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## NEUROLOGICAL STAMP

### Dorothea Lynde Dix (1802-87)

Dorothea Dix came from New England. Here she noticed the horrible conditions in an asylum. Some warders made a small charge for visitors to come and look at the mad and prod them into raving antics. In 1841 she laid before the Massachusetts General Assembly a description of the insane in jails and private institutions. She spent the rest of her life fighting to improve conditions of the insane.

Anton Ashley Cooper, afterwards Lord Shaftesbury, had discovered similar problems in England 10 years earlier while sitting on a Royal Commission to investigate such conditions. The lunatics at Bedlam were long regarded as one of the sights of London.

Miss Dix travelled thousands of miles by stagecoach, steamboat, and on horseback and quietly collected facts, which she recorded in sober restrained prose. She possessed great charm and a commanding voice. With these attributes, facts collected from a comprehensive study of asylums, and a selection of public speakers to sustain protest she harassed officials and influenced legislatures.

In 1843, in the face of her continuing investigation and increasing community agitation, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a Bill providing for adequate hospitalisation of the insane. This was her first triumph. She became an effective lobbyist in many of the States and a national figure. Her work and influence also led to improvement of the conditions of the insane in Great Britain—and also in Italy after an audience with the Pope. She travelled in Europe and crusaded for human rights of patients until her death at the age of 85.

The centennial of her death, 1987, went largely unnoticed but in 1980 a United States postage stamp had commemorated the first woman who brought the plight of the mentally ill into such prominence (Stanley Gibbons 1818, Scott 1844).

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