



Valentine's Day Benevolence & Brotherhood

In February of each year, we celebrate Valentine's Day. It is an opportunity to acknowledge those people in our lives whom we love. The word "love" is a rich one that has several expansive connotations. One of the definitions of love is "the feeling of benevolence and brotherhood that people should have for each other." Frances Wisebart Jacobs and Emily Bissell are two of the many women from our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*, who personify this sisterhood of compassion for other people. Frances Wisebart Jacobs, an educator and a

philanthropist, is considered the "Mother of Charities" for her efforts to establish what today is known as United Way. Emily Bissell developed Christmas Seals to help finance the fight against tuberculosis. We so enjoy sharing their stories!



Frances Wisebart Jacobs was the personification of one individual making a tremendous difference and benefiting so many others in the community. In fact, we would posit that every reader of this article has been touched in some way by her efforts. Her momentous work can only be partially understood when we tell you that she is recognized as the founder of the United Way. It all began in 1887 when Jacobs helped found the Charity Organization Society in Denver, Colorado.



This organization became a federation of charities that coordinated fundraising and other efforts and shared the proceeds. Thus Jacobs, called Colorado's "Mother of Charities" established the model that led to the community chest and to United Way.

Earlier (in 1872), Jacobs organized and became president of the Hebrew Benevolent Ladies Aid Society (today known as Jewish Family Services of Colorado). However, she soon realized that the problems of poverty, sickness, malnutrition, and unsanitary living conditions were not limited to the Jewish community. Accordingly, she broadened the scope of her work, and through her leadership, the Denver Ladies' Relief Society was established in 1874. Jacobs was vice president and acted as the group's public speaker. Another of her accomplishments occurred in 1880, when Jacobs was instrumental in setting up Denver's first free kindergarten for children of poor parents.

Jacobs was also the founder of a major medical institution. Because Colorado's dry air and sunshine were considered to be a cure for tuberculosis, hundreds of sufferers came to Denver. Jacobs regularly visited impoverished homes to bring food, coal, clothing, and soap. In addition, she often stopped to give aid to someone who had fallen on the street from a hemorrhage. A woman of great compassion, Jacobs began intense work to establish a sanatorium. She dreamed of a hospital open to any person who was destitute and stricken with tuberculosis; she wanted a medical center where scientific research joined forces with medical treatment.

On April 8, 1890, articles of incorporation of the Jewish Hospital Association of Colorado were filed. The association bought land east of the city, and on October 9, 1892, the cornerstone of the hospital was laid. She did not live to see the completion of the sanatorium which was originally named Frances Jacob Hospital after her. In December 1899 the first patient, a Minnesota woman, checked into the renamed National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives under its official motto: "None may enter

who can pay—none can pay who enter.” Today it stands as the internationally-known National Jewish Hospital for Immunology and Respiratory Medicine. Although economic realities have made it impossible to continue funding patient care entirely through philanthropy, the Hospital still provides a very significant amount of free or heavily subsidized care to patients unable to afford total treatment costs.

There are sixteen stained-glass windows in the dome of Colorado’s state capitol, each one illustrating a pioneer who was an important influence on Colorado’s development. Only one of them is a woman – Frances Wisebart Jacobs.



Interestingly, the history of Christmas seals and **Emily Bissell** also has its roots in tuberculosis. In 1907, a small tuberculosis sanatorium in Delaware on the banks of the Brandywine River desperately needed to raise funds. One of the doctors serving the hospital thought his cousin, Emily Bissell, who was active in the American Red Cross in Wilmington, Delaware and had significant fundraising experience, might be able to help.

Bissell had read an article about how money had been raised in Denmark for needy children stricken with tuberculosis. The money had been raised through the sale of small seals which were affixed to mailed letters, in

addition to the postage stamps. She decided to design a Christmas seal that could be offered for sale. Her design was a red cross centered in a half-wreath of holly above the words "Merry Christmas." Although the Delaware Red Cross refused to pay for the cost of the seals, the national Red Cross organization agreed to the use of the red cross on the seals.

Bissell started her own one-woman campaign to publicize the seals. She described how donating money for them would help fight the battle against tuberculosis. Her goal was to raise \$300 selling the seals at local post offices; they were one penny each. This way, she believed, even the poorest people could



help in the fight against tuberculosis. On December 7, 1907, the first seals were sold at a table in the corridor of the Wilmington post office. The campaign raised over \$3,000 – ten times her original goal!

The following year, Howard Pyle, a notable illustrator from Wilmington, donated the design of the second stamp. By 1908, Christmas Seals had become a national program. Today, Christmas Seals are still sold with proceeds benefiting the American Lung Association and other lung-related issues.

Frances Wisebart Jacobs and Emily Bissell are two of the many women whose contributions to the well-being of our communities have been so critical over the years. Their love for their fellow human beings has meant so much to generations of men, women and children.



Charlotte S. Waisman, PhD, co-author of *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America* (HarperCollins), is a national champion and advocate for women as a professor and keynote speaker. As an executive coach, Waisman coauthored *50 Activities for Developing Leaders* and *The Leadership Training Activity Book*. She is a principal with a consulting company specializing in leadership and workforce excellence initiatives.

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