

# **Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania medical log books**

**MSS.096.Item 126**

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University of Delaware Library - Special Collections Department

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Delaware Library - Special Collections Department
<b>Creator</b>	Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania.
<b>Title</b>	Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania medical log books
<b>Call number</b>	MSS.096.Item 126
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1840-1868
<b>Extent</b>	0.41 linear feet (3 volumes)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	Opened in 1829, Eastern State Penitentiary introduced a revolutionary system of incarceration, dubbed the Pennsylvania System, in which solitary confinement served as a form of rehabilitation. This collection consists of three volumes of patient information kept at the infirmary of the Eastern State Penitentiary from 1840 to 1868. The volumes present monthly summaries of cases, and provide some remarks based on post mortem examinations.

**Cite as:**

MSS 096, Item 126, Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania medical log books, 1840-1868, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

## Biography/History

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Opened in 1829, Eastern State Penitentiary introduced a revolutionary system of incarceration, dubbed the Pennsylvania System, in which solitary confinement served as a form of rehabilitation. This system became the model for over 300 prisons worldwide. Designed by John Haviland, Eastern State Penitentiary's radial floor plan provided each prisoner his or her own cell, bathroom facility, and exercise yard.

Eastern State was viewed as a progressive reform in that it eliminated many of the excesses of physical punishment in colonial American prisons. Within most 18th century prisons, "physical punishment and mutilation were common, and abuse of the prisoners by the guards and overseers was assumed," (ushistory.org). Believing that the main goal of the prison should be rehabilitation through true penitence, the Prison Society created a system in which prisoners had no physical contact with other prisoners or guards.

While solitary confinement resulted in significantly better conditions for prisoners than the typical early 19th century prisons where prisoners were often confined in large groups without bathroom facilities, Eastern State's "system of confinement in cells posed new problems for the maintenance of the prisoners' physical and mental health," (Johnston, page 59). Indeed, it was widely believed (then and now) to have caused significant mental illness among its prisoners due to its solitary confinement. Eastern State originally housed an infirmary and an apothecary, and prisoners were treated by a physician and several male nurses. However, shortly after opening, hospital cells were created and maintained.

According to Johnston, efforts were made for prisoners to stay clean and "inmates wearing hoods would be brought to bathe individually every two or three weeks," (Johnson, page 59). However, the heating, ventilation, and plumbing systems were insufficient which resulted, inevitably, in illness. While mental illness surely resulted from solitary confinement for some, "prisons were the dumping ground for a significant number of mentally ill men and women, undoubtedly due to the dearth of public facilities to care for the criminally insane," (Johnston, page 60). Records of medical conditions at the time of admittance and throughout confinement were kept by prison officials.

### **Bibliography:**

Johnston, Norman. *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

ushistory.org. "Eastern State Penitentiary." [ushistory.org/tour/eastern-state-penitentiary.htm](http://ushistory.org/tour/eastern-state-penitentiary.htm) (accessed March 10, 2011).

## Scope and Contents

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This collection consists of three volumes of patient information kept at the infirmary of the Eastern State Penitentiary from 1840 to 1868. The volumes present monthly summaries of cases, and provide some remarks based on post mortem examinations.

The earliest volume, dating from 1840 to 1843, gives daily tallies of patients, their diseases, and the progress of their diseases. The volume also includes monthly summaries of patients, with a separate tally for African American patients. In addition, there are yearly tabular views of the cases of African American prisoners and one tabular view of the cases of white prisoners in 1841.

The second volume, dating from 1844 to 1855, and the third volume, dating from 1855 to 1868, consist of monthly summaries of patients, their diseases, race, gender, and progress of their diseases. These two volumes also include post mortem reports.

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## Administrative Information

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### Sponsor

The creation of this collection level record was made possible through generous funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, administered through the Council on Library and Information Resources' "Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives" Project.

### Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

### Use Restrictions

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law. Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library, <http://www.lib.udel.edu/cgi-bin/askspec.cgi>

## Related Materials

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### Related Archival Materials note

American Philosophical Society: State Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania records, 1819-1955, Mss.365.P381p

Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site: Penitentiary archives

Pennsylvania State Archives: Records of the Department of Justice, Eastern State Penitentiary

University of Pennsylvania Rare Book and Manuscript Library: John Haviland papers, 1820-1837

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## Controlled Access Headings

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### Corporate Name(s)

- Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania.

### Form/Genre(s)

- Logs (records)
- Medical records

### Geographic Name(s)

- Philadelphia (Pa.)

### Subject(s)

- Medicine
- Mental health
- Prisoners--Medical care

- Prisons

## Collection Inventory

	Volume
1840-1843.	1
1844-1855.	2
1855-1868.	3