

## **The Historical Archive of Veronese Psychiatry.**

*Reference person: Professor Mirella Ruggeri, Section of Psychiatry, Department of Neuroscience, Biomedicine and Movement – University of Verona*

The archive, established in 2006 thanks to the forward-looking vision of Professor Michele Tansella, with the support of the University of Verona, the Integrated University Hospital, and the ULSS 20. The archive proposed to save from the dispersion a documentation of very high interest, made up of medical records, texts and paper material of various kinds coming from the former provincial hospital of San Giacomo. It is a documentation collected in various locations that is now available to scholars, and offers the possibility of reconstructing the social and scientific overview of the mental hospital situation in the province before the advent of the new psychiatric approach to mental illness that led to the closure of asylums. With the closure of the San Giacomo Mental Hospital, in fact, much of the historical and archival material went inexorably dispersed, in particular the furnishings, diagnostic tools, photographs, restraints, work tools for the treatment of health, numerous volumes of the library. The few buildings that have remained have been partially restored, some are in a state of advanced decay. Many initiatives and projects could emerge from having centralized documentation on the Verona asylum history in a single location. In short, the Historical Archives should become, also through the involvement of interested scholars and researchers, a meeting point and initiative on the topic of mental hospital history, but also, more generally, the history of psychiatry in the province of Verona. In addition to the need to overcome the dispersion of the archives, unifying them in a single location, there was another aspect that was at the base of the project to create the archive: to ensure that in the place where so many lives and so many misfortunes have intertwined, where many doctors and nurses have spent a lifetime of work remained an evident and conscious sign that testified the value of this memory. For this reason it is important that the archive is in the area where there was the San Giacomo Mental Hospitals, indeed in a building that since the early '900 welcomed patients of male observation. In this way we begin to keep alive the memory of what was a small city, then surrounded by walls (built, among other things by the patients themselves) and the fields of the agricultural colony, far from Verona, but always present in its history, despite the inevitable attempts to remove that "madness" has always stimulated.

The digitalisation and on-line accessibility has started thanks to the project called *Carte da legare. Archivi degli ospedali psichiatrici italiani* (<http://www.cartedalegare.san.beniculturali.it/index.php?id=8>), promoted by the **Direzione generale per gli archivi del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo**. The project aims at cataloguing the documentary heritage preserved in the archives of the Italian mental institutions and to make the database so produced available on-line. *Carte da legare*, in fact, was born to make available this great heritage. The study of the mental hospital of San Giacomo alla Tomba in Verona follows this line of research. The Institute is particularly important also because it was provided, besides the others, with a department reserved to criminal mental patients, who were cured by means of methods inspired by the criminal Lombrosian anthropology. The archives of the hospital are composed of two fonds, one kept at the *Archivio Provinciale* of Verona, the other at the *Biblioteca di Psichiatria e di Psicologia Clinica (Dipartimento di Scienze Neurologiche, Biomediche e del Movimento, Università di Verona)*. The mostly administrative material housed within the provincial archives of Verona

(<http://portale.provincia.vr.it/uffici/uffici/2/202/documenti/larchivio-provinciale>) has been rearranged and inventoried, thus becoming accessible. By contrast, the documentary material of historical and clinical interest lacks a records management system. This excellently preserved material consists of 1013 envelopes (1880-1980) containing medical records with case histories and nosological records in chronological order by date of hospitalization; the hospitalization ledgers prior to the year 1880; as well as 4 filing cabinets with records in alphabetical order.

The survey is being carried out thanks to a project funded by the Cariverona Foundation, carried out in collaboration between the Department of Neuroscience, Biomedicine and Movement and the Department of Culture and Civilization of the University of Verona