



Northern Michigan Asylum Playwriting Contest — Submission Guidelines

Overview

The Northern Michigan Asylum Playwriting Contest invites playwrights to submit original works inspired by, connected to, or thematically centered on the history, architecture, culture, or personal stories associated with the **Northern Michigan Asylum** (also known as the Traverse City State Hospital). Works may be dramatic, comedic, historical, speculative, or musical in style, but all submissions must honor or explore the site in a meaningful way.

Contest is hosted by Old Town Playhouse (OTP), a community theater serving Traverse City, Michigan, and The Minervini Group LLC (TMG), redevelopers of The Village at Grand Traverse Commons, the original site of the Northern Michigan Asylum.

The contest opens **January 19, 2026**, and all submissions must be received by **December 31, 2026**.

Eligibility

- Open to writers of all experience levels.
- Writers must be at least 18 years old at the time of submission.
- Co-authored works are permitted.
- Submissions must be written in English.

Content Requirements

- **Subject Matter:** The play must contain significant themes, settings, characters, or plot elements directly related to the **Northern Michigan Asylum/Traverse City State Hospital**.
- **Allowed Formats:**
 - One-act plays
 - Two-act plays
 - Musicals

- **Length Guidelines:**
 - One-act: 20–60 minutes
 - Two-act: 60–150 minutes
 - Musicals: 45–180 minutes
- **Originality:** Only **original, unpublished, and unproduced** works are eligible.

Prohibition on AI-Generated Content

To preserve artistic integrity and honor the spirit of the competition:

- **No portion** of the script may be generated by artificial intelligence tools (including ChatGPT, other LLMs, AI story generators, or automated scriptwriting tools).
- Writers may not use AI to draft, plot, or produce dialogue or lyrics.
- AI-assisted proofreading (e.g., spelling/grammar checks) is permitted, but no AI content generation may be used at any stage.
- Entrants will be required to attest that all creative content is human-authored.

Submission Requirements

- **Format:**
 - PDF file only
 - Standard script formatting preferred (12-point font, standard margins)
 - Include a title page with:
 - Play title
 - Author's name
 - Contact email
 - Contact phone number
 - Whether the play is one-act, two-act, or a musical
- **Page Header:** Include the play title and page numbers on each page.

- **Synopsis:** Include a 150–300 word synopsis at the beginning (separate page).
- **Character Breakdown:** Provide a list of characters, including vocal ranges for musicals.
- **Optional:** A brief (100-word) playwright biography.

Submission Process

- Submissions open **January 19, 2026** at 12:00 AM EST.
- All entries must be submitted by **December 31, 2026** at 11:59 PM EST.
- Submissions must be sent by email to contest@oldtownplayhouse.com either as a PDF attachment or unrestricted link to cloud storage.
- Each entrant may submit up to **two** plays.

Evaluation Criteria & Winning

Entries will be judged on:

- Quality of storytelling and dramatic structure
- Creative integration of Northern Michigan Asylum themes
- Originality and artistic vision
- Character development
- Stage feasibility
- Musical quality (for musicals)

One work will be chosen to be fully workshopped and produced in late 2027 or early 2028 by Old Town Playhouse. The performance will take place at Kirkbride Hall located in one of the original Northern Michigan Asylum buildings. [Note: A staged reading may be presented in lieu of a full production if material warrants such].

Judges panel will be comprised of two representatives from Old Town Playhouse, two representatives from The Minervini Group LLC and one outside representative designated by Old Town Playhouse to serve on the panel.

Winning playwright will be notified no later than **February 28, 2027**.

Rights and Permissions

- Playwrights retain all rights to their work.
- By entering the contest, playwrights grant the organizers permission to excerpt, read publicly, or stage readings for purposes of event promotion from the time the winning script is selected and announced until the closing performance of the OTP production produced in late 2027 or early 2028.

Research and Background Reading

Playwrights are encouraged to use the following works to learn more about the Northern Michigan Asylum. Note: Copyrighted works listed here are intended for inspiration and may not be adapted, dramatized, or otherwise used as source material without permission from the rights holder.

- *Traverse City State Hospital (Images of America)* by Chris Miller
- *Beauty is Therapy* by Earle Steele and Kristen M. Hains
- *A Man Against Insanity* by Paul de Kruif
- *Northern Michigan Asylum: A History of the Traverse City State Hospital* by William A. Decker, M.D. – This book is unfortunately out of print but can be found used on eBay, Amazon, or at the Traverse Area District Library. This is a great resource for facts and timelines.
- *How Thin the Veil* by Jack Kerkhoff – A memoir of 45 days in the Traverse City State Hospital.
- *Lucy Greene* by Richard VanDeWeghe – Historical fiction.
- *Jimmy Quinn* by Richard VanDeWeghe – Historical fiction.