

# The Meteor

Bryce patients published own newspaper, starting in 1872

A newspaper edited and published by patients at Bryce (then known as Alabama Hospital for the Insane) began publication in 1872 and continued sporadically for the next several years. Copies of eleven separate issues of the paper are preserved on the website of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, along with brief commentary that is included below (with the Department's website address). Additional information on the *Meteor* is also available at

the succession of years that still found them at the Hospital, determined . . . to print a number only when inclined to do so." The editor also surmised that people would not expect a regular publication from a hospital patient.

*Our little paper, gotten up for the benefit of the patients of the Alabama Insane Hospital and to give the patrons of the institution an insight into some details of its practical operations, is printed on quarto Novelty Press, without expense to the State—the whole labor of type-setting and putting to press being performed by the patients, or by employees of the Hospital in intervals of leisure from their regular duties...*

While not quite the juicy rag you might hope for, the

paper's articles do offer some glimpses of life at the hospital as well as into the minds of the patients.

An outstanding observation comes from the very first issue where one patient compares Alabama's hospital for the insane with its neighbor the state university by saying, "The inmates of the University come to acquire ideas. We to get rid of them." The continuing comparison/contrast of the two institutions is well worth perusing.

(<http://www.archives.state.al.us/meteor/meteor.html>)

From the historical perspective of the Kirkbride architectural enthusiasts, we learn the following:

Dr. Isaac Ray and Dr. Kirkbride are mentioned briefly in the first issue. And Dr. Pliny Earle is applauded for his humor in an annual report from Northampton State Hospital, while playfully chided for referring to baby pigs as "infants" (Oh, that 19th century humor...). On the same page, Dorothea Dix is also mentioned and described as in excellent health and "still actively engaged in doing good," while also contemplating a visit to Bryce.

On page two of issue eight, volume two, the paper's editor (a patient at the hospital) describes someone's publicized disbelief that *The Meteor* is the work of the insane. With some humor, the editor says, "He manifestly thinks the *Meteor* wires are worked by someone who is not insane. With this we find no fault. It is our own conviction. But unfortunately we can't get the Superintendent to see it."

Obviously the editor of *The Meteor* was an intelligent person with not a small amount of wit. And in spite of the sometimes tiresome 19th-century prose, reading the articles can be fascinating and often enjoyable. We recommend reading the issues for yourself.

(<http://www.kirkbridebuildings.com/blog/the-meteor-bryce-hospital-newspaper>)



the Kirkbride Buildings website.

The prose is thoughtful yet humorous. It is extremely well-written in spite of its very obvious Victorian style and influence. It explores life in and around the hospital, and makes many tongue-in-cheek references to the "differences" between those in and outside of the hospital's walls.

*The Meteor* was written, printed, and published by the patients of Bryce Hospital. Its original purpose was for the benefit of the patients and to explain the practical operation of the institution to its patrons. Later, it intended to inform the friends and patrons of the hospital, state newspaper editors, and state legislators of the conditions and purposes of the Hospital. It was designed to provide something for everyone.

As is stated in the newspaper's inaugural issue, it was called *The Meteor* because meteors come as a surprise, appear at irregular intervals, and have brilliant though short, temporary careers. The paper was also meant "to glow with a kindly and generous sentiment to all mankind." It appeared quarterly for five years and then became a "semi-occasionally" because the printer and editor, "disgusted with