

Jane A. Delano: Founder of the American Red Cross Nursing Service
A story from Schuyler County's history for March's Women's History Month

Hundreds of thousands of nurses have served the American Red Cross, caring for military personnel and civilians in times of war and for communities in times of need. Jane Arminda Delano of Schuyler County is credited to this day with the success of the Red Cross Nursing Service.

Jane Delano (De-LAY-no) was born in 1862 in the Townsend area in the Town of Dix. She attended a rural school in Dix and then Cook Academy boarding school in Montour Falls (now the New York State Academy of Fire Sciences). After graduating from Cook, she taught in rural schools before enrolling in the Bellevue Hospital Training School for Nurses in New York City, graduating in 1886.

"I can't say that anything romantic or sentimental determined me to be a nurse," Delano once wrote, according to the American Red Cross. "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 simple, she said. "I think the nurse's profession is a fine one, and I like it."

In 1888, in the midst of a yellow fever epidemic, she was hired as superintendent of the Sandhills Hospital near Jacksonville, Florida. Appalled at hospital conditions she found there, Delano instituted a regime of elementary hygiene and placed screens around each patient's bed because she rightly suspected mosquitos as fever carriers. Delano also began to train Black women as nurses instead of aides and cleaners, overcoming a shortage of nurses.

Her methods established, Delano answered a need for medical help at a copper mining camp in Bisbee, Arizona, where there was an outbreak of



typhoid fever. She worked there for three years.

Next, Delano became superintendent of nurses at the University Hospital in Philadelphia, a position she held for five years before returning to Schuylar County to care for her mother and work as a private nurse.

In 1900, Delano was appointed head of the Girls' Department at the House of Refuge on Randall's Island, New York City. This time, her duties extended to counseling. At the same time, from 1900 to 1902, she served as president of the American Nurses Association, concentrating on recruiting nurses and raising the professional standards of the job.

In 1902, she returned to Bellevue Hospital as superintendent of the School of Nursing. She was known as a superior administrator and an advanced thinker. Some of her ideas concerning the nursing curriculum were considered almost revolutionary, according to a Red Cross publication.

After the American Red Cross received its Congressional charter in 1905, Delano also began to recruit nurses for that organization, founding the American Red Cross Nursing Service. She designed the distinctive uniform of the Red Cross nurse: a nurse's cap and a blue cape with scarlet lining.

In 1909, Delano was named superintendent of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, although she did not actually enlist in the Army. One of her jobs was inspecting military hospitals overseas.

Delano also agreed to serve as chairman of the National Committee of Red Cross Nursing Service. Three years later, in 1912, Delano left the Army Nurse Corps to give her full attention - as an unpaid volunteer - to the Red Cross Nursing Service and recruiting.

Even before the United States entered World War I in December 1917, the American Red Cross was sending medical care to Europe. Between 1914 and 1918, more than 20,000 Red Cross nurses provided aid to the military and civilians.

With the Armistice ending the war on Nov. 11, 1918, Delano decided that she needed to go to Europe on behalf of the Red Cross Nursing Service to better oversee medical conditions at military installations.

Delano arrived in Brest, France, in January 1919. The next month, following a throat ailment, she needed a mastoid operation, then additional surgery. She never recovered and died on April 15, 1919.

The Red Cross quotes a Delano colleague, Ruth Morgan: "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.”

Although originally buried at Savenay, France, Delano’s remains were moved to Arlington National Cemetery for reinterment on Sept. 18, 1920. A statue of



Delano stands at American Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Posthumously, she was awarded the U.S. Army’s Distinguished Service Medal.

In Schuyler County, Jane A. Delano is honored with an historical marker in Townsend and dedication of the new Schuyler Hospital to her memory in 1972. Delano’s achievements are part of an exhibit at the Schuyler County Historical Society’s Brick Tavern Museum in Montour Falls. The exhibit includes some of her personal belongings.

Learn more about Jane Delano on the American Red Cross website by going to <https://rdcrss.org/3vQTAaP>

Photograph by Granger