

Strange Alabama: Bryce Hospital

BY KYARRA HARRIS | Published 09/12/16 3:00am | Updated 23 hours ago |



The old Bryce Hospital, located on the University's campus, is a landmark in the city of Tuscaloosa and the state of Alabama. It's one of the oldest mental health facilities in the state, opened in 1861, and the building has its share of stories.

Students often hear about the Bryce building and rumors surrounding it. Although it is sometimes called "the old Bryce building", it was originally an adjoining section to the original Bryce building which is located in Northport.

CW / Jake Stevens

Jaimee Daulton, a junior majoring in business, said she has heard of people sneaking into the building,

but she has not been able to see the building up close herself.

"I think it's cool that they are preserving the building since there are not a lot of buildings left with that kind of history," Daulton said. "Especially one that sounds like it was there during the time of the Civil War."

The building is over 150 years old, and it shows its age. For many students, sneaking into the building is a tradition, though this is considered trespassing and could lead to students getting arrested. Still, groups of students take trips inside every year, especially during Halloween season.

"Some people say the room that the furnace was in is still warm, even though the place has been shut down for years," said Kenneth Vassar, a junior majoring in marketing. "Sneaking in isn't for me – it's weird and creepy. But I think everyone knows someone who has."

The entire facility was originally named the Alabama Insane Hospital, but the building was later renamed after the first superintendent Peter Bryce. Bryce was a physician from South Carolina who studied mental health. He sought out to see that patients were treated morally.

Bryce died in 1892, but his goal to treat patients with appropriate care and ethics remained an important part of the hospital's mission until their decline in patients in 1970.

According to The Encyclopedia of Alabama, concerns from the public arose over whether long-term patients that worked during their hospital stay were a source of "free labor".

In 1972 in the case of Wyatt v. Stickney the judge ruled that each patient had a right to psychiatric evaluations and the right to live in the least restrictive environment possible. Many patients from all over the country were released from hospitals after the ruling.

The building still has a lot of significance even after standing for so many years. Alex Patterson, a senior majoring in marketing, said people enjoy the thrill of being scared and aura that surrounds the building's historical significance.

"I think they hope to experience something for themselves and find out their truth, because you hear

stories about people experiencing things but most of us can't actually believe it until we see it with our own eyes," Patterson said.