

*The Best Specimen of a Tyrant: The Ambitious Dr. Abraham Van Norstrand and the Wisconsin Insane Hospital*, by Thomas Doherty. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013. xi, 331 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$20.00 paperback.

Reviewer Ellen Dwyer is professor emeritus of history at Indiana University-Bloomington. She is the author of *Homes for the Mad: Life inside Two Nineteenth-Century Asylums* (1987).

There is a large literature devoted to the emergence of public lunatic asylums in the United States, largely focused on institutions in the Northeast and the Old South. Thomas Doherty supplements these works by turning to Wisconsin and the career of Abraham Van Norstrand, controversial superintendent of the Wisconsin State Hospital for the Insane between 1864 and 1868. Van Norstrand was the third superintendent of the hospital in less than a decade. His experiences suggest both the challenges involved in caring for the most troubled of the mentally ill in the mid-nineteenth century and the highly politicized environment within which that work often was done. Thus, Doherty's history provides useful comparative information for those studying contemporaneous figures in neighboring midwestern states, as well as a glimpse of mid-nineteenth-century Wisconsin that local historians will enjoy.

In his introduction, Doherty dates his interest in the Wisconsin State Hospital to the 1970s, when he was working at the Mendota Mental Health Institute. Intrigued by the remnants of earlier buildings scattered about the grounds, he went to the Wisconsin Historical Society to learn more about them. There he found a rich cache of records, including patient case histories and annual reports. Especially intriguing was the lengthy account of an investigation appended to the 1868 annual report.

Two figures dominated the 1868 investigation: Van Norstrand and one Samuel Hastings. After the suspicious death of a well-connected patient, Hastings, a hospital trustee, began a campaign to get rid of Van Norstrand. The resulting investigation produced voluminous testimony. Most damaging to Van Norstrand were the interviews with hospital attendants. While some remained loyal to Van Norstrand, perhaps because they feared losing their jobs, a number did not. The latter offered grim stories of negligence and abuse. Most graphic were the descriptions of the "cold baths" used to control unruly patients. The majority of hospital trustees continued to support Van Norstrand, but, after they tabled a motion to fire him, he resigned.

As a prologue to Van Norstrand's time at the state hospital, Doherty offers an interesting account of the doctor's earlier career, chron-

icled in a memoir written years later. Almost all of the memoir focuses on Van Norstrand's two-and-a-half years as a regimental surgeon affiliated with the Fourth Wisconsin Regiment between mid-1861 and January 1864. That period included a stint as acting medical director of a large military hospital in Baton Rouge. Although the memoir contains almost no information about Van Norstrand's subsequent work at the Wisconsin State Hospital for the Insane, Doherty argues that his military career, as captured in the memoir, foretold his subsequent asylum superintendency. The strengths and flaws of Van Norstrand the soldier characterized Van Norstrand the superintendent as well.

Doherty, not a professional historian, occasionally uses anachronistic language and puzzling, if colorful, phrases. Most notably, the (implicit) rationale for the title is not clear. Van Norstrand himself coined the phrase "the best specimen of a tyrant" to describe Benjamin Butler, a Civil War commander he much admired, but I am not persuaded that he patterned his own life on Butler's. Further, Doherty is not always critical of the fascinating primary sources he has uncovered. The book is largely descriptive, not analytic. Despite these caveats, I commend the depth and breadth of Doherty's research. While he does not offer a new interpretation of nineteenth-century asylum history, he succeeds in offering readers a lively and engaging story.

*Custer, Cody, and Grand Duke Alexis: Historical Archaeology of the Royal Buffalo Hunt*, by Douglas D. Scott, Peter Bleed, and Stephen Damm. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. xix, 205 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Jeremy M. Johnston is managing editor of *The Papers of William F. Cody* for the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming.

In January 1872 citizens of North Platte, Nebraska, welcomed the Grand Duke Alexis from Russia, the third son of Czar Alexander II. The royal excursion brought together an unusual mix of military officials and American western legends along with diplomats and royalty. Four key western legends hosted the Grand Duke: General Philip Sheridan, General George Armstrong Custer, Chief Spotted Tail, and William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. For the next few days, those four hosts entertained their royal guest on a buffalo hunt. Today, separating the tall tales from the historical reality of this famed hunting excursion proves difficult. This publication proves to be a solid attempt to provide readers with sound historical information based on a variety of resources.

Nearly 150 years after the Royal Buffalo Hunt, a team of archeologists from the University of Nebraska, led by authors Douglas D.