

Dorothea Lynde Dix - Champion for the Insane – I

Lead: She came from a life of wealth and social prominence, but Dorothea Dix devoted her life to good causes, especially helping to improve the treatment of the mentally ill.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts

Content: Dorothea Dix's early years were not happy. Her father was the estranged son of a prominent Boston family. An alcoholic who suffered religious delusions, Joseph Dix barely kept his family out of starvation. Dorothy refused to live in such conditions and eventually, at the age of twelve, fled to Boston where she lived with relatives for the next several years.

Women in that 19th century era were not permitted a formal education. They were banned from public schools, although affluent families could send their female offspring to private school. Dix, however, was well-spoken, bright, read voraciously, and was of mature disposition. She soon found a natural gift for teaching and by the age of fourteen, at the suggestion of a cousin, had started her own "little dame's school," a day school for upper class girls. Her reputation grew and soon she opened a branch of the school for poor indigent young women. She wrote text books for children on history, astronomy, art and literature and other volumes on a surprisingly wide variety of subjects.

Dix had an inclination toward overwork which taxed an already frail physical constitution and periodically had to drop out of work for long periods of convalescence. It was at the end of one such passage that she encountered a community scandal so tragic, so grotesque, yet so common, that it would shape the rest of her life. Next time: champion of the insane.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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