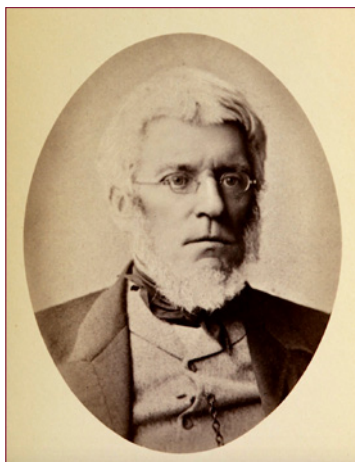


Remembering Isaac Ray, MD, as Butler launches its 175th anniversary celebration

Past president of RIMS was pioneer in medical jurisprudence

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Butler Hospital launched the celebration of its 175th anniversary in February at the hospital's Art and History Committee annual event. A centerpiece of the year-long celebration will be the creation and installation of a historical timeline in the Riverview building. **ISAAC RAY, MD**, the hospital's first superintendent, played a prominent role in the hospital's launch in 1844, and its medical legacy.



Isaac Ray, MD, (1807–1881), first superintendent of Butler Hospital. A forensic pioneer and prolific medical writer, he served for 20 years and during his tenure was also president of the Rhode Island Medical Society, 1856–1857.

approved by the General Assembly in 1844. A Board of Trustees was formed, which subsequently sent a request to businessman **CYRUS BUTLER**, who agreed to donate \$40,000, to be matched by the community and other sources. Records showed wide community support, with donations large and as small as \$1. To honor benefactor Butler, the Board in 1844 voted to change the name of the institution to the Butler Hospital for the Insane. Changing the designation from asylum to hospital was also made, noting the latter is "a place where an enlightened and persistent effort is made to cure the patients of their illness."

DR. LUTHER BELL of the McLean Asylum for the Insane in Somerville, Mass., was consulted in the planning and

Birth of Butler

A report published by Butler trustees in 1926 on the early history of the hospital states that Providence businessman and philanthropist **NICHOLAS BROWN** (1769–1841) wished to construct an asylum for the mentally disturbed. His will provided \$30,000 for a hospital "where that unhappy portion of our fellow beings who are by the visitation of Providence deprived of their reason, may find a safe retreat, and be provided with whatever may be conducive to their comfort and to their restoration to a sound state of mind."

A committee of incorporators applied for a charter from the State for the Rhode Island Asylum for the Insane, which was



A brochure for Center House, the main building at Butler Hospital in 1846, advertised the new facility. Providence architects William Tallman and James Bucklin designed the Tudor-Gothic style structure. The facility was built in 1846-1847, and the first patient was admitted on December 1, 1847.

Frederick Law Olmsted and his brother, who also designed New York's Central Park, enhanced the original landscaping design in 1906.

Butler is now on The National Register of Historic Places.

[IMAGE: NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES]

construction of the facility and traveled to Europe to visit similar institutions. Subsequently, he submitted plans which were executed with some modifications and with the input of Dr. Ray, who had also visited European institutions, particularly in the British Isles.

Isaac Ray, MD

The trustees of the institution chose Dr. Ray, a native of Beverly, Mass., as the first superintendent of the hospital. He attended Harvard Medical School for a time and graduated from Maine Medical School at Bowdoin College in 1827 at the age of 20. He was one of the original founders of what is now the American Psychiatric Association and a pioneer in the fields of medical jurisprudence and forensic psychology. In 1838, he published his first work, *The Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity*, which was republished half a dozen times in his distinguished career and cited frequently in court cases of the era.



Postcard c.1907 of Butler Hospital. [RI COLLECTION, PROV. PUBLIC LIBRARY]

Figure 1. The following chart of the patient population of Butler Hospital from 1847–1864 was presented by Dr. Ray in his annual report to the Board of Trustees.

Year.	Admitted.	Discharged	Whole No. under care.	Recoverd.	Im-proved.	Unim-proved.	Died.	At the end of the year.
1848	156	56	156	17	26		13	100
1849	93	85	193	35	24	7	20	107
1850	73	67	180	19	26	5	16	113
1851	68	54	181	26	8	4	16	127
1852	101	86	228	30	36	5	15	142
1853	92	98	235	44	27	5	22	136
1854	80	85	216	40	20	6	19	131
1855	56	50	187	20	15	4	11	137
1856	59	54	195	14	19	5	16	142
1857	37	39	179	15	10	4	10	140
1858	47	52	187	22	7	11	12	135
1859	42	42	177	14	16	2	10	135
1860	58	66	193	22	21	8	15	127
1861	53	45	180	22	5	4	14	135
1862	36	39	171	17	7	10	5	132
1863	37	39	169	9	14	8	8	130
1864	49	47	179	15	14	6	12	132
	1137	1005		381	296	94	232	

The late **DR. STANLEY M. ARONSON**, Brown's founding medical school dean and a decade-long editor of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal*, wrote this about Dr. Ray in a commentary:

"Ray wrote extensively on the many forensic and environmental factors that encouraged derangement, including social stress, excessive alcohol use and exhaustion. Much of his research pertained to the causes of mental disease. He urged suspension of judgment rather than facile explanation: "The less that is really known, the more obscure and mysterious this seems...the more disposed we are to accept the suggestion of the imagination, rather than a candid confession of ignorance."

In his decades of labor in Rhode Island, he had fashioned a great institution that acknowledged the innate humanity of all patients and operated on the simple premise that compassion rather than punishment is a more effective therapy for the mentally ill."

Patient population

In its early years, the hospital was open to all classifications of patients, from the poor to private-paying, the latter housed in separate and spacious buildings for men and women. In the superintendent's report of 1849, Dr. Ray reported that in the first 13 months of the hospital's opening, the facility had admitted 156 patients, and by the end of December 1848, there were 100. Of the 56 no longer there, 17 had recovered to their "normal mental condition," 13 had died, and the rest were removed by their families. The deaths were attributed to cancer, old age, consumption, chronic disease, delirium tremens, apoplexy, acute mania, and general paralysis. (Figure 1)

Dr. Ray related his general philosophy of treating patients this way in the annual report: "The law of kindness is imperative and inflexible; that the preservation of self-control and self-respect is encouraged by precept and example, by courteous and gentle

treatment, and by rewarding every effort with some indulgence or privilege; that the violence of excitement is controlled by seasonal seclusion and perhaps medicine and with as little as possible mechanical restraints... that various forms of exercise and amusement, such as riding, walking, indoor and outdoor games, serve to improve bodily health, and divert the mind from morbid contemplations into healthier channels."

Costs

Even in its early history, the hospital struggled with deficits, as it sought to gain acceptance and subsidies from local cities and towns for the indigent, which often found it cheaper to house the "incurable insane" in local almshouses. Annual reports of the hospital enumerate the rising costs; for example, the Board in 1854 raised rates for public patients from \$2.50 per week, to \$3.

When a state institution opened in Cranston in 1870, many of the "paupers" were sent there, which alleviated some of the budgetary deficits Butler faced in its first decades. More than 100 years after its opening in 1847, the hospital closed in 1956 due to deficits, and was reopened the following year after philanthropic efforts spearheaded by the Providence community.

Family

Dr. Ray was joined by his son, **BENJAMIN LINCOLN RAY, MD**, at Butler. The younger Ray was a graduate of Brown University, Class of 1856, and Harvard Medical School, Class of 1859, and followed in his father's footsteps, serving as assistant physician at Butler from 1859–1867.

In 1856–1857 Dr. Ray served as president of the Rhode Island Medical Society. The *Transactions of the Rhode Island Medical Society* of 1862 contain an address on "Hereditary Transmission," by B. Lincoln Ray, MD, in which he is observed by those present to be a "chip off the old block and a proof of the doctrine of hereditary transmission."

After retiring from Butler in 1867, Dr. Ray removed to Philadelphia, where his son had opened a practice. He died in 1881. It is fitting that he is interred adjacent to the Butler campus, in Swan Point Cemetery, one of the first garden cemeteries, which was chartered in 1846, the year that Dr. Ray assumed his duties at Butler. Also interred are his wife, Abigail May Frothingham, a daughter, Abby, who died at the age of 14, and his son, Benjamin Lincoln Ray, MD, who predeceased him by two years, leaving his parents grief-stricken, and which hastened Dr. Ray's demise, according to a eulogy published in 1881 in *The Alienist and Neurologist*, a journal of scientific, clinical and forensic psychiatry and neurology. It stated:

"A great and good man has departed, but he has left behind a good work, fairly finished for his time, and a fragrant memory embalmed in the hearts of many warm friends and conferees."

Dr. Ray's work continues to this day, in Butler's 175th year. ❖