

Nebraska Nursing Hall of Fame



Myrtle Dean

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“The great nursing leaders whose examples we want to keep always before us, were first of all great nurses, but with all their tenderness and devotion they were vigorous, forceful, and persistent women, with clear vision and judgement, and with fearless courage.”

-Myrtle Dean, 1926

During her lifelong career Myrtle Dean was a pioneer in the field of nursing. Her distinguished career was directed to many efforts that established an early groundwork for today’s profession. This work included humanitarian aid both during and following World War I and a high level of advancement in nursing education. Her longer resume includes leadership in the field of hospital administration.

Myrtle Dean was born in Townsend, Montana, in 1884 and grew up in Pierce County, Nebraska, where she attended local public schools. After receiving her registration from the Atlantic (Iowa) School of Nursing in 1912, she held several positions.

In 1916, Dean became an instructor at the Illinois Training School for Nurses and Cook County Hospital in Chicago. When the American Red Cross was called upon to organize medical units should war be declared she joined the American Red Cross Nursing Service as a reserve nurse. When World War I broke out she volunteered with Chicago Base Hospital 12, commonly called the “Northwestern” unit. The unit was among the first of six base hospitals to arrive in Europe, assigned to the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) to relieve the British hospital at Dannes-Camiers, France. From 1919-1921, Dean remained in Europe and volunteered with the American Red Cross Nursing Service and its foreign relief operations in the war-devastated Balkan countries of Montenegro and Serbia (now parts of the former Yugoslavia). She was called upon to establish orphanages, which also included clinics, small hospitals, soup kitchens, and child welfare programs. She was chief nurse for three of these facilities.

Dean then returned to the United States, but at the urging of the American Red Cross’s Near East Relief efforts, returned overseas for assignment to Constantinople (now Istanbul), Turkey, at the American Hospital and its American School of Nursing. From 1923-1924 she assumed the position as a chief nurse and instructor, training foreign nurses in modern standards and techniques, in turn, overcoming barriers in language, customs, and religions.

In 1926, Dean relocated to Lincoln, Nebraska, to join the newly-founded Bryan Memorial Hospital. She was assigned to succeed the first superintendent of the Bryan Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in December, 1926. Dean was promoted in January, 1927, to superintendent of the hospital, in addition to serving as superintendent of its school of nursing until 1937. After a leave of absence from 1937-1938, she returned to Bryan Memorial Hospital as superintendent of the hospital until resigning in 1941. She also served as the President for the Nebraska Nurses Association from 1933-1935.

Upon leaving Bryan Memorial Hospital, Dean took positions as superintendent of several hospitals. She retired from the field of health care in 1952 and located at Lexington, Kentucky, where she passed away in 1975.