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Neurological stamp

Benjamin Rush (1745–1813)

Benjamin Rush actively supported the American Declaration of Independence and in 1776 was one of the 56 signatories. Later he was Treasurer of the USA Mint from 1799 until his death in 1813.

A graduate of Princeton and Edinburgh he became Professor of Chemistry and later of Medicine in Philadelphia. Rush was a prolific writer and a tireless reformer. Lettsom called him the American Sydenham. Rush believed that there was only one disease process and that was “irregular, convulsive or wrong action of the system affected”. To correct this he advocated a regime of bleeding and purgatives. His most important work *Medical Enquiries upon Diseases of the Mind* (1812) was the first American book of psychiatry. However, at a time when Pinel (born in the same year as Rush) was removing chains from the mentally afflicted of Paris, Rush was

advocating a strait waistcoat or a chair named “the tranquilliser”.

In his book Rush describes several types of aphasia as disturbances of memory. He recognised that multilingual patients may revert to another language when the facility for one language was disturbed. He also recognised the role of heredity in malformations of the brain and was probably the first to advocate that general disease (for example, arthritis, epilepsy) could be relieved by the extraction of decaying teeth.

John Trumbull's famous painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence was reproduced on a United States stamp in 1869. This was the start of medical philately and the mint value of that stamp is now around US\$2500. The painting was again reproduced in 1976 for the American Bicentenary (Stanley Gibbons 1668–1671, Scott 1691–1694).

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