



Dixmont State Hospital (PA) (Images of America)

Mark Berton

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Pittsburgh natives have recognized Dixmont State Hospital by its towering boiler house smokestack that stood prominently along busy Route 65. It has been a topic of curiosity, urban exploration, ghost hunts, and historical research; but prior to its closing in 1984, Dixmont State Hospital stood as a refuge to the mentally ill for three counties in western Pennsylvania. A majestic study in the Kirkbride design of asylum architecture, Dixmont was originally built by the Western Pennsylvania Hospital in 1859 as a private venture before being bought by the commonwealth. It was named for famed mental health care reformer Dorothea Dix, who was instrumental in choosing the hospital's site—a site chosen for its tranquility and its view of the Ohio River. Dixmont was completely razed in January 2006 to make way for a multi-parcel commercial endeavor. But for those who spent time there, Dixmont was a vibrant community within a community. Through historic photographs, Dixmont State Hospital opens up this world that was off limits to the general public but was alive with festivals, celebrations, and the successful treatment of patients.

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