



Drunkard's Refuge: The Lessons of the New York State Inebriate Asylum

John W. Crowley

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Opened during the Civil War in 1864, the New York State Inebriate Asylum in Binghamton was the first medically directed addiction treatment center in the United States. In this book, John W. Crowley and William White provide a lively account of this pioneering facility and its charismatic founder, Dr. Joseph Edward Turner. Based on Turner's recently rediscovered papers, the story is one of plots and intrigues, charges and countercharges, criminal accusations and indictments, and the plundering of a historic institution.

Turner, who had developed an interest in alcoholism as a medical student, spent years championing the idea of a publicly funded hospital for the treatment of inebriety. His efforts to realize his vision repeatedly ran into obstacles, including strong opposition from religious and temperance groups, who refused to consider alcohol addiction a medical disorder, and a skeptical state legislature. After the asylum finally opened, funded in part by alcohol-related tax revenues, Turner and other doctors became embroiled in a power struggle over treatment philosophy, while patients and family members bristled at what they considered excessive rules and regulations. Within three years Turner had been forced out and the hospital had ceased to function as an institution specializing in the care of inebriates.

Crowley, a literary scholar, and White, a clinical researcher, have written this book with a broad readership in mind, including individuals working and living within the worlds of addiction treatment and recovery. At a time when the treatment of addiction is facing fresh challenges to its core ideas, clinical practices, and economic infrastructure, the authors show that the lessons of the New York State Inebriate Asylum are no less relevant to the present than to the past.

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