University of North Carolina Asheville

“The Insane and Other Defectives”: Dr. P.L. Murphy and the Enactment of the Colony System at the State Hospital in Morganton

A Senior Thesis

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Abstract:

Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy, the first Superintendent of the State Hospital at Morganton, helped revolutionize mental healthcare in North Carolina and thus transformed the facility into a lasting landmark. During his tenure, Murphy practiced moral treatments which took a more humanistic approach to mental healthcare and abolished the use of physical restraint.\(^1\) An example of one such exercise was the enactment of the Colony System, which incorporated agricultural activities as a therapeutic practice. Recent scholarship on this individual however, has failed to place Murphy in the proper context of his time. Therefore, it is the goal of this thesis to provide a corrective analysis of the life and accomplishments of Dr. Murphy, particularly his implementation of the Colony System which made the State Hospital a model institution into the present day.

“Undoubtedly, the one great sight of Morganton after it’s [sic] mountain view, is the State Hospital for the Insane distant one mile south of the court and in full view of the W.N.C.R.R.” Col. William S. Pearson in 1891 highly praised the State Hospital at Morganton, a facility for the mentally insane. The residents of Morganton as well as the greater region of Western North Carolina shared Pearson’s sentiments and viewed the State Hospital as not only a symbol of healing for those suffering, but also as a physical representation of progress and modernity that the region as a whole lacked. Thanks to the work done by Murphy, the State Hospital at Morganton remains an operational institution filled with academic interest.

In order to achieve an accurate image of the early history of the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum it is necessary to understand the status of mental healthcare in the state at this time. Beginning as early as the third quarter of the twentieth century, interest has been expressed in the interconnectedness of politics and healthcare at both the state and national level. In 1972 Lloyd J. Thompson authored “History of Mental Health in North Carolina” that was released in the second volume of *Medicine in North Carolina: Essays in the History of Medical Science and Medical Service, 1524-1960*. This piece discussed how North Carolina responded longitudinally to the issue of mental healthcare and the role that politics played in that response. Only a short number of years later, Clark R. Cahow continued Thompson’s work with his 1980 book *People, Patients, and Politics: The History of the North Carolina Mental Hospitals 1848-1960* which took an analytical look at the history of North Carolina’s mental institutions. It is clear through these publications that the fields of mental health and politics possessed an intimate relationship.

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The Western North Carolina Insane Asylum began as a legislative issue and the actions of Superintendent Murphy were the result of government decisions that forever impacted the lives of those the facility served.

A dedicated nursing staff was vital to the success of the State Hospital at Morganton. As early as 1982 Dr. Olga Maranjian Church understood the importance of psychiatric nursing when she published her dissertation entitled, “That Noble Reform: The Emergence of Psychiatric Nursing in the United States, 1882-1963.”\(^5\) Church’s article denoted the vital role that nurses played in mental health care facilities across the United States by aiding primary physicians. Often it was nurses who interacted most with patients and attempted to keep them as happy and comfortable as possible. Therefore, Carrie Streeter once again examined the impact of nursing with her 2011 article, “Theatrical Entertainments and Kind Words: Nursing the Insane in Western North Carolina, 1882-1907” that was published in *The Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing.*\(^6\) While Church examined nursing in the United States as a whole, Streeter focused particularly on the State Hospital at Morganton and the unique techniques implemented there. Credited with much of the success of the asylum, Dr. Murphy’s legacy would not have been possible without the support of his nursing staff.

During the years of 1890 and 1920, a period also known as the Progressive Era, a shift occurred in institutions like the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum regarding treatment techniques. David J. Rothman in 1980 with his book *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* reported how asylums across the United States during this period began to move away from convenience based care to one more rooted in

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conscience.\textsuperscript{7} In 2012 Carrie Streeter authored her Master’s thesis entitled, ‘Let Me See Some Insane People’: Progressive-Era Development of the State Hospital at Morganton, 1883-1907, which remarked how the State Hospital at Morganton compared to other asylums across the United States.\textsuperscript{8} During his tenure, Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy transformed the State Hospital at Morganton into a model of a conscience based care through his implementation of the Colony System.

Superintendent Murphy understood the horrors that occurred in other asylums when it came to patient care. Therefore, he attempted to distinguish his institution as a center of healing. Gerald N. Grob’s 1977 article “Rediscovering Asylums: The Unhistorical History of the Mental Hospital” detailed accounts of abuse and immoral techniques that at one time were commonplace.\textsuperscript{9} Through Murphy’s dedication to holistic healthcare, Morganton, North Carolina gained a reputation as a premiere destination for the mentally ill. Edward W. Phifer Jr. a native of Morganton recognized the impact of the State Hospital on not only his hometown but the state of North Carolina as a whole which served as inspiration for his 1979 book Burke County: A Brief History.\textsuperscript{10} Although Patrick Livingston Murphy was the individual who propelled the State Hospital to prominence it was the early decision by legislators to institute the Kirkbride Method that set Murphy on a path for success. The Art of Asylum-Keeping: Thomas Story Kirkbride, and the Origins of American Psychiatry published in 1994 by Nancy Tomes, detailed the life of Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride and the events leading up to his development of his famed asylum


\textsuperscript{8} Carrie Streeter, “‘Let Me See Some Insane People’: Progressive-Era Development of the State Hospital at Morganton, 1883-1907,” (Masters Thesis, Appalachian State University, 2012).


\textsuperscript{10} Edward W. Phifer Jr., Burke County: A Brief History (Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources Division of Archives and History, 1979).
method that was implemented at countless institutions like the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum.\textsuperscript{11}

In 2009 Appalachian State University Professor Dr. Lynne M. Getz brought to the surface initial scholarship on Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy. ‘‘‘A Strong Man of Large Human Sympathy’: Dr. Patrick L. Murphy and the Challenges of Nineteenth-Century Asylum Psychiatry in North Carolina,’’ an article that appeared in \textit{The North Carolina Historical Review} accounted Dr. Murphy’s impact on the field of psychiatry during his time at the State Hospital at Morganton.\textsuperscript{12} Although heavily researched, the problematic argument presented by Dr. Getz’ judged Murphy’s medical actions and decisions against contemporary practices in an attempt to minimalize his impact. In the context of his time Murphy was regarded as an innovative and revolutionary medical professional. Therefore, it is the goal of this thesis to provide a corrective analysis of the life and accomplishments of Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy and highlight the role he played in establishing the State Hospital at Morganton as a model institution for not only the patients it served but the community in which it was housed.

Long before Dr. Murphy appeared on the mental health stage, Dorothea Dix, a famed activist for the mentally ill, advocated for the creation of a mental institution in North Carolina.

I appear as the advocate of those who cannot plead their own cause…I am the voice of the maniac whose piercing cries from the dreary dungeons of your jails penetrate not your Halls of Legislation. I am the Hope of the poor crazed beings who pine in the cells, and


stalls, and cages, and waste rooms of your poor-houses...shut out, cut off from all healing influences, from all mind-restoring cares.\textsuperscript{13}

These are the words spoken by Dix in November of 1848 as she stood before the North Carolina General Assembly and implored legislators for aid in the fight against insanity. As Dix went on to say, North Carolina was one of the only states at this time that still lacked a mental health institution. She particularly detested the use of alternative and violent methods of care toward the insane. Dix stressed:

\begin{quote}
At present there are practiced in the State of North Carolina, four methods of disposing of her more than one thousand insane [sic], epileptic, and idiot citizens, viz: In the cells and dungeons of the County jails, in comfortless rooms and cages in the county poor-houses, in the dwellings of private families, and by sending the patients to distant hospitals, more seasonably established in sister States.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Dorothea Dix’s plea proved the need for a mental health care facility in North Carolina was absolutely necessary. Appealing to the legislators, Dix promoted the economic benefit that awaited North Carolina with the creation of a stable mental healthcare system. Central to her economic argument was the fact that it was more expensive in the long-term to house patients in county prisons and poor-houses, many of which were severely overcrowded.\textsuperscript{15} Dorothea Dix’s efforts before the North Carolina General Assembly led to the establishment of Dorothea Dix Hospital, a mental health institution located in the State Capital of Raleigh. Upon completion on March 5, 1856 the initial patient count was in excess of 40, and rapidly grew beyond the hospital’s ability to provide proper care.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Dorothea Lynde Dix, “Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital for the Protection and Cure of the Insane,” (Meeting Before the General Assembly of North Carolina, House of Commons Document, No. 2), November 1848, Documenting the American South, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 3.

\textsuperscript{14} Dix, “Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital,” 4.

\textsuperscript{15} Dix, “Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital,” 5-6.

\textsuperscript{16} “The Founding of Dix Hill,” \textit{The Antique Gazette}. August 1966, Box 1, Folder 1.4 Lynne M. Getz Student Papers at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC.
Witnessing rapidly rising patient counts in existing institutions, the North Carolina General Assembly of 1875 began formulating a plan for a facility in the Western region of the State, the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum and Murphy’s future home. Major proponents of the erection of a new asylum were Colonel Samuel McDowell Tate and Captain J.C. Mills. The actions of these men ensured the appropriation of a sum totaling $75,000 for the asylum’s construction.\(^{17}\) With finances secured, the next critical decision in the foundation of a western asylum focused on the selection a proper site. Considered locations included larger cities like Asheville and Hickory, but legislators selected the town of Morganton, North Carolina due to its convenient proximity to the railroad and the foothill location.\(^{18}\)

In 1875 after the selection of Morganton, construction began unabated on the new institution. In the same year, the commission selected the Kirkbride Method, a design plan that rapidly gained support in the world of mental health. Thomas S. Kirkbride, the creator of the aforementioned method outlined that the maximum number of patients that any one facility should house was 250 because counts beyond that were unmanageable and detrimental to care. By extension the model dictated that, “hospitals should always be located in the country, not within less than two miles of a town of considerable size…they should, if possible, be near turnpikes or other good roads, or within reasonable proximity to a railroad.”\(^{19}\) Later in his book *Construction, Organization and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane with Some Remarks on Insanity and its Treatment*, Kirkbride stressed that the scenery of the hospital’s countryside locations should be attractive and the beauty and serenity therapeutic for the

\(^{17}\) Sheila A. Brown, “Broughton Hospital History 1874-1977” (Lenior Rhyne College, July 7, 1977), Hanging Files, Burke County Library Archives, Morganton, NC, 3-30.

\(^{18}\) Brown, “Broughton Hospital History,” 3.

residents. According to the Kirkbride Method the town of Morganton, North Carolina was the ideal location for the erection of the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum.

With construction well under way, the time arrived to choose an individual who could take charge of the impressive structure. According to the By-Laws of the institution the duties of the Superintendent of the hospital included, but were not limited to: “The Superintendent shall reside constantly in the institution and shall devote his whole time to its welfare…It shall be his duty to see that all the officers and employees of the Institution are energetic, industrious, punctual, exact and in all respects faithful [sic] in the performance of their several duties as prescribed in these By-Laws.” It is clear through this excerpt of the expected duties of the Superintendent that not just any person was capable of undertaking supervision of this massive establishment.

The only individual capable of succeeding at the position of Superintendent of the State Hospital at Morganton for more than twenty-five years was Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy. Born October 23, 1848 in Sampson County, North Carolina Murphy grew up in a family of successful lawyers. After extensive schooling at the Hillsborough Military Academy, Murphy returned home to Sampson County in 1863 and began a local medical practice. Despite a relocation to Wilmington, Murphy found himself dissatisfied with traditional medicine. Soon after, P.L. Murphy enrolled at the University of Virginia and later the University of Maryland where he

21 Board of Directors of the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum to His Excellency The Governor of North Carolina, “Duties of Superintendent,” December 8, 1882, Hanging Files, Burke County Library Archives, Morganton, NC.
22 “Hillsborough Military Academy Report Upon the Recitations and Conduct,” October 2, 1863, Box 1, Folder 2, Patrick Livingston Murphy Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.
specialized in the field of Psychiatry and graduated in March of 1871. In December of 1879 the renowned Western Virginia Asylum in Staunton offered Murphy the position of Assistant Physician. 1879 was also the year in which Murphy married a woman named Bettie Waddell from Augusta, Virginia who not only made him a father to four children but served as an invaluable asset to his future place of employment.

As an Assistant Physician, the news of a new institution being constructed in Morganton was no secret to Murphy or the mental health community. This new hospital provided an opportunity for Murphy to establish himself as a Superintendent, a role he greatly desired. According to a 1910 Memorial Notice written by the Assistant Physician of the State Hospital, Isaac M. Taylor, M.D., when Murphy applied for the role of Superintendent at the State Hospital at Morganton, he “brought to the board of directors assembled to choose a superintendent, recommendations of such strength, that though he was without political influence he was elected over a large field of competitors, many of them eminent in the State as successful practitioners.” Able to distinguish and elevate himself in the eyes of his superiors, Dr. Murphy established a well-known reputation at the Western Virginia Asylum. When writing a letter of recommendation on behalf of Murphy, his superiors declared, “He is still young—of fine executive abilities, cool judgment, and indomitable energy. We therefore think the new Asylum

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25 Board of Directors of the Western Lunatic Asylum to Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy, “Offer Letter,” December 12, 1879, Box 1, Folder 2, Patrick Livingston Murphy Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.
27 Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy to Board of Directors Western Insane Asylum, “Acceptance Letter,” December 4, 1882, Box 1, Folder 3, Patrick Livingston Murphy Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.
at Morganton, under his control, would be managed prudently—intelligently and successfully.”

Offered the position on December 4, 1882, Patrick Livingston Murphy accepted the position of Superintendent for the nearly completed Western North Carolina Insane Asylum and assumed the role in January of 1883.

Eager for the construction of the hospital to conclude, legislators confirmed Murphy’s selection as Superintendent. In 1883, convict laborers placed nearly three million local handmade bricks making the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum ready to open its doors. On March 29, 1883 the first patient, Dr. J.K. Pepper, a forty-five year old formerly practicing physician was admitted to the institution. Dr. Pepper’s admittance records indicate that he was “male. Is married. Has a liberal education. Practicing physician. Has been insane nearly two (2) years…Confined to bed most of the time.” Before his stay at the asylum, Dr. Pepper battled mental illness in excess of two years. Records indicate that on March 27, 1885, almost exactly two years after his admittance to the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum, Pepper succumbed to his illness. Over the next several years admittance numbers continued to grow to the point that in the hospital’s first decade of existence an estimated 1,378 patients received treatment, a number far exceeding the planned maximum capacity for the facility. In a December 8, 1900 Report of the Superintendent letter to the Board of Directors, Murphy recorded that 37% of patients had experienced a full recovery in the near decade since the hospital had been in operation.

29 “Letter of Recommendation on Behalf of Murphy,” 1882, Box 1, Folder 3, Patrick Livingston Murphy Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.
30 “Job Offer Letter,” December 4th, 1882, Box 1, Folder 3, Patrick Livingston Murphy Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.
32 Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy, “Dr. Joe K. Pepper Patient Record,” May 1, 1883, Hanging Files, Burke County Archives, Morganton, NC.
33 Murphy, “Dr. Joe K. Pepper Patient Record”.
34 Murphy, “Dr. Joe K. Pepper Patient Record”.
35 Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy, “Report of the Superintendent” in Biennial Report of the State Hospital at Morganton 1900-1902., December 8, 1900, Box 1, Folder 1.4, Lynne M. Getz Student Papers at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, 7 & 18.
operation and that the yearly death rate of 4.6% was an accomplishment worth recognition.\(^{36}\)

Due to the growing success of the hospital, there were instances in which the facility had to turn

patients away. In response to a plea for treatment, Dr. Murphy insisted in an 1897 letter, “in this

territory there are at least 200 lunatics whose names can be called who are not in the institution,

because there is no room.”\(^{37}\) A continual issue throughout the history of the institution,

overcrowding became the forefront problem that physicians constantly searched for a way to

combat.

From the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum’s establishment, it was a place of

constant change and flux, with one of the first major modifications occurring in 1890 with a

name change to the institution. In a December 4, 1890 newspaper article by *The Morganton

Herald*, a patient of the institution wrote a letter addressed to the State Board of Charities

discussing an issue of great importance to him, the name of the facility he called home.\(^{38}\)

It is proposed to change the name of the Western Insane Asylum to the State Hospital at

Morganton. Doubtless you at first…see no reason in sound philosophy for making the

change I say to you there is much, very much reason in it, trifling as it may first

appear…I sincerely believe that the change of name to hospital from asylum would work

many unseen but beneficent results among a large class of patients. The name suggests a

place for the care of sickness to even the most illiterate.\(^{39}\)

The name change approved in 1890 transformed what had been known as the Western Carolina

Insane Asylum into the State Hospital at Morganton, a namesake that remained until the 1960s.

During the late 19\(^{th}\) and into the 20\(^{th}\) century, there occurred in the mental health

community a push toward more humane treatment of patients, a trend that Murphy as a well-
versed physician promoted. Traditionally, care involved the use of immoral treatments, such as excessive restraint. Therefore, the institution of this progressive model of medicine propelled the State Hospital into an elevated position. Dr. Lynne M. Getz explained, “Throughout the nineteenth century, physicians did not fully understand the physiology of mental illness and universally relied upon the practice of moral treatment to care for the insane. The focus of great reform movement in the late eighteenth century, moral treatment reflected on the Enlightenment desire for humane and reasonable treatment for those considered less fortunate.”

Dr. Murphy chose to embrace moral treatment during his tenure at the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum. A February 22, 1889 newspaper piece published by *The Morganton Star* highlights this:

> The patients are devoted to him—made so by his gentleness toward them and his manifest interest in them individually and in their welfare. In proof of his control over them it is only necessary to say that no form of physical restraint has been used in the Western Insane Asylum for three years. To those who associate clanking chains and other forms of personal ill—usage with insane asylums, this statement will doubtless be a revelation; but it is stated as a fact that the insane at Morganton are controlled by moral suasion united with medical treatment.

As a means to further the holistic approach to medicine that Murphy and the State Hospital practiced, a garden planted by patients on the grounds provided low cost food for the asylum and allowed for the medical growth of patients. Implementation of this was reminiscent of the Kirkbride Method which outlined the healing properties of nature for the mentally ill.

Required by Murphy, as part of the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum’s original by-laws,

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the Superintendent provided an annual report on the success of the institution. Within the 1888 Superintendent’s Report, Murphy wrote, “The farm and garden are being as rapidly improved as possible, and both yield well and are, as can be seen from the Farmer’s report, remunerative, besides furnishing work for the male patients. The orchards are being added to and improved. As years go by, the Hospital is becoming more and more effective in all its departments.” The positive mutual benefit of the garden for both patients and the hospital alike allowed Murphy to question if the scale of this operation could be expanded.

The accomplishments of Murphy at the State Hospital at Morganton allowed for the institution to gain notoriety across the mental healthcare community and become a model facility. This brought a traffic influx to Morganton and the greater Burke County area that previously had not been seen, further increasing the community’s support of the institution. An extended article published in the December 27, 1892 issue of the Asheville Daily Citizen addressed the growing popularity of the site. Entitled, “At the State Hospital, A Great Institution in Morganton, “The Citizen” Makes a Tour of the Buildings and Grounds—Noble Work Done for the Unfortunates of North Carolina,” this article details the journey from Asheville, North Carolina to Morganton for the reporter of the Asheville Daily Citizen, a trek that ran in excess of 60 miles and predominantly traveled by rail. Personally escorted and shown the State Hospital by the Superintendent, the unnamed reporter remarked the impressive nature of Dr. Murphy’s daily routine. The reporter praised Murphy as an ideal superintendent:

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44 Western North Carolina Insane Asylum Board of Directors, “Duties of Superintendent,” in by-Laws, December 8, 1882, Hanging Files, Burke County Library Archives, Morganton, NC, 1.
He knows the great building, its corridors, underground and above ground, and its patients, like a book, often read. He is, in short, a model superintendent, and has perfected the systems at the hospital so that superintendents of similar institutions in various portions of the country visit this place to study and follow Dr. Murphy’s plans. The State hospital is in every way a monument worthy of North Carolina and of the man who stands at its head.47

Dr. Murphy, however, did not leave his status as a pioneer in the mental health community solely in the hands of journalists. A renowned writer himself, Murphy published several articles including, *The Treatment and Care of the Insane in North Carolina: What it is, What it Was, and What it Ought to Be*, a piece delivered before the Agricultural and Mechanical College in Raleigh, in 1900, and *Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives* which he presented in 1906 at the Meeting of the North Carolina Medical Association in Charlotte.48 These works delivered Dr. Murphy’s medical opinions on the care for the insane as he observed and practiced at the State Hospital at Morganton. As Getz remarked, “Until his death in 1907, Murphy guided the hospital with two overriding concerns: using the method of moral treatment for insanity and exercising the utmost economy in the operations of the hospital…believing that early treatment of mental illness was the key to recover, Murphy urged families to send their afflicted loved ones to the hospitals as soon as possible.”49 Although, as Dr. Getz also pointed out in the 2009 article, Dr. Murphy’s techniques were in no way innovative seeing as moral treatment of the insane had been a practiced concept in Europe, particularly Germany since the 1860s.50 Instead, Murphy’s determination to see this method succeed for the afflicted in Western

48 Murphy, Dr. P.L., “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” Read Before the Meeting of the N.C. Medical Association, Charlotte, NC, June, 1906, Burke County Library Archives.
   Murphy, Dr. P.L., “The Treatment and Care of the Insane in North Carolina: What it is, What it Was, and What it Ought to Be,” Read Before the Agricultural and Mechanical College, Raleigh, NC, 1900, Burke County Library Archives.
50 Murphy, “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” 2.
North Carolina that allowed him to be esteemed by not only his patients but the community as a whole.\textsuperscript{51}

Dr. Murphy understood the power of public attitude and opinion, therefore he prioritized the establishment of a positive position within the community of Morganton. In a January 4, 1898 letter addressed to Dr. Murphy, The Board of Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Morganton extended their thanks for Dr. Murphy’s aid in the repair of the church furnace.\textsuperscript{52} Actions like these and others helped to elevate not only Murphy’s stature in the community, but it also allowed for support of the hospital to grow. According to a newspaper article published in February of 1889 by The Morganton Star “The Western Insane Asylum is one of the chief glories of North Carolina, and the people of the State, generally, as well as the insane particularly, are most fortunate in having at the head of it so able, skillful and humane a superintendent as Dr. P.L. Murphy has proved himself to be.”\textsuperscript{53} Once founded, a popular and positive opinion of Murphy persisted throughout his time at the facility.

Despite Superintendent Murphy’s clear devotion to both his patients and the community, he was not the only member of the Murphy household to hold a vested interest in the success of the State Hospital. In fact, his wife of twenty-eight years Bettie Waddell Murphy called the institution her home and aided her husband in the care of the mentally ill. The State Hospital at Morganton often held social events where fellow physicians and respected members of the

\textsuperscript{51} Getz, “A Strong Man of Large Human Sympathy,” 36.
\textsuperscript{52} Board of Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Morganton to Dr. P.L. Murphy, “Letter of Thanks,” January 4, 1898, Box 1, Folder 6, Patrick Livingston Murphy Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.
community gathered to enjoy each others company. These events even served as potential matchmaking opportunities as seen in a November 1, 1888 letter from Jim Wilson Jr. to a woman named Sue where he insisted that it would be his pleasure to escort her to the Asylum for the entertainment that evening. In a Memoriam dedicated to Mrs. Murphy, Dr. J.K. Hall wrote “the hospital, with her as queen and as hostess, became and remained the social center of that cultured and delightful town.” With regards to Mrs. Murphy’s relationship with patients, Hall also remarked that “she knew all the patients; she loved them all. Constantly she was doing little kindnesses for them. They adored her. So did all others who knew her…If the waters were ever in trouble, there she was with the oil of understanding and kindness to allay the turbulence.”

Credited with aiding in his success as a physician, Mrs. Murphy was his constant companion. Superintendent Murphy, described as “massive in body and mind, and Scotch in blood and stiffness of neck, but the quiet, gentle voice of Bet, as he called her, always brought sedation to his soul and calmness to his mind. What infinite helpfulness through him must she have rendered the State!”

Through Murphy’s work with his wife and his daily interactions with his patients, he realized in order to maintain the success of the hospital, a qualified nursing staff was necessary. In 1895, the State Hospital at Morganton instituted its first nursing school to educate future employees. It was Dr. Edward Cowles who in the October 1887 American Journal of Insanity indicated the need for nursing schools and reform in insane asylums. “The feeling is strong upon me that the importance of this nursing reform for the insane is not yet half realized…this puts a

54 J.K. Hall, M.D., “In Memoriam: Bettie Waddell Murphy 1854-1933,” Hanging Files, Burke County Archives, Morganton, NC, 9.
55 Jim Wilson Jr. to Sue, “Invitation Letter,” November 1, 1888, Hanging Files, Burke County Library Archives, Morganton, NC.
power into our hands for the moral treatment of our patients that opens wide possibilities in promoting their comfort and cure.”

Cowles alleged the importance of nursing must be realized in order for asylums to be successful. At the State Hospital at Morganton according to author Carrie Streeter, “Dr. Murphy’s personal correspondence with community members demonstrated his awareness of a growing demand for private care nursing, not only for patients with physical ailments but also for patients suffering from mental illness as well.”

Local newspapers reported extensively on this development and made claims that for the past 20 years the nursing field had needed extensive attention: “The establishment of a training school for nurses in connection with the State Hospital at Morganton is a new departure about…which will be of benefit to the community at large as well as an upward move in the further application of hospital methods to the work of caring for the insane.”

Dr. Murphy organized the curriculum in two sections, lecture, given by current medical staff, and practical instruction that allowed students upon graduation, to become employed in various wards of the hospital. Due to the demanding nature of the curriculum, earning a supplementary living wage was extremely difficult. Therefore while attending school the prospective nurses received a room, board and a clothing allowance.

Incentives like these, allowed for the nursing school at the State Hospital to compete for the top candidates in the nursing field, which ultimately allowed the asylum to thrive.

More revolutionary than the establishment of the nursing school was Murphy’s introduction of the Colony System in 1903. The Colony System, a plan originating in Germany

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in the 1860s made its way to the United States by the 1890s. Dr. George C. Palmer, the Superintendent of the Michigan Asylum for the Insane published a paper entitled “The Colony System of Caring For the Insane” in the October 1887 edition of *The American Journal of Insanity*. Dr. Palmer argued that, “Many victims of our present civilization do not get insane or die early, but live with diseased bodies and impaired minds, marry and become parents of children that may be classified as delicate, consumptives, nervous, epileptics, insane, or of others with defective organizations that tend to increase the number of incurable insane.” The article described the stresses of city life and the recently ended Civil War that slowly transformed previously healthy individuals, even children, into victims of mental illness. Mental illness, according to Palmer was an ever-growing epidemic, a solution that provided comfort and was economically sound was of vital importance.

As discussed by Dr. George C. Palmer:

> The definition of the word colony is, a company of people transplanted from their mother country to a remote province or country and remaining subject to the jurisdiction of the parent State. Preserving the analogy, the colony system means, a company of patients transplanted from the parent institution to a settlement specially prepared for them, remaining dependent upon the parent institution for its support and management.

Involving a rural setting where patients completed agricultural work such as farming, tending to livestock, and gardening, Palmer reported that the use of the Colony System promoted patient’s transition back into society. Lack of functionality in typical society forced most residents of mental institutions to be there in the first place. Dr. Palmer’s rationale was that if their functionality could be restored, then perhaps one day the patient could successfully assimilate back into society. However, Colony treatment was not an option for every patient’s presentation

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63 Murphy, “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” 2.
of mental illness. “Not all the chronic insane can be properly cared for in this way, but a large class of quiet patients can be made more comfortable, and be likely to attain a better degree of health than in many of our best regulated asylums.” Therefore healing under the direction of the Colony System was not a possibility for all, but rather a privileged few.

The Colony System as presented by Dr. George C. Palmer in 1887 and practiced by Murphy was not the first suggestion of moral care with regards to treating insanity sufferers. Dr. Getz insisted that during the nineteenth century mental health professionals were not aware of the complexity of mental illness and nearly universally relied on moral treatment as a means of care. Therefore it is not surprising that Murphy, a proponent of moral treatment techniques for the mentally ill attempted to establish a colony of his own in Morganton, North Carolina. In the asylum’s December, “1900 Biennial Report of the State Hospital at Morganton,” both the Superintendent and the President of the Board of Directors remarked that, “the care of the Insane has year by year, for twenty-five years, become more and more problematic…it may be wise for the people of North Carolina to consider what may be done to prevent insanity and to some extent stop this great drain on the wealth of the State.” Murphy’s solution to both the overflow and economic distress was to instate a Colony Building to house 30 recovering men, providing housing to patients in need of more attentive and constant care.

In 1903, Dr. P.L. Murphy built his first Colony building. Murphy recalled “the plan of conducting it by the hospital authorities was largely experimental, and was made to suit the

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68 J.G. Hall, “Report of the President of the Board of Directors,” in Biennial Report of the State Hospital at Morganton, December 12, 1900, Hanging Files, Burke County Library Archives, Morganton, NC, 6.
69 Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy, “Report of the Superintendent,” in Biennial Report of the State Hospital at Morganton, December 8, 1900, Hanging Files, Burke County Library Archives, Morganton, NC, 17.
people of Western North Carolina.”

In June of 1906 he presented “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives” before the meeting of the North Carolina Medical Association. This document thoroughly detailed the construction and success of the Colony Buildings established in Burke County. Designed to provide a “home-like appearance, and the management has been such as to make each patient feel at home…every effort is to make each one feel that these things are his own…everyone is expected to do something if no more than pick up chips for the cook,” the buildings according to Murphy represented the formation of a cohesive community.

Essentially what Murphy created at the State Hospital at Morganton was a community of individuals who worked together to ensure not only their well-being and survival but the treatment of their individual mental illnesses, which ultimately served as a unifying element. Murphy claimed that the individual assignments that residents of the Colony took up gave the patients a purpose and a will to live which ultimately improved their morale and well-being. “This working class, while too defective to take up the burden of life, are yet appreciative of their surroundings and of most things that make life happy to the people in the outside world…some under this treatment recover that otherwise would not, but the majority must remain under hospital care, this being their refuge and their home.”

Although Dr. Murphy adamantly pushed for the expansion of the Colony System into hospitals across the State, he made a request that no further mental institutions be erected. Instead, Murphy proposed that the existing locations of hospitals simply acquire more land and construct Colony Buildings to house those patients whose care can be minimally supervised within the community. With regards to the State Hospital, “unfortunately at Morganton no

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70 Murphy, “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” 2.
71 Murphy, “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” 3-4.
72 Murphy, “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” 10.
more land can be purchased and that institution cannot with advantage be greatly increased in size…This is to be deplored for the plan there has been so successful that much was hoped for in the judicious extensions of these colonies…many of these defectives are capable of doing common labor and can be made very nearly self-sustaining if properly managed.”

Murphy commented that despite the achievements of the Colony System at the State Hospital, the inability to acquire additional land halted any further extension of the program. In regards to other facilities however, “it can be demonstrated that the colony system is the best and the cheapest, it should by all means be adopted.”

Dr. Murphy’s call for the extension of the Colony System into other institutions sparked the interest of North Carolinians. A February 17, 1906 article by The Charlotte Observer discussed Governor Robert Broadnax Glenn’s response to the growing popularity of the Colony System in the state. Quoted as saying, “The colony plan out on a farm in the fresh air, with plenty of light work where these poor people may be properly treated and brought back, if possible, to their right mind, ought to be adopted in the future, as saving costly buildings and producing more care,” Governor Glenn understood the benefit of the treatment plan. Political support such as this added to the existing encouragement of the medical community, the spread of the Colony System of treatment was eminent; with the State Hospital at Morganton under the direction of Dr. Murphy being the example of success for North Carolina Mental Institutions.

When discussing the impact of the implementation of the Colony System at the State Hospital, according to Getz:

it was clear that by the time of his [Dr. Murphy’s] death in 1907, the State Hospital at Morganton was well on its way to becoming a custodial warehouse for hundreds of

74 Murphy, “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” 15.
75 Murphy, “Colony Treatment of the Insane and Other Defectives,” 14.
chronic patients...Murphy exemplified the asylum superintendent who urged the public to view the hospital as the humane choice for the care of the mentally ill and who struggled to treat as many patients as possible, but whose tools for doing so were severely constricted.77

In the eyes of Getz, Dr. Murphy attempted to deceive the mental health community into believing that the Colony System was a humane treatment. When in her view it was nothing more than a holding cell for hundreds of incurable patients. However, Dr. Murphy’s implementation of the Colony System represented a technique ruled as highly innovative and effective during the early twentieth century. Therefore, attempting to analyze medical techniques out of their historical context is not only ineffective but inaccurate. The Colony System although no longer in use, remains a vital part of the history of the State Hospital at Morganton and has defined the legacy of Dr. P.L. Murphy. As Getz observed, “By the mid-nineteenth century, insane asylums throughout North America and Great Britain had filled up with multitudes of incurable patients, and it had become clear that moral treatment within a large asylum had failed as a therapeutic practice.”78 However, because of the meddling relationship between mental healthcare and politics, funds were not allocated for the development of new therapies and consequently asylums in many instances became places of frustration instead of healing. Viewed as a success, Murphy possessed the ability to publicize treatment options in layman’s terms to suffering North Carolinian families and positively juxtaposed moral treatment with other therapies.79

The Colony System, which began in 1903 as a treatment technique by Dr. Murphy remained in use at the State Hospital until the 1920s. The Centennial issue of The News Herald in 1975 reported, “the colony system was part of Murphy’s philosophy of employment and

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78 Getz, “A Strong Man of Large Human Sympathy,” 35.
wholesome living for the mentally ill.”

Although the use of the method only spanned two decades, there are elements reminiscent of the Colony System that persist today. In the same 1975 newspaper article it is proposed, “The modern trend towards the development of group homes for persons with disabilities is very similar to the colony system started by Murphy.” Therefore, the actions of one man, Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy, have had a continued impact into the modern day.

Dr. Murphy, an individual revered in the medical field for his implementation of moral treatments like the Colony System, died on September 11, 1907 at the age of 59. Buried on the grounds of the place he devoted more than a quarter century of his life to, Murphy left behind a lasting legacy. In a 1910 Memorial Notice written by his Assistant Physician Dr. Isaac M. Taylor, his colleague noted that, “The uplift of the insane was his life work and in pursuit of this he was mindful of the most lowly as well as of those of high estate, and his intercourse with those under his care, their friends and the public at large endeared him to all.” The public was so endeared to the late Dr. Murphy, that in the same year, they moved to form the Patrick Livingston Murphy Memorial Association. This association, comprised of not only fellow physicians but also politicians and major figure-heads in the State of North Carolina, such as Governor Thomas J. Jarvis and Governor Charles B. Aycock. A letter describing their efforts, detailed their future plans as well as requested donations, the association claimed that “It is proposed to erect to his memory, a bronze statue, to be placed in front of the magnificent main building overlooking the beautiful grounds, with its velvet lawn and noble trees which were his

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83 Taylor, “Memorial Notice,” 491.
84 John McCampbell, F.M. Scroggs, Richard H. Lewis, W.A. Hoke, “Patrick Livingston Murphy Memorial Association,” 1910, Box 1, Folder 1.4, Lynne M. Getz Student Papers at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, 1-2.
pride and joy in life.”\textsuperscript{85} September 19, 1914 saw a ceremony that dedicated a bronze statue and engraved plate which honored the works of Dr. Murphy.\textsuperscript{86} The inscription read:

To the Memory of Patrick Livingston Murphy 1848-1907 “The Wise and Beloved Physician and Gifted Alienist Who Organized This Hospital and was its Superintendent for the first twenty-five years of its existence, from January 1883 until his death, September 11th, 1907. A Strong Man of Large Human Sympathy, Vigorous of Intellect, Courageous of thought and Action, Firm of Will, Steadfast and Noble of Purpose, Conscientious in the Performances of Duty, Broadminded and of Far-seeing Vision, He Wrought to the Limit of His Strength and Splendid Capacity for the Good of His State and its People and Died, as he had Lived, in Fully Enjoyment of Their Affectionate Esteem and Grateful Confidence.\textsuperscript{87} 

The level of dedication shown by the medical, political and general community in pursuit of Dr. Murphy’s legacy is a clear indicator of the sheer impact that one man cultivated.

Through the actions of Dr. Murphy, the structure that came to be known as the Western North Carolina Insane Asylum became a landmark in the community of Morganton. In a special centennial celebration of the hospital, The News Herald published a 12-page article that detailed the role the institution played in the development of the area in July of 1975. The article asserted that “when Morganton was chosen as the site for the new hospital, the city began a transition that is still underway. Almost immediately, the facility began drawing hundreds of highly skilled newcomers into the Morganton area, and the same is true today. Over the years, the state supported hospital has provided jobs for thousands of Burke County citizens.”\textsuperscript{88} Before the establishment of the Western Carolina Insane Asylum, Morganton, North Carolina and the greater Burke County area was a rural, agriculturally based community. However, after the

\textsuperscript{85} McCampbell, et. al., “Patrick Livingston Murphy Memorial Association,” Lynne M. Getz Student Papers at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, 2.
\textsuperscript{86} “Patrick Livingston Murphy,” The News Herald, January 27, 1915, accessed August 1, 2015, Burke County Library Microfilm Archives.
\textsuperscript{87} “Patrick Livingston Murphy,” The News Herald, January 27, 1915.
\textsuperscript{88} Hall, “Broughton: 100 Years Old,” The News Herald, June 29, 1975.
institution’s arrival in conjunction with the arrival of the Western North Carolina Railroad, progress found its way to Western North Carolina. According to residents of the area “the rich history of the hospital, which has helped to establish this community as the mental health capital of the western part of the State” thus bringing nationwide attention to an area that previously was unheard of. Today, Broughton Hospital is still in operation and serves as both a temporary and permanent home for hundreds of patients and provides careers for countless staff.

The history of the State Hospital at Morganton is as complex as the illnesses suffered by the thousands of patients who resided within the hospital’s walls. What began in 1848 as an appeal by Dorothea Dix for a mental institution triggered a ripple effect that allowed for the establishment of not only a facility but a center of healing and a home for individual’s whom society struggled to accept. None of this however would have been possible without the efforts of the institution’s first Superintendent, Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy. Whose devotion to moral treatment set the hospital on a course that ensured a proud legacy. The success of this hospital is realized through its continued service and functionality even into the year 2015, nearly 132 years after its first patient was admitted.

Works Cited

Primary Sources:


Historian and author Samuel A. Ashe in 1907 published his biographical chapter on Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy in *Biographical History of North Carolina From Colonial Times to the Present*. This work was published only shortly after the death of Murphy and allowed for knowledge of Dr. Murphy and by extension the State Hospital at Morganton to reach a wider demographic of individuals.


Within the Burke County Library in Morganton, NC there is the North Carolina Room which holds a plethora of records. Upon my first visit I uncovered filing cabinets full of information on first the Western Carolina Insane Asylum, which would later be named the State Hospital at Morganton and finally renamed Broughton Hospital. Sources like these have been vital to understanding how the hospital as an institution developed over time and how they impacted Burke County as a whole.


J.G. Hall, “Report of the President of the Board of Directors” in *Biennial Report of the State Hospital at Morganton*, December 12, 1900.


Murphy, Dr. P.L. “Dr. Joe K. Pepper” (Patient Record). May 1, 1883.

Murphy, Dr. P.L. “Report of the Superintendent: The Farm, Garden and Grounds” in *Report of the State Hospital at Morganton*,” (1888).

Murphy, Dr. P.L., “The Treatment and Care of the Insane in North Carolina: What it is, What it Was, and What it Ought to Be”. Read Before the Agricultural and Mechanical College, Raleigh, NC, 1900.


Dr. Edward Cowells was the Superintendent of the McLean Asylum for the Insane in Somerville Massachusetts. The October 1887 edition of the *American Journal of Insanity* published his article detailing the affectivity and necessity for nursing institutions and reforms in mental health institutions. It was due in part of the works of Dr. Cowells that a nursing school was established at the State Hospital in Morganton in 1895 under Dr. Murphy.

Famed mental health care advocate Dorothea Lynde Dix played an instrumental role in improving health care in North Carolina. Therefore, before General Assembly of North Carolina Dix submitted the “Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital for the Protection and Cure of the Insane”. Without Dorothea Lynde Dix’s delivery of this document, the thousands of individuals that Broughton has, does, and will reach would not see help. This document was accessed online via the Documenting the American South database of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbride was an esteemed member of the mental health community and the creator of the ‘Kirkbride Method’. The Kirkbride Method as outlined in his book 1880 book, Construction, Organization and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane with Some Remarks on Insanity and its Treatment, was the construction plan that was chosen for the State Hospital at Morganton.


The Lynne M. Getz Student Papers located in the Special Collections of Carol Grotnes Belk Library at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC contains 5.0 linear feet with 7 manuscript boxes and 3 CD boxes. This collection was compiled as part of an oral history project by Lynne Getz and her students which aimed to document the impact that Broughton Hospital had on the community. The first of seven series which is entitled: History of Broughton Hospital Files was most helpful for my research.


Murphy, Dr. Patrick Livingston to J.E. Alexander (letter). August 7, 1897. Folder 5.8, Box 5. Lynne M. Getz Student Papers. Collections at Belk Library, Appalachian State University.


Newspapers.com is a website that has electronically compiled millions of newspapers from around the world dating from the 18th century until the present day. Through my research, dozens of newspapers from across Western North Carolina detailed crucial events in the asylums history and provided the communities’ and media’s perspective on the changes occurring.


George C. Palmer, M.D. was the Superintendent of the Michigan Asylum for the Insane in Kalamazoo, Michigan and was published in the American Journal of Insanity in October of 1887. Dr. Palmer’s work and article detailed the effectiveness of a treatment known as the Colony System, a technique that was implemented by Dr. P.L. Murphy at the State Hospital in 1903.


Patrick Livingston Murphy was not only a leading and sought after mental health physician during his career but also served as the Superintendent of the Western Carolina Insane Asylum, later renamed the State Hospital at Morganton from 1882-1907. The Patrick Livingston Murphy This archive which is part of the Southern Historical Collection is comprised of 1.0 linear feet of shelf space and contains more than 240 items. Included in this compilation are correspondences both professional and personal that detail Dr. Murphy’s medical career, his personal fee book, scrapbooks containing photographs of the development of the hospital, and Murphy’s writings about advances in mental health care treatment among others.

Board of Directors of the Western Lunatic Asylum to Dr. Patrick Livingston Murphy, December 12, 1879, box 1, folder 2.

Hillsborough Military Academy Report Upon the Recitations and Conduct, October 2, 1863, box 1, folder 2.

Offer Letter, December 4th, 1882, box 1, folder 3.
Secondary Sources:


This paper published in 1977 by Sheila Brown while attending Lenior Rhyne College was helpful in that it outlined the chronological history of Broughton Hospital and provided the necessary context to ultimately make this thesis successful.


Clark R. Cahow’s book People, Patients, and Politics: The History of the North Carolina Mental Hospitals 1848–1960, published in 1980 was a follow up history to his Duke University Masters thesis published in 1965. Cahow provided a unique perspective by examining mental health through a political lens that was useful in determining the development of mental health.


Dr. Olga Maranjian Church’s 304 page PhD dissertation, published 1982, was helpful in that it examined the role that nurses played in mental health care facilities. So often much of the focus is on the primary physician’s responsibilities, instead of the nurses who had the most interaction with patients.


Lynne M. Getz’s article “‘A Strong Man of Large Human Sympathy’: Dr. Patrick L. Murphy and the Challenges of Nineteenth-Century Asylum Psychiatry in North Carolina” published in The North Carolina Historical Review in 2009 was vital because it primary focus was on the first Superintendent of Broughton Hospital, Patrick Livingston Murphy. However, instead of highlighting Murphy’s accomplishments, Getz takes a harsher and more critical look at Broughton Hospital.


“Rediscovering Asylums: The Unhistorical History of the Mental Hospital” in The Hastings Center Report published in 1977, describes the unwritten truths about mental institutions and it served as a good comparison as to what was happening in Broughton as compared to other institutions at the time.

In addition to playing a large role in the foundation of the Burke County Historical Society, Edward W. Phifer Jr. published *Burke County: A Brief History* in 1979 and provides a look at how the State Hospital at Morganton contributed to not only Burke County history but to North Carolina history as a whole.


*Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America*, written by David J. Rothman, analyzes the conflict between decisions of conscience and convenience in the running of asylums in the United States. What became known as the Progressive Era saw a shift from the traditional convenience-based care to a more humanistic approach based on conscience, as seen through the techniques exercised at the State Hospital at Morganton.


A 2012 masters program graduate of Appalachian State University, Carrie Streeter is the author of ‘Let Me See Some Insane People’: Progressive-Era Development of the State Hospital at Morganton, 1883-1907. This work describes the changes that the State Hospital at Morganton underwent during the time period of 1883-1907 and has been instrumental in my own work.


“Theatrical Entertainments and Kind Words: Nursing the Insane in Western North Carolina, 1882-1907” was published in the 2011 edition of *The Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*. This piece discusses asylum nursing in the region, particularly on the advent of a nursing school inside the asylum in 1895.


The Nancy Tomes book, *The Art of Asylum-Keeping: Thomas Story Kirkbride, and the Origins of American Psychiatry* was published in 1994. This piece is an examination of the founder of Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane which was the precursor to the current American Psychiatric Association, Thomas Story Kirkbride. It was the Kirkbride Method that was instituted at the State Hospital.


“History of Mental Health in North Carolina” written by Lloyd J. Thompson in 1972, examines how North Carolina responded to the mental health care crisis in comparison to the rest of the United States. By understanding what state-wide decisions were made it is easier to distinguish which guidelines were set by the Western Carolina Insane Asylum and which were mandated by politics.