

Lillian Wald Biography

Lillian Wald

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Contents

Lillian Wald Biography.....	1
Contents.....	2
Biography.....	3

Biography

Lillian Wald was born on March 10, 1867 in Cincinnati, Ohio; she died on September 1, 1940 in Westport, Connecticut. She was the daughter of Max D. Wald, a merchant, and Minnie Wald; she never married. Wald is remembered for her dedication to the cause of public health, and for establishing important social reforms to accommodate the needs of the turn-of-the-century immigrant population in New York City. During her career, Wald was a public health nurse, settlement leader, and social reformer. In 1891, she graduated from New York Hospital for nurses, and in 1893 from Women's Medical College (N.Y.). In 1892, she worked as a nurse at the New York Juvenile Asylum.

Wald's achievements were considerable; she founded public health nursing in the United States. With Mary Brewster, she opened the Henry Street Settlement on Manhattan's Lower east Side, providing visiting nurse service and settlement services to the poor residents of that community; she also inspired the organization of similar services elsewhere. From 1893 to 1933, she was the co-founder and head of the Settlement, which under Wald's directorship acquired worldwide attention and respect. (It is particularly noteworthy that this neighborhood center provided opportunities for recreation and artistic expression, as well as medical services.) With Lina Rogers, she began the first public school nursing service in the world (New York City, 1902). She persuaded life insurance companies, starting with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in 1909, to organize nursing programs for their policyholders. Wald was also a pioneer in the field of child welfare, introducing the idea that it is the responsibility of the community to see that children are provided for. Toward this end, she conceived the idea of a United States Children's Bureau, which was later established at her urging (1912). She originated the plan for the American Red Cross' town and country nursing program. Wald was instrumental in the founding of the National Organization for Public Health Nursing, and served as that organization's first president in 1912. Wald wrote two autobiographical works, *The House on Henry Street* (1915), and *Windows on Henry Street* (1934).