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### Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of this material.

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## Access Terms

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- Public architecture
- Plans (orthographic projections)
- Building intellectual disability facilities
- Watercolors
- New York (State)

- Planning public buildings
- Onondaga County (N.Y.)
- Children with mental disabilities--New York (State)
- Construction drawings
- Floor plans
- Architectural drawing--19th century--New York (State)
- Site plans
- Syracuse (N.Y.)
- Asylums--New York (State)
- People with mental disabilities--Institutional care--New York (State)
- New York (State). Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
- Syracuse Developmental Center
- New York (State). Department of Mental Hygiene
- New York State Asylum for Idiots