

History of the Royal Saxon State Sanatorium and Nursing Home

Inspired by the article No. 20 about the sanatorium Weinsberg in our series Applied Philately by Dr. Spiess, I keep my eyes open since then to find similar letters. Especially since I want to create another exhibit on psychiatry sometime when I have more time. So now the following letter fell into my hands (of course again through Clemens).

It is a letter dated 25.8.1937. The letter with wonderfully legible postmarks is a service letter - provided with a service stamp of the German Reich (12 Pf). Since this is a service letter, I can use all the postmarks in a thematic exhibit, which is most helpful in an exhibit on the history of psychiatry, especially because of the sender's postmark on the back - *Erbbiologische Abteilung der Landes-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Arnsdorf/Sachsen*. Indeed, for this letter, the sender's cancel, at least the one on the front, can also be used for a thematic exhibit, since "The sender's cancel is a postally necessary part for the Reichspost to justify the use of the official stamp. Therefore, the sender's postmark can be evaluated thematically in such cases." Cited D. Läge.



On April 1, 1912, the Königlich-Sächsische Landes-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt (Royal Saxon State Sanatorium and Nursing Home) was founded in Arnsdorf as a very progressive institution for mentally ill patients by the standards of the time. Most of the buildings erected at that time are still standing today and are listed as historical monuments, including the park.

Already at the beginning the asylum has to deal with big problems: the First World War breaks out and although the asylum is designed for self-sufficiency, 771 psychiatric patients die in Arnsdorf during the war - often from hunger. After 1918, it takes almost 10 years until somewhat normal conditions are restored. With the beginning of the Nazi regime, a second dark phase of German psychiatry begins - also in Arnsdorf. From 1934 on, forced sterilizations are part of everyday life in the nursing home. Special food - with extremely low nutritional value - is given to "unproductive" patients, insulin shock treatments and drug trials are carried out on patients willingly infected with malaria. The beginning of World War II also marks the beginning of the planning and ultimately the execution of the murder of numerous mentally ill people under the code word "Aktion T4" in killing institutions. One of these is Pirna-Sonnenstein. Arnsdorf, on the

other hand, is an intermediate institution where patients "collected" from their homes by the gray buses are hospitalized for another 3-4 weeks before being forwarded to the killing institutions. Often selected by those responsible in the hereditary biology departments, who identified so-called "life unworthy" of life" and wanted to prevent its "propagation" through inheritance. From Arnsdorf, at least 2,681 patients were brought to Pirna-Sonnenstein from July 1940 to August 1941, and most of them were murdered on the same day. After the gas murders are stopped due to public protests in 1941, the killing continues through medication overdoses and systematic food deprivation in sanatoriums and nursing homes.

The catastrophic situation regarding nutrition, heating and medical care does not improve in the Arnsdorf institutions even after the end of the war. The situation stabilizes only at the beginning of the 1950s. The introduction of the first effective psychotropic drugs ("Megaphen") at the end of the 1950s also brings a certain improvement. In the 1970s, it was demanded (as in all of Germany) that the goal of psychiatry should not be to lock away mentally ill persons in large institutions, but to reintegrate them into society.

This demanded psychiatric reform, however, was not tackled until the 1990s and took years (tens of years) to be largely implemented throughout Germany. Today, the Sächsische Krankenhaus Arnsdorf (formerly Landes-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Arnsdorf) is one of the largest psychiatric institutions in Saxony with various departments, including day clinics.

Source: https://www.skh-arnsdorf.sachsen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/arnsdorf/pdf/100jahre.pdf