



Building History

Eastern Maine Insane Hospital Bangor Mental Health Institute Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center

Address: 656 State Street

City: Bangor

State: Maine

Map and Lot Number: Map R63 – Lot 8

Map: Bangor Chamber of Commerce N-D - Bangor Insane Hospital

NRHP: 87000420

First Owner: State of Maine

Architect: John Calvin Stevens (1855-1940)

Cornerstone Laid: 1896

Opened: July 1, 1901

"The Eastern Maine Insane Hospital in Bangor is one of the largest, least altered and most architecturally significant institutional buildings in the State of Maine. Designed by John Calvin Stevens (1855-1940), the State's foremost late nineteenth and early twentieth century architect, it was built in stages between the years 1896 and 1935. By virtue of its elongated staggered form and interior plan, the hospital embodies late nineteenth century medical theories concerning care for the insane as set forth in Thomas S. Kirkbride's On the Construction, Organization and General Arrangement of Hospitals for the Insane (1880)." – Kirk F. Mohny, Architectural Historian, Main Historic Preservation Commission, January 1987 – entered on the National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form.

Many additions and "improvements" have been added over the years.

The Eastern Maine Insane Hospital was the second state mental health facility built in Maine.

The Maine Insane Hospital in Augusta, opened at Augusta in 1840, had become overcrowded. The Bangor facility was built on a pastoral hill, named 'Hepatica Hill' for its flowers, overlooking the city of Bangor and the Penobscot River. Pine trees were planted around all of the driveways on the campus, as it was thought that patients needed rest and a site away from downtown Bangor.

Within five days of opening 145 patients were transferred from Augusta to the Bangor location. Patients were generally committed to the hospital by their community peers, such as town selectmen, family, etc.

Patients worked the fields, raised livestock, manned the laundry, sewing room and kitchen as part of their "treatment." This made the hospital self-sufficient and any excesses were sold at market to

pay additional costs, until 1973 when the case of Sonder vs. Brennan went to court and it was determined that patients in public institutions could not work without being paid.

The name of the hospital changed in 1913 to Bangor State Hospital and to Bangor Mental Health Institute in the early 70's.

The name was changed again on August 26, 2005, to the Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center. The institute, one of two psychiatric hospitals in Maine, was named for Dorothea Lynde Dix (1802-1887), who was born in Hampden Maine, then part of Massachusetts.

For information about the architecture and construction of the hospital see:
Thompson, Deborah. *Bangor, Maine 1769-1914: An Architectural History* (University of Maine Press, 1988) 475-478.

For information about Dorothea Dix, see:

James, Edward T., Editor. *Notable American Women, a biographical dictionary, 1607-1950* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, c.1971) 486-491. Notes that she was a humanitarian crusader for the mentally ill and superintendent of army nurses during the Civil War.