

MEDICAL PHILATELY

Medical Symbols: Part 5

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20th International Red Cross Conference,
Austria, 1965

Red Cross - Mark of Mercy

Banner of Red Cross is most universal and it has appeared on the stamps of more nations than any other symbol. It all started when a young Swiss, **Jean Henri Dunant (1828-1910)** witnessed an unusually bloody battle between the French and the Austrians, at the little town of Solferino in Lombardia, Italy (1859). The furious battle left 30,000 men dead and many injured in a short span of time. It was so shocking that both sides withdrew and soon peace was arranged between them. The sight of wounded men lying agonized and unattended where they had fallen, stirred Dunant deeply. Later, back in Switzerland, he wrote a book about his experiences '*Un Souvenir de Saolferino* (1862), and made a public plea for some system to be organized to help pitiful casualties as they dropped, wounded or dying, on the battlefields. He also asked that service to military sick and wounded be neutral. Dunant's story aroused immediate public interest and in 1864, the historic Geneva Convention met in that Swiss city and formed what we now call the Red Cross. Signatories



Red Crescent-Turkey, 1963
Red Cross Centenary

of twelve countries laid down the rules for neutrality to protect those brave men and women who go to aid the battlefield casualties. These principles became the bases for Red Cross Treaty (1865), which then formed the International Red Cross Society (1919), with certain amendments. Because Dunant was the true founder of this humanitarian movement, Convention honoured him by choosing his country's flag as its symbol, a white cross on a red field. However, when it was pointed out that this might be embarrassment, should Switzerland ever go to war, it was decided that Swiss national emblem of a cross may remain, but its colors may be reversed. Thus the Red Cross symbol, a red cross on a white background, was born. Henri Dunant was awarded Nobel peace prize in 1901.

The Red Crescent was formally recognized in 1929, when Geneva Convention was amended. After the collapse of Ottoman Empire, the Red Crescent was first used by its successor nation Turkey, followed by Egypt. The Red Crescent then became organizational emblem of nearly every nation with majority Muslim population. With the controversy over Israelis national society, Magen David Adam, resolved, a third symbol,



Henri Dunant-founder Red Cross
Nobel peace prize 1901, Sweden – 1991

referred to as Red diamond or red crystal was introduced in 2005.

The Red Cross emblem carries profound significance. By its proper use it saves lives. In time of conflict it is a visible sign of the protection conferred by Geneva Conventions. In peace times it indicates that a person or object is linked to the Red Cross movement and its fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and voluntary service.

During WW-I India had no organizational relief service except a branch of Saint John Ambulance Association. Indian Red Cross Society, independent of British Red Cross was introduced in the Indian Legislative Council by Sir Claude Hill in March 1920. The bill was passed and became an act. Indian Red Cross Society is a member of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The relations are strong.

(Stamps Courtesy J.V. Pai-Dhungat)

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