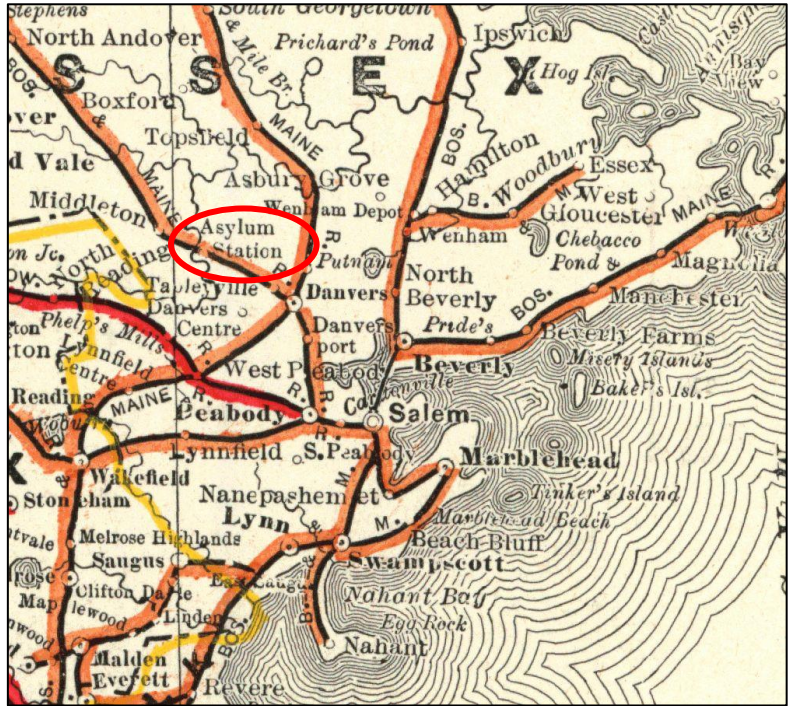


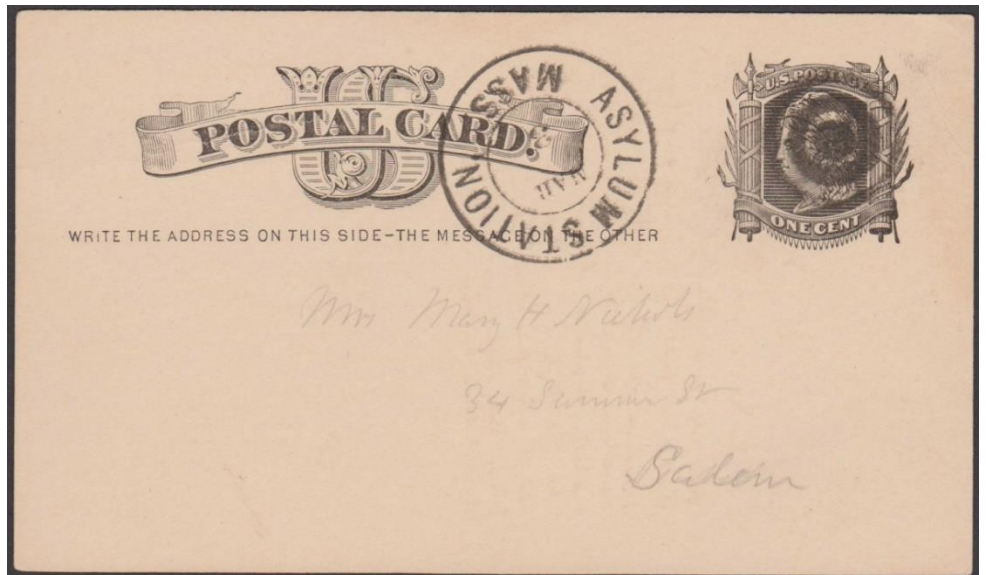
Asylum Station, Massachusetts

By Patrick and Paul Crosby

Double-ring postmarks always attract me since they are far less common than their single-ring counterparts. But this one has a town name of Asylum Station. What kind of Asylum? Was it rest facility like a sanitarium? Or was it a hospital for wounded war veterans? Or was it a mental hospital? It was easy to find out that the post office was in operation only from 1878 to 1899, but I couldn't find out much else until I saw an 1887 railroad map (by George F. Cram) that showed Asylum Station depot 4 miles northwest of Danvers, MA. Wait a minute! My brother, Paul, used to live in Danvers, and now lives in nearby Peabody and maybe he can help. A wealth of information followed, and I found out he used to do some counseling work at the hospital when it housed a detox facility.



The government postal card, shown here, the common (as in 50¢) Scott #UX5 and UPSS (United Postal Stationery Society) #S4, has a postmark showing March 3 and is dated March 3, 1879 in pencil on the reverse. Asylum Station was a railroad depot on the Boston & Maine R.R. (also the Lawrence branch of the Eastern Railroad) that was formerly called Swan's Station, and the post office was located inside the depot until the 1890's when it moved to the Street Railway Station. The State Lunatic Hospital at Danvers began operation in 1878 in the western most section of the town of Danvers, a rural area. It was also known as the State Hospital for the Insane and most recently Danvers State Hospital.



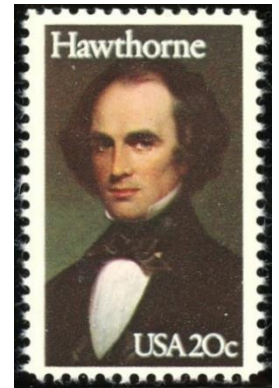
Construction and the running of the hospital basically followed the Kirkbride Plan. A Philadelphia physician, Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride believed that most insane persons are curable and the process of restoring a more natural "balance of the senses" can be "...greatly enhanced by pleasant surroundings, fresh air, and pure water."

Encouraging the Kirkbride Plan was social reformer Dorothea Dix who was an advocate for the mentally ill seeking active government participation and who during the Civil War had been Superintendent of Army Nurses for the Union. The state of Massachusetts was in dire need of a new facility because of overcrowding and the shutdown of a South Boston facility. The Kirkbride complex of buildings was built on Hathorne Hill and was designed in a Victorian style with Gothic elements. Included in this mostly self-sufficient hospital were pleasant walking gardens, a large farm where some of the patients worked, and a view to Boston 18 miles away.



Sc. #1844, 1983, 1¢ in Great American Series

Author Nathaniel Hawthorne added the “w” in his name because he did not want to be associated with his great-great-grandfather, Judge John Hathorne. Why? Because the judge was the lead judge for the Salem witch trials, which unjustly condemned and executed 19 persons for witchcraft during a period of mass hysteria. He lived on the hill on which the state hospital was built 200 years later. Called “Hathorne Hill,” it was the name given to the whole area.



Sc. #2047, 1983, 20¢, Literary Arts Series

When the railroad station changed its name from Asylum Station to Hathorne in 1899, the post office also changed its name to Hathorne (October 26, 1899). Currently the post office is a small part of a larger building about 200 yards away from the previous Asylum Depot post office.



Photo of Hathorne P.O. courtesy of Paul Crosby, 2021.

The hospital closed as a hospital in stages, finally ending in 1992. Most of the hospital was torn down to be turned into a condominium complex. But the facade of the building was kept, and it looks like a big, old mansion.

The Asylum Station postmark with target killer is considered to be a DPO (discontinued post office) since the name was changed. A lightly written message on the reverse speaks of a Joshua who seems to have diphtheria. I recently purchased this card for a bargain price of \$7. Thanks to long-time postal employee Christine Mitchell at the still existing Hathorne Post Office for her colorful input.

References:

www.rememberingdanvers.blogspot.com/2007/12/hathorne-post-office.html by Sandy Nichols Ward

www.danversstatehospital.org

Daily Bulletin of Orders Affecting the Postal Service, Post Office Department, Washington, D.C., Vol. XX, No. 6016 (November 20, 1899).

Historical Map Archive, www.alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/index.html

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal cards, especially used, including first days; the 1886 Grant Letter Card (or Sheet); UC16, the first U.S. aerogram; and postal history on business or picture post cards.