

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**GENDER AND LUNACY**  
**A study of women patients at the**  
**Auckland Lunatic Asylum**  
**1870-1910**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
History at Massey University.

Bronwyn Labrum  
1990

**ABSTRACT**

This is a study of the experience of the insane in nineteenth century New Zealand and it examines in detail a sample of 45 women and 15 men who were admitted to the Auckland Lunatic Asylum between 1870 and 1910. Based on patient casenotes, reports by asylum officials, newspaper accounts, and drawing on recent overseas historical literature about insanity, the thesis analyses why these patients were labelled insane, what that process involved, and the techniques adopted to treat the mentally ill. Throughout it emphasises the socially-constructed nature of mental illness and aims to determine the extent to which gender was a factor in the processes of detection and incarceration. Although the focus is primarily on women, men are included as it is argued that gender is a comparative tool of analysis. The study concludes that committal and treatment were all heavily influenced by gender in varying degrees. However it also argues that examining gender does not tell the whole story. Complex pressures all played their role. These included notions of propriety, social and familial conflict, economic distress, material conditions and race.

## CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Illustrations	v
Tables	vi
Abbreviations	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Institutional and Legal Contexts	14
Chapter 2: The Auckland Asylum	40
Chapter 3: Pathways into the Asylums: The Process and Nature of Committal	74
Chapter 4: The Medical Diagnoses	145
Chapter 5: The Patients	180
Chapter 6: Treatment and Rehabilitation	203
Conclusion	243
Appendices	
A. Committal forms as laid out in the Lunatics Act of 1882	249
B. "Causes of insanity" at the Auckland asylum in 1879, 1890 and 1910	253
C. Previous place of abode of sample patients	255
D. Occupations of total female asylum population, 1878-1910	256
Bibliography	257

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many people for their assistance while researching and writing this thesis. In the initial stages, while I was searching for a suitable topic, Charlotte Macdonald directed me towards Hilary Haines' 1982 article on female causes of insanity from 1878-1902 and stimulated my curiosity about this area of research. She has continued to show interest and encouragement. My supervisors Margaret Tennant and David Thomson provided critical and pointed guidance. Colin Davis was particularly helpful in coming to grips with the material in chapter three.

Coral Hair, Narelle Scollay and Mark Stoddart of the National Archives Records Centre in Auckland were unfailingly helpful and obliging as I worked on the asylum and hospital board records. I am also grateful to Anne Carpenter, who took the patient photos from the case files and Gordon Maitland, Photograph Librarian at the Auckland Institute and Museum, who helped me find the photos of the asylum. Staff at the Auckland Public Library, National Archives, the Alexander Turnbull Library, the Beaglehole Room in Victoria University Library and the Library of the Department of Health gave every assistance. The interloan department at Massey University Library was vital in tracking down the huge secondary literature on the subject. Hilary Haines, then at the Mental Health Foundation, and Warwick Brunton at the Health Department also provided information and advice on sources, based on their own research in the field.

Research for this thesis was supported by a bursary from the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs.

Of equal importance to the academic, institutional and financial assistance was the constant inspiration, motivation and support that my fellow travellers and friends Bronwyn Dalley, Anne-Marie O'Neill, and Gaynor Whyte gave me. The mysteries of computers and software were disclosed by Ashley Gould, who also made available his own machine for the processing of most of my earlier drafts. My family were unstinting with their emotional support and practical assistance. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Quentin Jukes, who has been there for the entire length of this project, and who has been loving and sustaining in countless ways.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Between pages
The Auckland Lunatic Asylum in the 1890s	13-14
The Auckland Lunatic Asylum in the 1890s	39-40
Floor plan of the Auckland Lunatic Asylum as erected in 1867	52-53
Two female patients in 1910	73-74
One male patient in 1910	144-145
Two female patients in 1910	179-180
Staff at the Auckland Lunatic Asylum in the 1890s	202-203

## TABLES

3.1	Agencies of committal among sample female patients, 1870-1910	92
3.2	Causes of committal among sample female patients, 1870-1910	106
4.1	"Causes of insanity" of women and men admitted to the Auckland Asylum, 1879, 1890, and 1910	158
4.2	Nature of "female troubles" of women admitted to the Auckland Asylum, 1879, 1890, and 1910	163
5.1	Rates of committal by gender per 10 000 male and female provincial population aged 15 and over	182
5.2	Rates of committal by gender and marital status per 10 000 provincial population aged fifteen and over	185
5.3	Rates of committal by gender and age per 10 000 provincial population aged fifteen and over	190
5.4	Rates of Maori committal per 10 000 provincial population aged fifteen and over	193
6.1	Numbers of "discharged recovered and "discharged not recovered" as percentages of total admissions, 1878, 1890, and 1910	228



## ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Auckland Provincial Records
<u>AJHR</u>	<u>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</u>
<u>APCVP</u>	<u>Auckland Provincial Council Votes and Proceedings</u>
<u>APGG</u>	<u>Auckland Provincial Government Gazette</u>
<u>DSC</u>	<u>Daily Southern Cross</u>
GP	General Practitioner
H-MHD	Health Department Files, Mental Health Division
<u>NZH</u>	<u>New Zealand Herald</u>
<u>NZJH</u>	<u>New Zealand Journal of History</u>
<u>NZMJ</u>	<u>New Zealand Medical Journal</u>
<u>NZPD</u>	<u>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</u>
<u>WN</u>	<u>Weekly News</u>
YCAA	Carrington Hospital Files