

Jane A. Delano

a biography . . .



THE AMERICAN NATIONAL RED CROSS, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Jane A. Delano



Founder of the American Red Cross Nursing Service

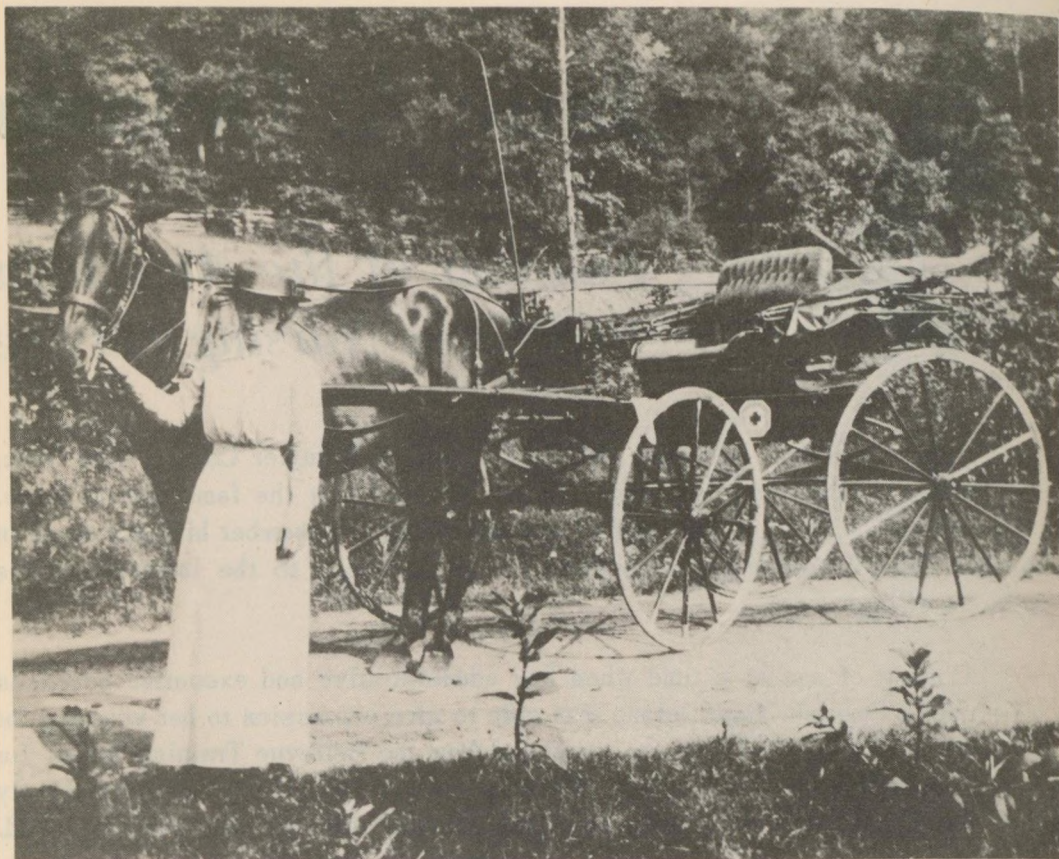
Jane A. Delano was born March 12, 1862, in Schuyler County, New York. Her father died in the Civil War -- just where and how the family never knew. Although the daughter he left behind was too young to remember him, his death in the war was undoubtedly responsible for her devotion to the interests of the soldiers of later wars.

Coming of age at a time when few administrative and executive positions were open to women, Jane Delano was able to give expression to her yearning for a career in nursing, and she was graduated from the Bellevue Training School for Nurses in New York City in 1886. She went through her training so unobtrusively that few of her classmates dreamed of the unusual abilities she later displayed.

Jane Delano's first opportunity for public service came just 2 years after her graduation, when she became superintendent of the Sandhills Hospital near Jacksonville, Florida. Yellow fever was raging in many of the southern states. One of Miss Delano's first innovations in the hospital was the screening of every patient's bed. Medical authorities already suspected the mosquito as the carrier of this dread disease, but it was not until several years later that experiments proved it true.

From Florida the young nurse went to a typhoid-ridden mining camp at Bisbee, Arizona. For 3 years she remained, isolated from all medical and sanitary service. The possibilities of what could be accomplished in such a place through health education and social service took root in her imagination. No doubt it was at Bisbee that the seed was planted that many years later was to bear fruit in the form of a special nursing service provided for in her will for just such handicapped communities.

After leaving Bisbee, Jane Delano was appointed superintendent of nurses in the University Hospital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After 5 years there she did private-duty nursing in her home in Montour Falls, New York.



Rural public health nursing was started in the horse and buggy days. It brought skilled nursing care and health instruction to the remote corners of the country.

Through all these early experiences Jane Delano was doing something more than making a living, something more than nursing the sick. She was observing and thinking and growing. She was realizing her potentialities for service. She was cultivating a sense of responsibility that was to make her one of the most prominent leaders of her profession in World War I.

When the New York School of Civics and Philanthropy opened, Jane Delano was one of the first to enroll. She realized the need for broader preparation to enable her to deal with the complexities of human relationships in the work she had chosen. In 1900 she was given an exceptional opportunity to practice the theories she had been studying when she became head of the Girls' Department at the House of Refuge, Randalls Island, New York. A strong hand, a warm heart, unswerving discipline, intelligent sympathy were the rare combinations requisite for this difficult position. After she gave up this position she rented a small apartment in an inexpensive section of the city, where on certain afternoons each

week she invited as many of the girls from the House of Refuge as she could accommodate. She welcomed them as guests, discussed their problems, advised and encouraged them. Then together they cooked supper while she taught them some of the duties of keeping house. This demonstration of her unselfishness was to bring her greater return than she could have imagined. One of the trustees of the House of Refuge learned of her efforts in behalf of the girls and was so impressed that he made Jane Delano one of his beneficiaries. This generous act eventually gave her financial independence and made it possible for her to help others.

The next step in the career of Jane Delano was as superintendent of the School of Nursing at Bellevue Hospital. In addition to being a superior administrator, she had become a genius in selecting assistants who could be relied upon to share her responsibility. This ability to evaluate people was always a great asset. At Bellevue she again proved to be an advanced thinker. Some of her ideas concerning the nursing curriculum were considered almost revolutionary. Because she saw much broader opportunities ahead for nurses she insisted that her students have cultural and recreational advantages that had not been considered necessary by hospital authorities. She did much to dignify the position of the individual nurse, whose status up to that time had not been fully recognized as professional. Thoroughness was a watchword with Jane Delano, but she did not allow it to take precedence over other things still more important. The patients were always her first consideration. "If something must give way," she once said at a particularly busy time, "let the ward look a little untidy, but make the patients comfortable."

The experience of meeting all kinds of emergency situations in a big city hospital and of seeing the affects of fires, wrecks, and explosions made an impression on Miss Delano that later influenced her greatly in accepting responsibility for organizing the Red Cross Nursing Service.

Miss Delano remained at Bellevue during the Spanish-American War. During this period she became a member of the New York Branch of the Red Cross and served as secretary for the enrollment of nurses for war service. As a volunteer she gave a great deal of time to recruiting because she was deeply interested in seeing that the soldiers had the best nursing care that could be provided.

Not long after, there was a break in Jane Delano's professional life when she took care of her invalid mother at her home in Charlottesville, Virginia, for 2 years. Following her mother's death, Miss Delano went abroad, intending to spend an indefinite period in study and travel. But her ability was not to be submerged in leisure. In 1909 she was called home to become superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps. Her appointment was made by the Surgeon General upon the suggestion of Mabel Boardman, secretary of the Central Committee of the Red

Cross. Miss Boardman knew Miss Delano's ability and her interest in the Red Cross and hoped by this means to cement the relationship between the Red Cross and the Army Nurse Corps.

When the American Red Cross was reorganized in 1905 the responsibility of enlisting nurses for war or disaster service had been entrusted to chapters. But this method was found to be unsatisfactory because of the varying standards for nurses in different states and the lack of a uniform basis of selection among chapters. Miss Boardman had encouraged the nursing profession to take an active part in developing the Red Cross Nursing Service and in creating the National Committee on Red Cross Nursing Service, consisting of a chairman and 14 members. Miss Delano was made chairman of this committee at about the time she became superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps, placing her in a strategic position to consolidate the aims of the two nursing groups.

The years from 1909 to 1914 disclose in the life of Jane A. Delano ever-broadening experience and understanding. During her superintendency of the Army Nurse Corps she visited the military hospitals in the Philippines and Hawaii and went also to China and Japan, receiving from the latter country the decoration of the Japanese Red Cross. She served as president of the American Nurses' Association from 1909 to 1912. She also served as chairman of the board of directors of the American Journal of Nursing.

As chairman of the National Committee on Red Cross Nursing Service, Miss Delano immediately began to urge a plan of organization that would place the responsibility for recruiting nurses for emergency service with the Red Cross entirely in the hands of the nurses themselves. The plan included state and local committees of graduate nurses who would themselves be enrolled Red Cross nurses and who would serve as volunteers in doing the work of recruiting, keeping records, and mobilizing nurses when they were needed. This plan was ultimately accepted by the Red Cross and by nurses in general. It worked so effectively that in 1910 when 20,000 United States troops were massed on the Mexican border in anticipation of war with Mexico, Miss Delano proudly announced:

Should a sudden need for nurses arise, there stand ready to cooperate with the National Committee on Red Cross Nursing Service 141 nurses on 24 state Red Cross committees and 233 on local committees. The committees, with nearly 1,300 enrolled nurses, are a guarantee to the nation that neither the stress of calamity nor the turmoil of war will ever again find us wholly unprepared.

After 3 years as head of the Army Nurse Corps, Miss Delano resigned in 1912 to give full time, as a volunteer, to building up the Red Cross Nursing Serv-

ice. To increase the prestige and strength of the Service became her dominant purpose. She traveled extensively throughout the United States, speaking before nurses' meetings and to classes in schools of nursing. Nurses were urged to enroll with the Red Cross for emergency duty in time of epidemic, fire, flood, and war. But no one dreamed that the demands of war would so soon put the efficiency of the Red Cross Nursing Service to the test.

The period from the organization of the Red Cross Nursing Service in 1910 to 1917 when the United States entered World War I was one of dramatic growth and historical significance. Miss Delano met every opportunity for growth with imagination, courage, and practical foresight. She welcomed the chance to extend the skill and service of trained nurses. The Red Cross course in elementary hygiene and home care of the sick, begun in 1908 and taught by graduate nurses, had been taken under the supervision of the Nursing Service. The popularity of the classes had become so great that a textbook was needed, and Miss Delano, in



Miss Delano, center, with a group of Red Cross nurses on board the SS Red Cross. The "Mercy Ship" carried doctors and nurses to France, England, Russia, Germany, Austria, and Hungary in 1914.

collaboration with Isabel McIsaac, who had succeeded her as superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps, found time to prepare and publish such a book in 1913. To supplement this program, a course in home dietetics had been developed by the Nursing Service. In 1912 the Red Cross Town and Country Nursing Service, a forerunner of the rural public health nursing program, had been established at the suggestion of Lillian D. Wald of the Henry Street Settlement. Miss Delano had given every encouragement to the expansion of this service because no one knew better than she the need of the people in remote rural regions for skilled nursing care and health instruction.

On August 1, 1914, war was declared. Even before the United States joined the Allies, the Red Cross organized and sent abroad medical and nursing units to staff hospitals and to help the civilian population in the war-torn countries of Europe. From the beginning of this vast undertaking Miss Delano guided the various activities of Red Cross nurses at home and abroad. Many other nurses noted for their administrative ability were added to her staff to help share the responsibility, but Miss Delano kept her interest in every department, and no detail was too small to merit her attention. In summing up their achievements later, it was found that during the war 18,989 enrolled Red Cross nurses had been assigned to military establishments; 283 to hospitals and cantonment zones for the United States Public Health Service; and 604 to foreign service under the Red Cross commissions to the Allies.^{1/}

In the fall of 1918, after the armistice was signed and the pressure for recruitment of nurses had subsided, Miss Delano decided to make a trip overseas to see the conditions under which the nurses were working and to estimate the needs of the future. Quite in keeping with her purpose was a remark made on the evening of her departure when a friend asked why she was not wearing some of the decorations that had been given her for distinguished service. She replied, "What do those ribbons mean to me? All I want is the love of the nurses."

She arrived in Brest early on January 10, 1919. Although a sleet storm was raging and the wind was cold and penetrating, Miss Delano started out at once to visit hospitals. What her visits meant to the nurses is expressed in a letter from one of them, referring to a talk given to a base hospital staff:

She told them how her heart had been with each one, how she wished she might have shared all their discomforts, that she welcomed the bad weather she was encountering as it gave her a better idea of what those in France had had to endure. It was a talk such as one comrade

^{1/} Lavina L. Dock and Others, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1922, p. 986.

would have had with another, not a hint of criticism or supervision, just encouragement and approbation.^{2/}

About 10 days after her arrival in France Miss Delano became ill with a sore throat that resulted in an ear infection. She was in a hospital for treatment for a short time but was soon up and away again on her inspection trips. However, a recurrence of the ear trouble resulted in a mastoid operation on February 21 in the hospital at Savenay. Although the best medical and nursing care were available to her, her worn-out condition made the outlook discouraging from the beginning. One operation followed another, and the Red Cross was notified of the seriousness of the situation. Her closest friend, Anna Kerr, was sent to France to be with her. She arrived just before the last operation, and Miss Delano

^{2/} Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, p. 998.



Jane Delano, photographed at her desk in national headquarters, just before sailing for France in the fall of 1918.

was delighted to see her. After the operation she talked to Miss Kerr a few minutes and asked, "What about my work? I must get back to my work." These were her last words although she lived several days. On the evening of April 15, 1919, Miss Delano died. Her body was interred in the American military cemetery at Savenay, but 17 months later it was brought back to the United States and placed in Arlington Cemetery near Washington, D.C. Commitment services were held on September 18, 1920. On a shaded hillside in the nurses' plot, her grave is surrounded by simple white markers of the graves of many other nurses who share honors with America's soldier dead.

Not long after Miss Delano's death American nurses began collecting funds for a memorial to her and to other nurses who had died in the service of their country. In April 1934 their dream was realized at dedication ceremonies attended by delegates of the three national nursing organizations^{3/} in convention in Washington. The memorial, executed by Dr. R. Tait McKenzie, physician and sculptor, and erected in the garden at Red Cross national headquarters, is the draped figure of a graceful woman done in bronze, with hands extended in an attitude of readiness to serve--symbolic of nursing. The base of the statue is a sweeping curved bench in marble with a verse from the Ninety-first Psalm in relief: "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day." The inscriptions on the monument read: "To Jane A. Delano and the 296 nurses who died in the World War," and "Blessed are the merciful."

Other tributes also keep her memory green. At the Army Medical Center in Washington a residence for nurses bears her name in lasting witness to her contributions to the nursing profession and the Army Nurse Corps. Beautiful oil portraits of Miss Delano hang in Delano Hall and the main building at American Red Cross national headquarters. Many of the nurses' posts of the American Legion have chosen the name of Jane A. Delano as their designation. But the greatest of these memorials and the most appropriate of all is the living monument that Jane A. Delano herself helped to create, the Nursing Service of the American National Red Cross.

An army surgeon summed up Miss Delano's character and her contributions to nursing history in these words:

To the cause of sound education for the nurse and the extension of her sphere of activity in relation not only to hospitals and to private

^{3/} American Nurses' Association, National League of Nursing Education, National Organization for Public Health Nursing.

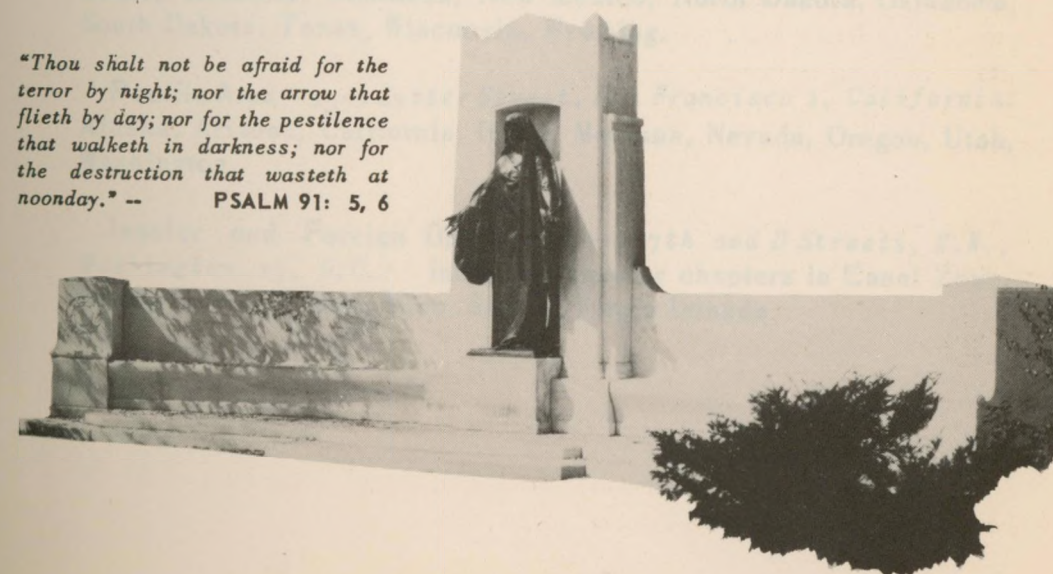
practice but to the broader fields of public hygiene and sanitary instruction, Miss Delano gave much of her life.

She lived to see nursing generally recognized as an indispensable complement to the practice of medicine, as it must one day be recognized as an integral part of the art of therapy. She lived to see the trained nurse universally regarded and employed as a vital agent in measures of public sanitation throughout the civilized world.

To the affiliation and coordination of the important nursing agencies of the country, to the end that under the American Red Cross there might be established a force of nurses properly selected and organized, adequate not only for the demands of peace but for the emergencies of war, she gave the latter years of her life. It was work well done.

She lived to see the standards of nursing for which she stood recognized by the Government. She lived to see the nursing agencies of America united and cooperating with the Army and the Red Cross. She lived to know that the Red Cross was ready, and to realize that it had given to the Army a contingent second to none in the service, in character, in morale, in organization, and in efficiency. She lived to see that the American Army nurse had stood the test. She gave her life freely and unreservedly to a noble service. She accomplished that which she undertook. She died at the height of her powers, at work. She was a fine figure, the figure of an American nurse.^{4/}

^{4/} Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, p. 1005.



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