

“Everyone wants our cotton pickers”: Black Mental Health and “Industrial Therapy” at Goldsboro State Hospital in North Carolina, 1890-1960

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INTRODUCTION

The state hospital at Goldsboro was opened in 1880 as the first institution in North Carolina to serve the black mentally ill. It was established by the state legislature in the 1870s alongside the hospital at Morganton, an additional facility for white patients in western NC. Both were a response to overcrowding at the first state psychiatric institution in Raleigh, which opened in 1856. Previous scholarship has indicated disparities in funding in the first few decades of operation at Goldsboro, which resulted in inadequate facilities and adverse patient outcomes. However, little literature exists regarding the care and treatment of patients at Goldsboro in the first half of the 20th century. This project examines several previously unexplored sources (state eugenics board records, medical superintendent journals) as well as other published and archival materials to compare diagnostic and management practices at Goldsboro to its white counterparts in North Carolina in the early 20th century.

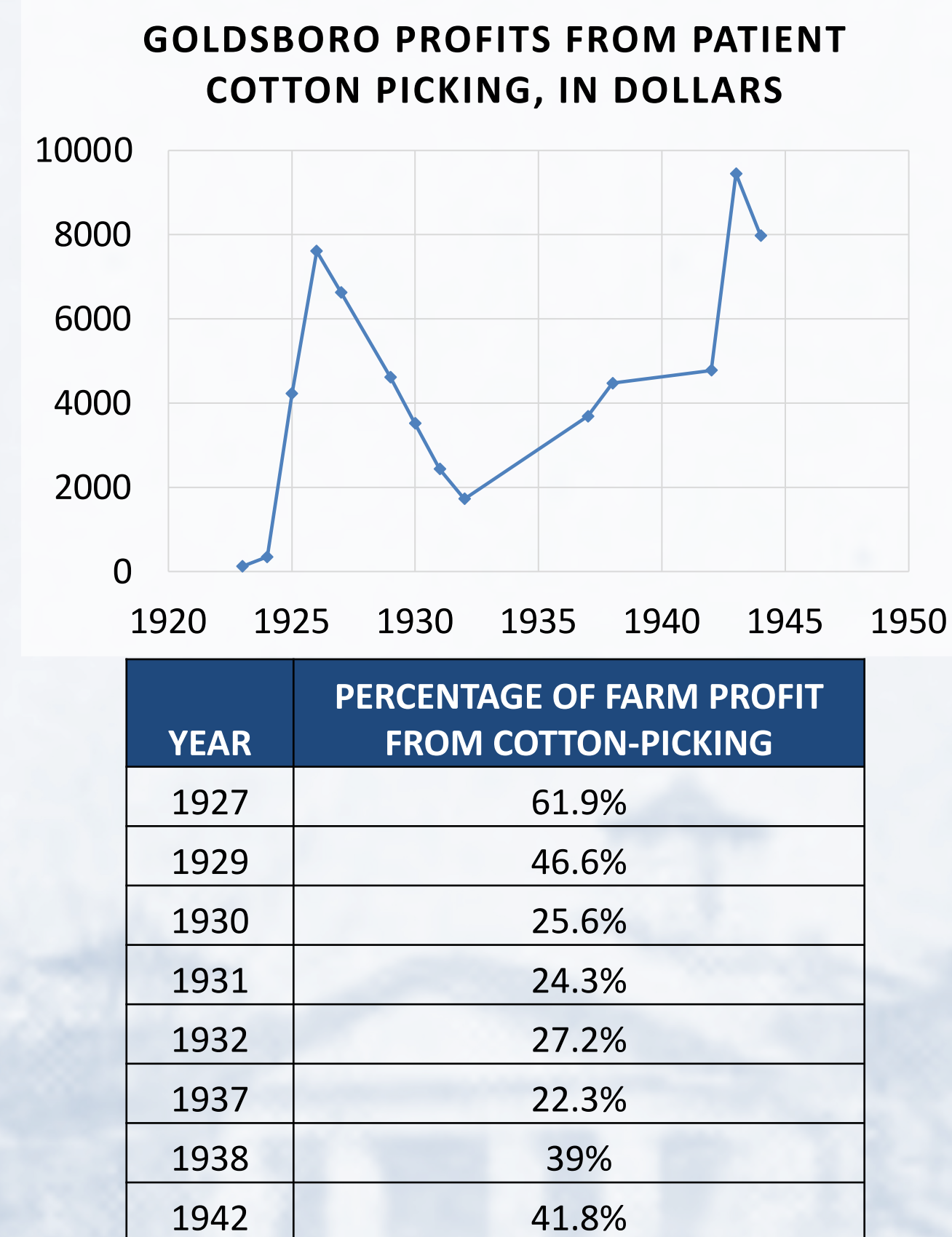
METHODS

Review of the following primary sources was conducted:

- Available biennial reports from the state hospitals at Goldsboro (1889-1944), Raleigh (1896-1944), and Morganton (1918-1920, 1940-1944)
- Available personal journals from Dr. Frank L. Whelpley, superintendent of Goldsboro from 1938-1946 (1916-1938)
- Available monthly meeting notes from the Eugenics Board of North Carolina (1934-1947)
- Newspaper articles, other published material, relevant documents and reports from the North Carolina State Archives

FIGURES AND EXCERPTS

Figure 1 and Table 1. Goldsboro cotton picking profit, 1923-1944.³



“A very interesting type of **industrial therapy** is practiced here which **could not be done anywhere but a Negro institution...** This is not only helpful in terms of the labor shortage in war time but turns out to be excellent therapy for the patients. It is noted that **deteriorated Negro patients who cannot even take care of their own toilet habits may be excellent cotton pickers...**”

Excerpt from inspection report of the state hospitals conducted by Dr. Maurice Greenhill regarding cotton picking at Goldsboro, 1944

Truck Spills Inmates - 30 Hurt

GOLDSBORO
Seventy-two women patients who were packed like cattle into a private truck owned by a white cotton farmer, narrowly escaped death near here Tuesday when the siding gave way and dumped them from the moving vehicle into the highway.

Excerpt from article published in *The Carolina Times*, addressing a truck accident that occurred during transport of patients to a separate farm for cotton picking, 1955

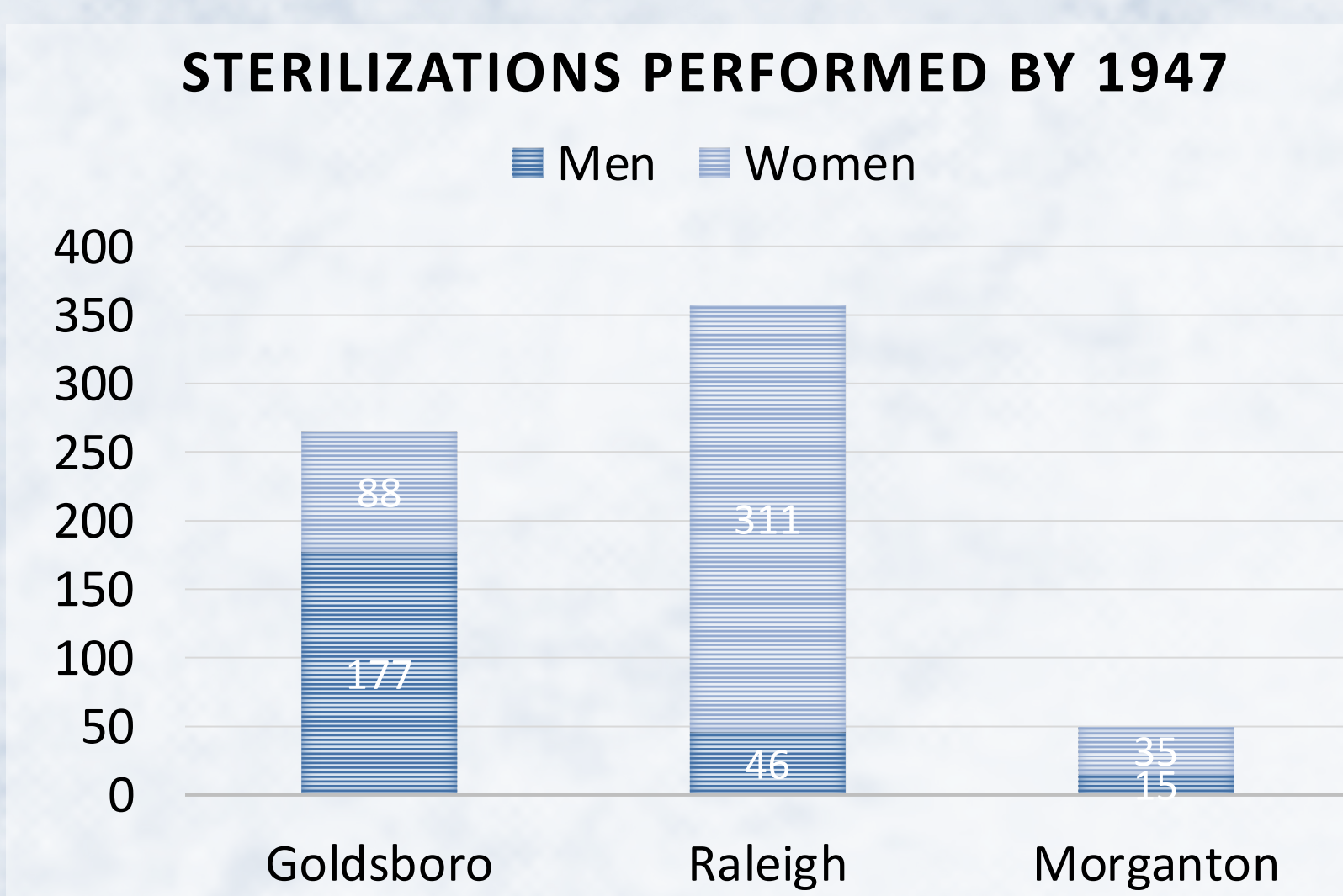
Table 2. Top admission diagnoses at Goldsboro and Raleigh.³

BIENNIUM ENDING IN	GOLDSBORO	PERCENT TOTAL ADMISSIONS	RALEIGH	PERCENT TOTAL ADMISSIONS
1914	Manic-depressive	18.7%	Manic-depressive	40.0%
	Dementia praecox	13.1%	Toxic psychosis	13.2%
	Psychosis with pellagra	9.7%	Alcoholic psychosis	7.0%
1924	Manic-depressive	32.8%	Dementia praecox	21.2%
	Dementia praecox	18.7%	Manic-depressive	16.0%
	Psychosis with syphilis	7.1%	Drug addict and alcoholism	14.3%
1926	Manic-depressive	27.8%	Drug addict and alcoholism	22.5%
	Dementia praecox	19.0%	Epilepsy	20.8%
	Psychosis with syphilis	15.3%	Manic-depressive	17.2%
1928	Psychosis with syphilis	28.2%	Drug addict and alcoholism	19.8%
	Manic-depressive	19.8%	Dementia praecox	18.1%
	Psychosis with pellagra	11.4%	Manic-depressive	17.7%
1930	Psychosis with syphilis	31.6%	Manic-depressive	21.9%
	Manic-depressive	19.3%	Alcoholism	15.9%
	Psychosis with pellagra	17.2%	Dementia praecox	9.4%
1932	Psychosis with syphilis	27.6%	Manic-depressive	19.7%
	Psychosis with pellagra	18.8%	Alcoholism	17.5%
	Manic-depressive	17.2%	Epilepsy	12.5%
1936	Manic-depressive	23.1%	Alcoholism	47.4%
	Psychosis with syphilis	20.9%	Dementia praecox	10.8%
	Psychosis with mental deficiency	11.8%	Manic-depressive	10.2%

“The negro laughs louder, sings louder, prays and preaches louder, than the Caucasian; and is more vulgar in speech and less cleanly in his person. He carries these characteristics into his insane condition and is therefore more noisy, more vulgar and beastly in his habits... **Mania is the prevailing form of mental derangement** and suicides are rare.”

Excerpt from article by J.F. Miller, superintendent of Goldsboro from 1888-1907, published in 1896

Figure 2. Sterilization at the state hospitals.



*Of note, 23 castrations were included in the number for males at Goldsboro.

“**Castration was performed on men of vicious type, criminals guilty of attempted rape, and those who were a problem in the hospital, since it is thought to quiet them down and make them easier to handle...** Patients were not considered intelligent enough to be asked for consent... most patients understood, however, what was being done...”

Excerpt regarding attitudes at Goldsboro from book by Moya Woodside surveying sterilization in NC, published 1950. Notably, Goldsboro was the only hospital to provide a number of castrations performed. At Raleigh, “asexualization” was opposed and only for “the male patient permanently institutionalized and a trouble-giver.”

The Hungry River Collective

This project intends to provide context to the work of the Hungry River Collective. From 1918 to 1924, Dr. Frank Whelpley took many photographs of people and their surroundings at Goldsboro. The Hungry River Collective is dedicated to building a community circle around this collection of photographs, seeking to raise awareness and advocate for loving outcomes, and to restore dignity and honor the individuals and stories depicted.

Scan for more information:



Photograph of cotton picking at Goldsboro from the hospital museum, dated 1918, taken from the video “Love and Outrage: Asylum for the Colored Insane”

RESULTS

- “Industrial therapy” in the form of cotton-picking on external farms earned thousands for Goldsboro annually, and was thought of as a unique form of treatment, exposing patients to further harm both in the fields, and in transport.
- Superintendents espoused stereotypes of black patients as excitable, primitive, and suited to manual labor, contributing to skewed diagnostic trends and subsequent labor as treatment.
- Sterilization began in the 1920s as a form of behavioral control, and was disproportionately performed on male patients at Goldsboro in the first few decades of the NC eugenics program.

³Figures are limited by availability of archival resources, as well as varying consistency in hospital record-keeping. Table 1 includes only years in which a sum was provided for “total farm products sold or used otherwise.” Table 2 includes only years with “manic-depressive” illness in the diagnosis list for newly admitted patients, and only years in which biennial reports from both Raleigh and Goldsboro were available for comparison.