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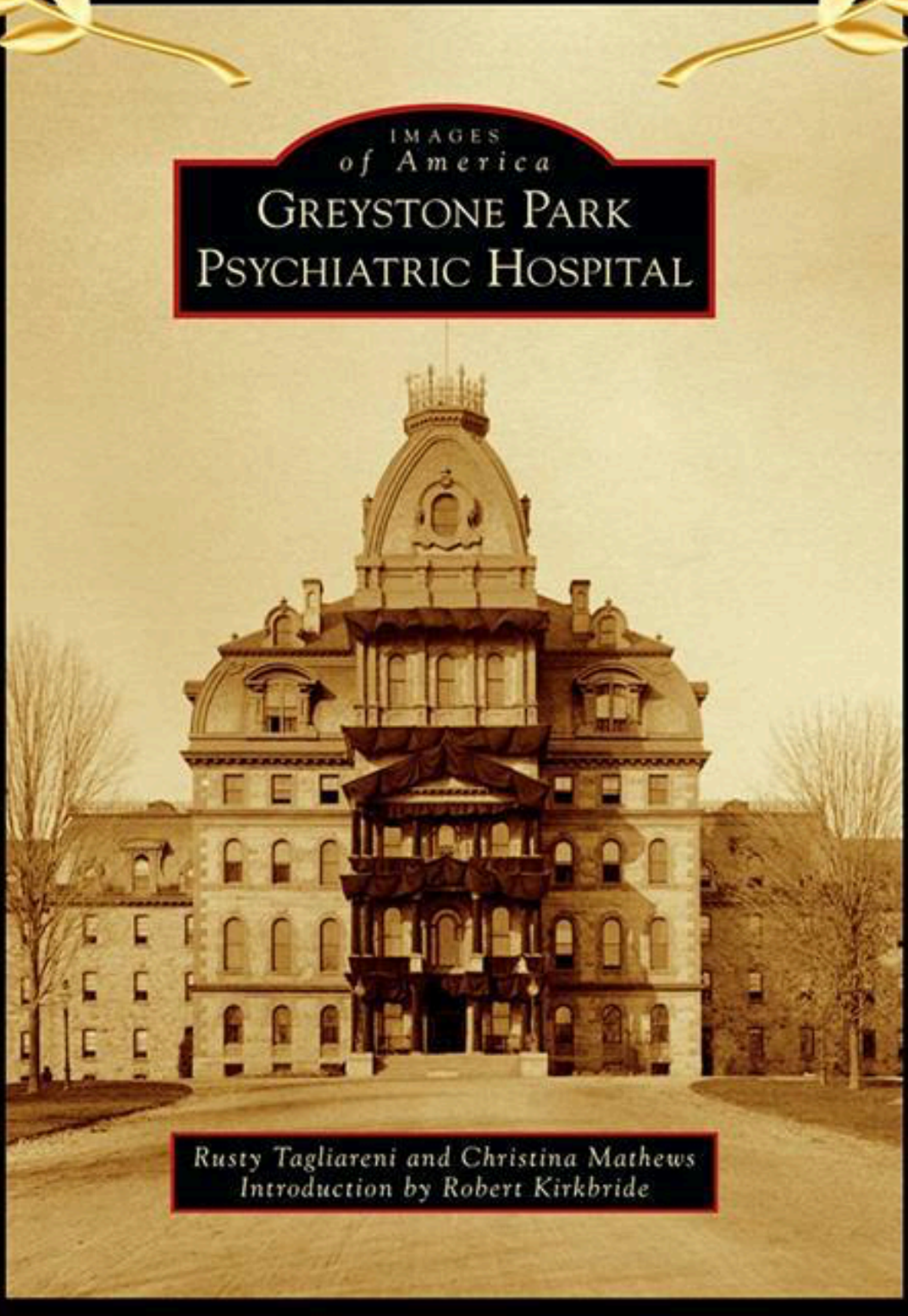


IMAGES
*of America*

# GREYSTONE PARK PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Rusty Tagliareni and Christina Mathews
Introduction by Robert Kirkbride

# INTRODUCTION

*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.*

—Emma Lazarus

In the eyes of the world, 1876 was an auspicious year for the United States of America. Despite economic tensions and the aftermath of a war that had divided the nation, a bright symbol of the country's rise—the torch of the Statue of Liberty—was exhibited in Philadelphia at the first international exposition held in the United States, and it remained for several years after in New York City's Madison Square Park. Conceived as a memorial to the nation's abolition of slavery and its first century of independence, the colossus would inspire the immortal words from Emma Lazarus and was kindred in spirit to another monumental structure completed in the same year, not far away.

On October 31, 1876, managers of the State Hospital for the Insane at Morristown, New Jersey, submitted the first annual report for a vast new building shaped by similar egalitarian ideals. The founding managers wrote that Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital, as it would later be known, "will ever remain as a monument to the enlightened liberality of the age and the State that gave it existence."

If only those aspirational words had proven to be true.

The cover of this book shows Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in mourning for a simple reason. Despite public outcry and the committed resilience of local citizens, Greystone was unceremoniously demolished across the summer of 2015. With no plausible explanation, state officials disregarded multiple offers for redevelopment—including at least one at no cost to taxpayers—and turned an indifferent eye to due legal process by accelerating demolition, which eliminated the option of federal funding for preservation. Even as New York State refurbished H.H. Richardson's Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, New Jersey taxpayers' money was directed by state leadership to erase a structure of national and global significance.

There are complex and conflicting views toward the preservation or destruction of Kirkbride hospitals. Embracing this complexity is critical to the imaginative reuse of these immense structures, which average hundreds of thousands of square feet and offer remarkable examples of architectural know-how, embodying energy and memory, personal and communal. They also offer remarkable opportunity.

Some may see only horror in these buildings, and in asylums in general, and this is understandable. Although they were conceived under the Enlightenment belief in the therapeutic powers of beauty, and despite the ideals of the Kirkbride Plan to provide a place of care for the placeless, the asylums offer cautionary reminders of the frailties of human infrastructures and bureaucratization in the name of efficiency.

Challenging as it may be, it is important to decouple the Kirkbride hospitals from the sensationalized associations that have accumulated around them. When Thomas Story Kirkbride urged superintendents to know the names of all of their patients, he established a

critical scale for optimal performance. Each stagger-step of a Kirkbride Plan Hospital was designed for a manageable cohort, yet that did not deter the mental health system from overpopulating these structures almost immediately. As noted in the first annual report, Greystone could "easily accommodate eight hundred patients, with the necessary officers and attendants," but it was not designed for the thousands it hosted at any given moment in its long history.

Except for their first few years of operation, most Kirkbride hospitals never had an opportunity to operate at the scale of peak effectiveness. Administrators, physicians, and caretakers were compelled into a perpetual mode of crisis management, exacerbated by the traumas of economic depressions and frequent wars.

Overuse was not the fault of the asylums themselves. The buildings did not commit people; people committed people. Yet too often, these buildings have been treated as scapegoats by politicians and others whose petty vendettas and short-term interests distract the public from tending mindfully to the bones of our public infrastructure and addressing the clear and present neglect of our national mental health care.

Buildings like Greystone accumulate dense histories, inspiring mixed sentiments that are easily overlooked in favor of a single coherent narrative. Yet there is no single, omniscient history; there are coexisting truths and crosscurrent histories, unfolding from vantages that often differ and are dynamic. Careful, thorough readings of primary sources—the original artifacts and buildings— cultivate empathy for the past and present. Thoughtful site documentation, historical research, physical restoration, and adaptive reuse promote continuity across generations, sustaining cultural memory and identity, as Tom Mayes has emphasized in a series of articles written recently for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Such reasoning demonstrates with crystalline clarity why old buildings, especially buildings such as the Kirkbrides, matter.

Greystone represented a vast amount of embodied energy—the resources expended in the building's fabrication in all its financial, material, and human facets. These include the infrastructures necessary to build the building, including quarries and worker housing, along with power, water, and material supply. Of course, buildings are more than the sum of matter and energy; they represent our embodied intelligence. Human imagination—and lack thereof—manifests itself through our constructed environment. How we make is how we think. Human know-how and belief systems are embodied in the details that appoint our everyday lives. Such details are easily overlooked but subconsciously furnish our imaginations, equipping us to be and become ourselves. Like all Kirkbride hospitals, Greystone represented a commitment to enhanced mental wellbeing through a beautiful and well-designed environment.

Akin to other Kirkbrides, Greystone was built by standards now hailed as economically and environmentally sustainable, with materials quarried close by and appointed with local help in the stained-glass, mechanical systems, and furnishings that were later influenced by Gustav Stickley's Craftsman Farms, a national historic landmark just three miles away. With unbridled pride and optimism, the first annual report informs New Jersey citizens:

> The provision here made for the care and cure of the insane is most ample in extent and excellent in character, and is fitting evidence of the humanity and liberality of the State towards its insane citizens, who are, in an especial sense from their helpless condition, its own proper wards. . . . The facilities of such an establishment when well organized and in working condition are *immeasurably* superior to any that can be supplied by friends or by city or county authorities, and therefore should be availed of in behalf of all those who, through the loss of reason, are entitled to its benefits.

Kirkbride hospitals are among our nation's most compelling social innovations, providing shelter for the unfortunate as part of the broader public good and a more level playing field for the pursuit of happiness as an inalienable right. Destruction of such products of human care and skill, willful or not, is not merely wasteful; it is hubristic and nonsensical.

Study of the demolished Kirkbrides benefits from urban explorers and documentarians who have captured details of these structures before their disappearance. Rusty Tagliareni and Christina Mathews have made substantial contributions through their project Antiquity Echoes, and such photographic and documentary projects as *Greystone's Last Stand*. These materials are invaluable to support digital documentation and virtual reconstructions. Yet, as I have learned from my own multimedia research on two Renaissance memory chambers, the true value of such media is to stimulate curiosity and point us to the actual artifact. Such documentary efforts may enhance, but can never replace the original artifact. Primary sources are far superior to digital reconstructions, regardless of rationale.

Why? Human learning is multisensorial, experiential, and contextual. Buildings offer ideal vehicles for cultural and personal narratives. The architecture chosen by our founders to represent our fledgling nation, less than four score years prior to Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride's influential treatise on asylum keeping, is part of an ancient legacy informed by the arts of rhetoric and activated by public debate and shared governance. The list of formidable architects who designed Kirkbrides, including Samuel Sloan, H.H. Richardson, and Thomas U. Walter to name a few, are of a lineage that extends back through Thomas Jefferson, Andrea Palladio, and Leon Battista Alberti to the *res publica* of ancient Rome and the *polis* of Athens.

Democracies and the public forum call for architecture whose decorum and ornament offer memorable locations, aesthetically and cognitively speaking. Such locations furnish public debate with perches for the "birds of thought," whose flight powers the private and public imagination, instilling civic pride and shared identity. The chapel and amusement room offered two such locations at the heart of Greystone and the Kirkbride Plan. In a 1981 article, George Layne described Thomas Story Kirkbride's groundbreaking use of photography and the magic lantern in psychiatric therapy, a practice called out by Greystone's managers:

> [The amusement room is] fifty-nine by forty-seven feet, and twenty-four feet high, is well lighted, and is to be fitted up with stage and scenery for tableaux and minor theatrical representations on one side, and with arrangements for showing magic lantern views on the other. The spectators are furnished with seats with reversible

> backs. The chapel is seventy-one by thirty-seven feet, and thirty-six feet high, and is lighted by stained glass windows. The arched wood ceiling is embellished with stencil work, and the sides, front end (a plain surface) and rear end (an arched recess) are tastefully frescoed. Both of these rooms are exceedingly valuable for the purposes for which they are intended, and are now in frequent use.

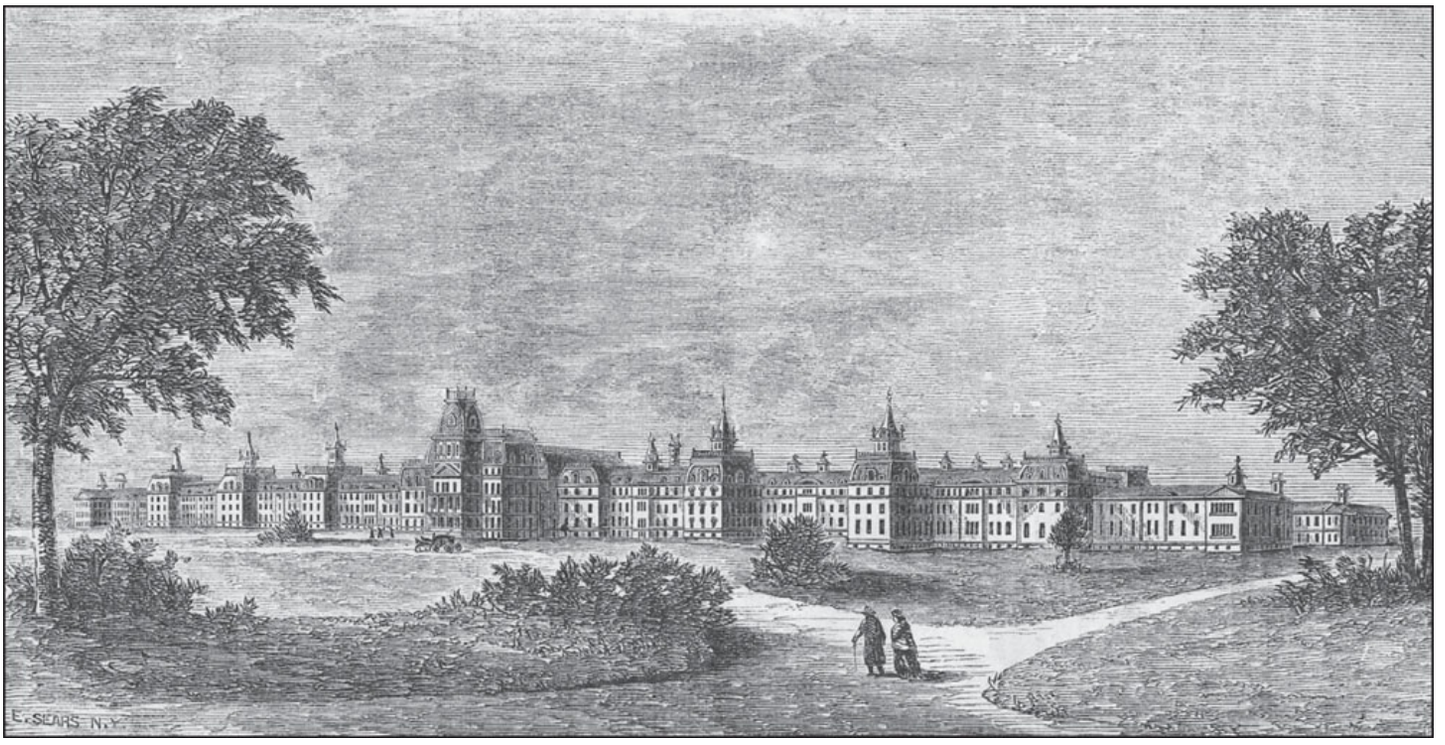
No longer. Despite national rallies and formal legal efforts to stay demolition, officials at every level of New Jersey government, including those who understandably yet regrettably remained silent as events unfolded, could not see the value of revitalizing this remarkable piece of human history. When transparent exchange is denied and buildings constructed for the public good are deliberately erased without remorse, swift and tenacious response is necessary to lend voice to the silenced and support due process.

Local communities are embracing the complexity of the Kirkbride hospitals, increasingly aware of their long-term, multifaceted value. Enthusiasts are fascinated with the daunting logistics of building one of these vast structures at a time prior to motorized construction equipment. They are committed to the challenges of resuscitating the hospitals for a range of new uses and for those as-yet unimagined. Such negotiations are the blessings and burdens of democracy.

The Statue of Liberty has been revitalized on several occasions by the generosity of our citizens. If only that had been possible for Greystone, whose ignominious fate represents an epic failure of our collective imagination and a cautionary tale of the consequences of nontransparent and wasteful governance. We have been denied an opportunity to remake a resource created to help others remake themselves. We were also denied an opportunity to re-envision our own future through the lens of a Greystone transformed.

It is my sincere hope, and of others I represent, that Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital and its tens of thousands of physicians, staff, and patients, including those who died while in residence, are duly respected and memorialized with the salvaged remains of the building to ensure that Greystone, although erased, is not forgotten.

—Robert Kirkbride




To explain the origins of Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital, it is first necessary to explain the ideals behind its creation. Greystone was built around a plan that adhered to the principles of Thomas Story Kirkbride. Thomas Kirkbride was first and foremost a psychiatrist, but what he will forever be remembered for was his advocacy for the mentally ill. He devised a plan of building that, in its very form, could serve as a therapeutic tool to aid in the recovery of patients who benefited simply by being present within its walls. Abundant sunlight and copious amounts of fresh air were key principles of his, along with the view that patients, no matter how afflicted, should never be treated as anything less than respected human beings. His concept came to be called the Kirkbride Plan, and over 60 massive asylums were built throughout the nation based upon its premise. Of all these facilities, none matched the size or scope of Greystone Park, the largest Kirkbride Plan institution to ever exist. (Courtesy of Mike McDevitt.)