



American
Red Cross

JANE DELANO

Founder of the American Red Cross Nursing Service

American Red Cross Nursing has been a vital force since 1909, uplifting lives with compassion and professional skill and strengthening the Red Cross with innovations and support. In a foreword to *The History of American Red Cross Nursing* (1922), President Harding wrote, "Perhaps of no other figure in American tradition have there been more stories written, pictures painted, songs sung than of the American Red Cross Nurse. She has personified courage, sympathy and gentle strength in contrast with the brutality of war."

Leading Pioneer of the Modern Nursing Profession

To this day, Red Cross nurses follow in the footsteps of Jane Delano, a leading pioneer of the modern nursing profession, who almost single-handedly created American Red Cross Nursing. Through her efforts as the first chairman of the National Committee on Red Cross Nursing, the image of the Red Cross nurse became a vital national symbol. More than 370,000 professional Red Cross nurses have enrolled in the Nursing Service since its inception. These nurses volunteered for service in times of war and disaster and created programs for emergency response and the advancement of health care in peacetime.

Born March 12, 1862, near Townsend, Schuyler County, New York, Jane Delano was a member of a Massachusetts family whose ancestry dates back to colonial times. Her father, George Delano, served and died in the Civil War. After a brief period of teaching, Delano enrolled in the Bellevue Training School for Nurses and graduated in 1886. ". . . I can't say that anything romantic or sentimental determined me to be a nurse," she wrote with characteristic candor. "Many young nurses start out with the statement that the sight of suffering impelled them to begin a career of alleviating distress, but please don't say that my career was ever influenced by such sentiment." Her reason for becoming a nurse was simply "I think the nurse's profession is a fine one, and I like it."

Early Career

Delano's first opportunity to perform public service nursing came in 1888, when she served as superintendent of a Jacksonville, Florida hospital treating victims of a yellow fever epidemic. Her superior executive and administrative skills quickly became evident, as she developed innovative nursing procedures for the patients under her care. She next spent three years nursing typhoid patients at a copper mine in Bisbee, Arizona. Here she realized the great need for providing health education and social services to rural communities. After Bisbee, she served briefly as the superintendent of nurses at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. During the Spanish-American War (1898), she began her association with the American Red Cross by becoming a member of the New York Chapter where she served as the secretary for the enrollment of nurses.

In 1902, Delano returned to Bellevue Hospital as superintendent of the nursing school. She introduced revolutionary ideas for the nursing curriculum. She insisted that her students receive cultural and recreational advantages they had not enjoyed before. She worked hard to dignify the position of nurses in the medical community. Up to that time, nurses were not recognized as full members of the medical profession.

A woman of incredible energy, Delano served as superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps from 1909-1912. At the same time, she became chairman of the new National Committee on Red Cross Nursing Service and created the plan for the first volunteer nursing unit of the American Red Cross. She also served as president of the American Nurses' Association and chairman of the board of directors of the American Journal of Nursing. During this period, she emphasized the importance of having a ready supply of nurses in case of military conflict. She wanted to avoid the lack of preparation the country faced to meet nursing demands during the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. Under her skillful leadership, the American Red Cross Nursing Service became the recognized nursing reserve for the Army, Navy and Public Health Service.

Leading the American Red Cross Nursing Program

In 1912, Delano resigned from the Army Nurse Corps to volunteer full time with the Red Cross. She wanted to increase the enrollment of Red Cross nurses. Consequently, she traveled extensively throughout the United States, speaking before nurses' meetings and at nursing schools. As a result, when the United States entered World War I in 1917, there were over 8,000 registered nurses immediately available for duty. Even before the United States joined the Allies, the Red Cross organized medical and nursing units to staff hospitals and help the civilian population in Europe. By the Armistice in November 1918, over 20,000 Red Cross nurses had volunteered to serve at home and overseas. The success of her wartime nursing program became eloquent testimony to the clarity of her vision and the quality of her leadership. Her colleague Ruth Morgan stated, ". . . she was pre-eminently a great leader. To be calm, when others were distracted, to be sure, when others were uncertain, to be brave, when most of us would have been timid, and above all, to be generous, when most of us would have been selfish, was her practice."

While she was organizing Red Cross Nursing for service to the military, Delano created other programs



of powerful significance in American life. She developed Red Cross courses in Elementary Hygiene and Home Care of the Sick for which she co-authored the textbook. She prepared courses for the training of nurses' aides. She established the Red Cross Town and Country Nursing Service for delivering health care to rural areas of the country. In 1918, the name

changed to the American National Red Cross Public Health Nursing Service. It became one of the most successful contributions to the nation's health care system.

Following World War I, Delano went to France to inspect base hospitals that were still in use. While there she became ill, required surgery, and died on April 15, 1919. Her devotion to the Red Cross remained to the end. Her last words were "What about my work, I must get back to my work." She is buried in the Nurses' Corner at Arlington Cemetery.

Honoring Her Service



Not long after her death, American nurses collected funds for a memorial to Delano and the other nurses who died in the service of their country. R. Tait McKenzie, a sculptor and physician, designed a bronze memorial featuring the draped figure of a graceful woman with hands extended to show a nurse's readiness to serve. An inscription states, "To Jane A. Delano and the 296 nurses who died in the War—1917-1918." In April 1934 dedication ceremonies took place in the garden at Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Delegates of the three national nursing organizations—the American Nurses' Association, the National League of Nursing, and the National Organization for Public Health Nursing—attended.

Henry P. Davison, a leader of the American Red Cross during World War I, praised the contributions Jane Delano made to the nursing profession at the time of her death.

"The value of what she did for our cause can never be measured. Appreciation of her individual services will grow as the knowledge of the work done by nurses during the world war becomes better known to the world. She was beloved by all who knew her. I am sure it can be said of Miss Delano that her thought from beginning to end was never for herself, but for the service of humanity."

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