

YOUR VIEWS: Landmark Bryce Hospital must be preserved in entirety

By Letters from our readers

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Bryce Hospital is an Alabama treasure. Along with its rich and long history, Bryce's main building is nationally significant for its architectural plan, which changed the way mental health facilities were designed by the mid-19th century.

Characterized by a series of wings stepped back from a central core, this design provided rooms with natural sunlight and privacy, spaces clearly earmarked for different uses, and many other features not seen in earlier mental health institutions. The plan reflected a major change in the philosophy behind caring for the mentally ill. Many scholars recognize Bryce Hospital as being the best example of this revolutionary plan.

Originally known as the Alabama Insane Hospital, Bryce Hospital was designed in 1852 by nationally renowned Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan and his partner, John Stewart. The architects designed the hospital to specifications of Dr. Thomas Kirkbride, the leading 19th-century authority in the mental health field and creator of the "Kirkbride Linear Plan."

During the mid-to-late 19th century, Bryce Hospital became the primary design model used for more than 100 U.S. and Canadian asylums.

Today, Bryce Hospital is one of only five surviving -- completely intact -- examples in the country. While other linear-plan hospitals still exist, most have either lost their flanking wings or have been altered over the years. This is why Bryce's "Kirkbride Linear Plan" must be preserved in its entirety.

With its original plan intact, Bryce Hospital is a place of national significance in telling the story of American mental health care.

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