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## Former Bryce residents finally get honored

*Published: Sunday, April 18, 2010 at 3:30 a.m.*

It is fitting that the 5,000 or so former Bryce Hospital residents buried in four cemeteries near the mental health hospital will be honored today when the Bryce Hospital Preservation Committee and the Alabama Department of Mental Health unveil five markers at the cemetery site.

The markers will indicate that each cemetery is registered with the Alabama Historical Commission and will commemorate the years in which people were buried there, most of them under simple, unmarked headstones.

A larger memorial is carved in the shape of a triangle and features a transcription written by a Bryce patient carved into the stone facing Jack Warner Parkway to the south.

Bryce opened in 1861, and its main buildings are among the oldest mental health facilities still in use in the United States. The three-story domed main building was one of the first "moral architecture" projects in the nation and was inspired by the ideas of Dorethea Dix, the great 18th century crusader for the humane care of the mentally ill.

First called the Alabama Hospital for the Insane and later the Alabama Insane Hospital, the facility was renamed for its first superintendent, Peter Bryce, who came to Tuscaloosa as a 27-year-old psychiatric pioneer personally recommended by Dix.

During his long tenure, Bryce, who died in 1892 and is himself buried with his wife on the hospital grounds, demanded that the unfortunate patients at the hospital always be treated with kindness, courtesy and respect — just as one should treat all fellow human beings.

The use of inhumane shackles, straightjackets and other restraints were discouraged and abandoned altogether in 1882, and Bryce got the patients involved in such constructive pursuits as farming and even journalism — between 1872 and the early 1880s patients wrote and edited their newspaper, *The Meteor*, which provided an unprecedented look inside a mental institution.

Bryce's enlightened stewardship was recognized around the country as a model to be emulated.

During the 20th century, Bryce suffered a long period of decline. By 1970, it was ranked last in state funding in the country. Later, as the movement to keep mental health patients in their hometowns took hold, the population fell from more than 5,000 patients to only a few hundred today. Now the grounds are about to be sold to the University of Alabama and a new, state-of-the-art facility is planned on the nearby campus of the Partlow Developmental Center.

But the people below those simple grave stones aren't going anywhere and deserve the recognition they are getting today at the 2 p.m. ceremony at the Bryant-Jemison Chapel on the Bryce campus.

"We want to appropriately honor the lives of those patients whose final resting place has not received the respect they deserve," commissioner of the Department of



Mental Health John Houston said.

Peter Bryce would be proud.

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