

The Insanity of It All

The Friends Hospital and Pioneering the Treatment for the Mentally Ill

Behind some trees, beautiful footpaths, and carefully manicured grass, a stone four-story mansion that is now known as the Friends Hospital lies on Roosevelt Boulevard in Philadelphia. Immersed in nearly two centuries of history, the Friends Hospital is the first privatized mental institution in the United States of America. This enigmatic establishment has influenced and revolutionized every aspect of American psychiatry since it opened in 1817. Yet the grand institution was a result of a few individuals invariably tied to care for the mentally ill.

Benjamin Rush, Father and Psychiatrist

Doctor Benjamin Rush: Pennsylvanian and signer of Declaration of Independence, father of psychiatry. When Dr. Rush began working in the mental wards of the Pennsylvania Hospital during the latter stages of his life in 1783, he observed the decrepit conditions of the

mentally ill there and began a series of reforms. At the time, the mentally ill were considered to be abominations, as terrors to the neighborhood, possessed by the devil. Thus, the Pennsylvania Hospital, as the first hospital to have a mental ward in the United States, was primarily established to keep the evil at bay. The mentally ill were treated as savages and animals, often beaten and chained, being refused visits even from family members. Dr. Rush was the first doctor to believe that the mentally ill were not doomed souls, but victims of a curable disease. Though controversial, he utilized methods such as bloodletting to apparently calm down lunatic behavior. During the time, Dr. Rush also proposed many changes to improve the conditions of the mental wards to allow for better lighting and heating. However, his plans frequently faced setbacks due to funding problems.

<Image 1>

A portrait of Benjamin Rush seated at desk, engraved by James Longacre.

Dr. Rush is the father of psychiatry, because he was a father. His eldest son, John, was sent home from the navy in 1810 due to attacks of depression and insanity. After killing a friend in a duel, John had made several attempts to take the lives of both himself and others. In a letter to John Adams, Dr. Rush himself described his son as “an object of horror to his afflicted parents and family” quoted from Carlson’s article “Benjamin Rush and His Insane Son”. Now suffering from a deep state of melancholy, John was placed in the mental ward of the Pennsylvania Hospital by his father. The eldest son was still in the mental ward when Dr. Rush died in 1813, uncured until John’s own death in 1837, still in the mental asylum.

So it was with mixed emotions that Dr. Rush wrote and published the first textbook on psychiatry, “*Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*”, in 1812. Dr. Rush speaks in the textbook, “I shall now deliver an opinion, which I have

long believed and taught in my lectures, and that is, that the cause of madness is seated primarily in the blood-vessels of the brain, and that it depends upon the same kind of morbid and irregular actions that constitutes other arterial disease." Dr. Rush classified many mental illnesses and prescribes a multitude of treatments for the mentally ill, which was to completely change mental institutions and treatment of the mentally ill in America, including the Friends Hospital.

The Melancholy of Thomas Scattergood

<Image 2>

Portrait of Thomas Scattergood by his son-in-law Stephen Pike.

The traveling Quaker minister was described by nearly all who knew him as a somewhat depressed man. He was often self-deprecating and generally in a melancholic state of mind. In 1794, Thomas Scattergood traveled to England to visit several Quaker schools and a mental institution, the York Retreat. There, he observed the many advantages

and flaws with the Quaker retreat firsthand, though apparently without much interest.

His travel to England did not appear to influence his impartiality to the mentally ill until 1808, when he encountered a woman in Sadsbury, Pennsylvania who was in despair and considered insane. Much to the surprise himself and his friends, he felt especially connected to the depressed lady. The next morning before leaving, he shared a message of love, peace, and happiness to her. At the following year's Yearly Meeting of Friends, a spirited lady whom Scattergood did not recognize greeted him, and spoke, "Why, don't thee know me? I am the Friend that through thy instrumentality was raised *right up* out of the earth!" She proved to be the same despairing woman that Scattergood talked to the previous year. The message of love and peace had apparently cured her.

No written records exist between this event and 1811. That year, proposals for a Quaker mental institution were raised simultaneously in two separate Friends Meetings in Philadelphia, one of which was at Thomas Scattergood's house. In June 1813, the building committee for the proposed institution purchased a farm in Frankford, Philadelphia, not far from Benjamin Rush's house, for the construction of the mental institution.

Ground Foundations

The "Contributors to the Asylum for the Relief of Persons deprived of the use of their Reason" met for the first time in April 1813. The committee was responsible for raising the necessary funds and organizing the construction of the mental institution. Personnel included Thomas Scattergood, the accredited founder of the Friends Hospital and Isaac Bonsall, a clerk who was to become the first superintendent of the institution, among numerous other merchants and physicians. By 1814, the committee had published a report of progress for the construction of the Asylum, and raised \$24,170.75, nearly \$250,000 by today's standards.

How did the committee manage to such a substantial amount of funds for the institution in just a year? The necessity for a mental institution in the Quaker community had prompted numerous Friends to give generously for the project. At the time, the only mental institution in Pennsylvania was the Pennsylvania Hospital, originally constructed in response to the increasing numbers of mad persons in Philadelphia. However, rooms for the mentally ill in the Pennsylvania Hospital were neither heated nor lighted. Beatings for these individuals were frequent and severe. Though conditions improved when Dr. Rush began to reform the institution, funding and architectural issues of the hospital had restricted Rush's transformations. Many problems still remained by his death in 1812. Thus, many Quakers did not wish to put their mentally ill friends or family into the Pennsylvania Hospital due to the poor conditions of the Hospital. The proposals for a Quaker mental institution that was privately run were met with much approval and quickly passed.

The values upon which the Friends Hospital founded were based on both moral values and Dr. Rush's teachings. First and foremost, the Friends Hospital was formed "with the necessary medical assistance" for the mentally ill and to "tend to facilitate their recovery," stated in the purpose of the 1814 progress report "*Account of the rise and progress of the asylum*" by Samuel Tuke. Influenced by Dr. Rush, the Quakers believed that mental illness was a curable disease. Moreover, the institution was to be constructed "in a retired situation...for the relief and accommodation of persons thus afflicted." The committee envisioned the Friends Hospital built on a farm in the countryside, featuring large fields and quiet surroundings. The institution provided patients and staff with comfort, tranquility, and a sense of family.

<Image 3>

The appearance of the Friends Hospital as proposed in "Account of the Rise and Progress of the Asylum" by Samuel Tuke in 1814.

The architecture of the Friends Hospital itself was notable for the revolutionary design and comfort it provided for the patients. The original stone construction consisted of two stories and two wings. The male and female patients were separated to each wing flanking the central administrative offices. Each wing had rooms on only one side of the hallway, the other side featuring windows to allow ample lighting and fresh air for the patients. Each wing had their own door to separate yards, and well-behaving patients were frequently allowed outside to the front yard for strolling and exercise along the beautiful walkways surrounded by trees. Parlors were placed in the center of the building to allow for conversation between patients.

The Friends Hospital officially opened in November 29, 1817 after an expenditure of \$42,670.74, roughly \$560,000 by today's standards. Eleven years later, further

construction on the hospital took place to lodge particularly manic or temperamental patients. By 1838, the hospital had received 507 patients.

Benevolent Mr. Bonsall

Isaac Bonsall was the natural choice for the first superintendent of the Friends Hospital. He was on the same planning committee as Thomas Scattergood since the very beginning, and since then had been especially involved and committed to all stages of the mental institution, clerical and constructional. Moreover, the Society of Friends valued Bonsall for his intelligence and strong moral values.

Bonsall treated patients throughout his years as superintendent both morally and medically from 1817-1823. He used several treatments for his patients using methods prescribed in Dr. Rush's textbook, such as soothing particularly manic patients by pouring cold water over their heads in the bath, though bloodletting was not practiced. He also treated patients with strong humanitarian values. Bonsall at every opportunity attempted to converse with the patients, often with disturbing results, finding that many of the patients had shattered or deranged minds. For example, he states in his diary that patient Frances T. "insists that has no brains, and that her left hand and arm are dead, and that she does not sleep any."

Bonsall treated his patients with care and love, most notably reflected in the case of John H. In his diary, quoted from David Roby's "Pioneer of Moral Treatment," Bonsall states:

I had the most rational conversation with John H. that I ever had. He seems quite intelligent, and states many facts relative to his father's business, his father's success, and his want of it. Most of what he said, I knew to be correct. It was truly a pleasure to discover such rationality.

We had allowed him to eat at our table to afford him all the facilities in our power to keep his mind calm and aid his recover.

However, being the superintendent of a mental institution was not without its difficulties. Nonetheless, Bonsall did not view troublesome patients with disgust or shame, but rather with a dismayed acceptance and sympathetic attitude. He was rarely, if ever, angry with his patients. Bonsall writes in another entry regarding John H:

I think I have not stated heretofore in what his "filth" consisted. He would mix his excrement with his urine, and rub this mixture over his body, and other parts of his person. Frequently, his excrement is made into cakes, and placed between papers, and then put either into his pockets, or between his clothes. While he was allowed the use of his trunk, he deposited considerable among his clothes placed therein.

Moreover, Bonsall attempted to cure his patients with occupational and reactional therapy. By employing patients in exercise and other meaningful errands, the temperaments of many patients were improved. Among them was John H. Though John was “excessively lazy” and “there is no persuading him to work,” he was eventually convinced otherwise.

[Samuel Raleigh] then took [John H.] to the woodpile and tried to induce him to carry a few sticks, which he refused to do. He then got a rope and tied a number of sticks to his back and made him walk up stairs with it. He repeated this several times until John consented to carry sticks in his arms. [Thereafter] John H. carried several armfuls of wood, and pounded considerable quantity of brick . . . John H worked most of the afternoon, and his disposition to work increases . . . John H. is now one of our best workers, and in other respects improves much.

During his time in the Friends Hospital, Bonsall gave many mentally ill patients something they had never experienced before, nor what any other mentally ill dare to dream of: care, trust, and freedom.

The Legacy of Psychiatry

Of the 507 patients admitted between 1817 and 1838, the cure rate for the Friends Hospital was 49%, compared to the national average of 29.15% at the time. The soothing countryside setting, abundance of light and heating, and exceptional care by staff and physicians was unique for its time. On December 1824, a newspaper article on the Pennsylvania Hospital published in the National Gazette states how it wishes that an institution could be built in the country similar to the Friends Hospital. The Friends Hospital was a pioneer in the field of psychiatry and many were soon to follow.

The Friends Hospital pioneered occupational therapy. Carol Perloff describes the activities available for patients in “The Asylum”.

[Patients] could stroll through the woods and gardens of the grounds, play croquet, cricket, or tennis, attend Friends meetings at Frankford, or go on shopping excursions. Reading materials, lectures, tea parties, parlor games, magic lantern slide exhibitions, and stereoscopes were among the many other diversions. Those inclined might visit the deer park, enclosed in part of the woods on the property, or watch the lambs, poultry, English rabbits, and pigeons introduced into their pleasure grounds.

As a form of occupational therapy, the Friends Hospital also encouraged patients to tend gardens, the forerunner of today’s horticultural therapy. The distinguishing feature of horticultural therapy was that the patients tended to living, changing

Floor plan of a mental institution proposed by Thomas S. Kirkbride's "On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane" 1854 (top), contrasted to the floor plan of Friends Hospital in 1835 (bottom), and in Charles Cherry's "A Quiet Haven".

organisms. From the experience, patients can often relate to the experiences in their own lives. The first greenhouse opened in 1879, providing an opportunity for year-round greenery and horticultural therapy. The beautiful azalea gardens in the Friends Hospital, started in the 1920's, are open to public for viewing pleasure. Horticultural therapy is now globally recognized to benefit individuals both therapeutically and vocationally.

Of the thirteen founding members of the American Institutions for the Insane, now known as the American Psychiatric Association, two were physicians at the Friends Hospital. Thomas Story Kirkbride was the resident physician in the Friends Hospital from 1832 to 1833. Kirkbride was heavily influenced institution's vision of moral treatment, occupational therapy, and the abundance of lighting and comfort in the architectural design. In 1854, he published the renowned work "On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane", in which he suggested the famous "Kirkbride Plan." The plan which was to transform mental institution architecture for the years to come suggested buildings with two wings for each sex flanking on central administrative area, featuring well-lighted and heated rooms. His designs and plans were very similar to the Friends Hospital, though often on a grander scale.



The second founding member of the American Institutions for the Insane was Pliny Earle, who was a resident physician at the Friends Hospital from 1840 to 1842. The first of his accomplishments was his adamant disapproval of Dr. Benjamin Rush's bloodletting as a cure to mental illness. "I believe that Dr. Rush's theories are annually consigning hundreds prematurely to the grave, and hundreds more to premature insanity," writes Earle in his memoir in 1857. Secondly, many mental institutions at the time claimed cure rates of more than 90%, causing public distrust in such institutions. Thus, Earle standardized the statistics of mental illness by conducting a large survey and analysis on 39 mental institutions across the United States. As a result, he had discovered the national average of 29.15% stated above. Moreover, as a found member of the American Institutions for the Insane, he is noteworthy for having a vision of kindness and occupation, which the Institution adopted.

When Dr. Rush tended to his mentally ill son in the Pennsylvania Hospital, or when Mr. Scattergood, though often melancholic, fervently proposed a plan for a mental institution in his humble abode, neither planned nor dreamed for an establishment that was to be a pioneer of American psychiatry. Isaac Bonsall, who attended to his

erial view of the current
riends Hospital, as found on
ng Maps.



patients with great care and benevolence, could not anticipate the reform that was to come for asylums in the entire United States. The lasting legacy that is the Friends Hospital was not the result of men seeking fame or glory, but produced by the sincere hearts of

compassionate individuals. Today, the Friends Hospital stands as a large complex of buildings surrounded by beautiful gardens, as a symbol of upstanding morals, and a tribute to good men.

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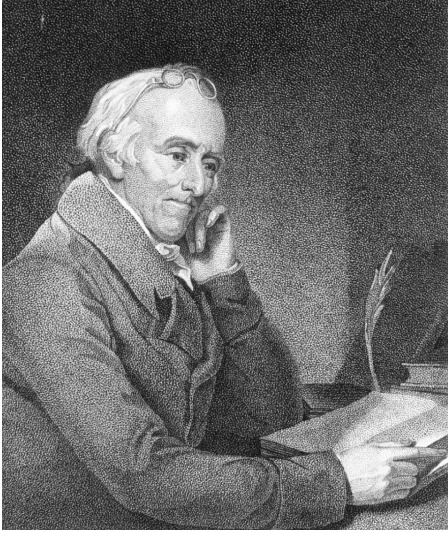


Image 1



image 2

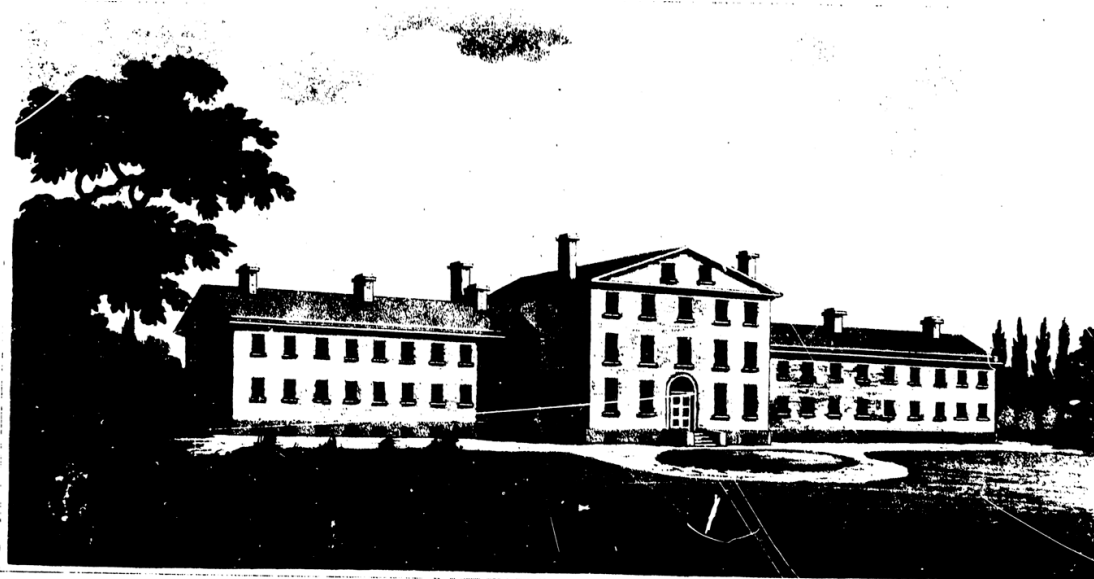


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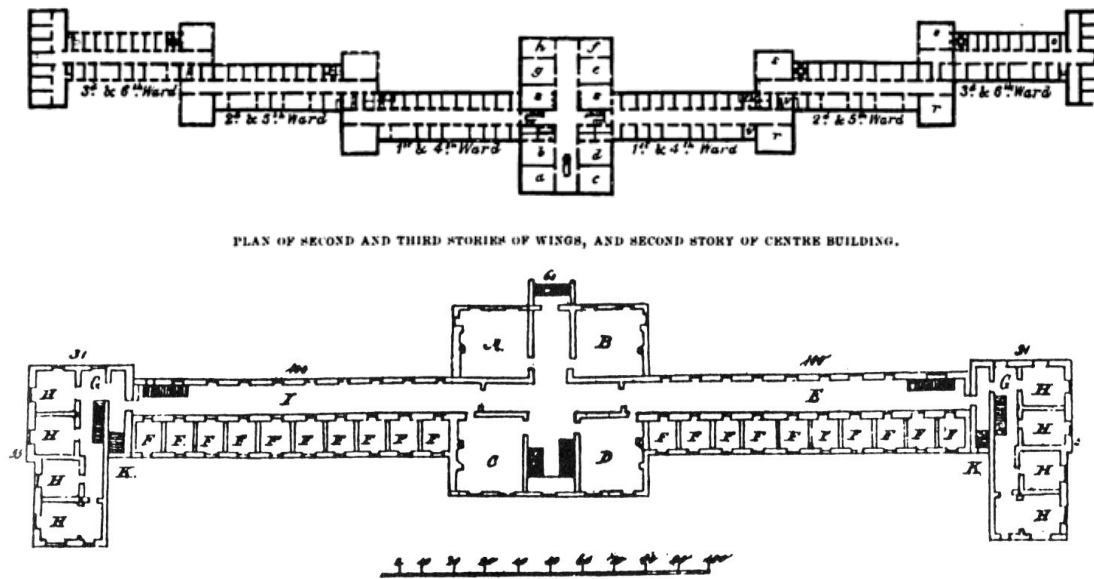


Image 4



Image 5