Flying Whispers, Forgotten Lives

RESEARCH ON THE ADMISSIONS LEDGERS AND SPIRAL CEMETERY AT THE DELAWARE STATE HOSPITAL [FOR THE INSANE]

Mon., Apr. 4, 2016
Kirkbride Rm. 100
7:00 to 8:30 pm

Presented by Katherine A. Dettwyler
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Co-sponsored by Departments of Black American Studies, History, and Women and Gender Studies

Since 2012, UD Anthropology Professor Katherine Dettwyler has been conducting research on a series of hand-written, hardbound “admission and clinical notes” ledgers from the Delaware State Hospital, dating from 1894 to 1920. One goal of the project is to create a searchable database so that the detailed information contained in these ledgers will be available for researchers interested in the history of how people who could not care for themselves—the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, the senile aged, and those with traumatic and acquired brain injuries—ended up at the hospital and were cared for during this period. A second goal of the project is to document who is buried in the Delaware State Hospital Cemetery (known as the “Spiral Cemetery” for its unusual design). The cemetery, in operation from 1891 to 1983, contains some 776 graves, noted only by numbered granite markers. Most of the burials are of former patients, but the cemetery also includes staff who died during epidemics as well as a handful of other people. The “Friends of the Spiral Cemetery” committee has been working to clean up and restore the cemetery, and honor those buried there. A dedication ceremony will be held May 9, 2016 at 2pm to unveil a Delaware Historical Marker and a monument listing the names and marker numbers of all those buried in the cemetery.