



August 13
Clara Maass, 1901, renewer of society.

Clara Maass was the first of ten children born in June of 1876 to a German immigrant family from East Orange, NJ. By age 17 she enrolled in the Training School for Nurses at Newark German Hospital, where she was one of their first 5 nursing graduates. By age 21 she had become the head nurse of the school.

Maass left her post at the Hospital in April 1898 to volunteer as a “contract nurse,” at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, with the US Army (*the Army Nurse Corp was not to be founded until 1901*). She served as a nurse with the Army in the south, in Cuba, and in the Philippines.

When hostilities ceased, the next enemy was Yellow Fever. At first this disease was thought caused by the filth in the slums of Havana, but by 1900 it was understood to be caused by a mosquito bite. Clara had worked with victims of Yellow Fever before, and was particularly drawn to the tragedy of this disease in Cuba.

In 1900, the US Army began a series of yellow fever experiments in Havana, Cuba. They hoped to prove that by inducing a controlled case of the disease from a mosquito bite, they could treat a light form of the illness to help patients develop an immunity. Trying to help find a cure, Clara Maass—along with others—volunteered to be bitten by infected mosquitoes over several months’ time. The date Aug 13th, in the “Green Book,” was the day before her last exposure to the disease was to occur. She died of Yellow Fever on August 24, 1901 at the age of 25.

In her memory, Newark German Hospital (now in Belleville, NJ) was renamed Clara Maass Memorial Hospital. In 1952, Cuba issued a national postage stamp in her name on the 50th anniversary of her death. In 1976, 100 years after her birth, the U.S. Postal Service honored Clara Louise Maass with a stamp—the first nurse ever to be so honored. Put another way: Clara Maass moved people.

Society (*and that includes us*) has this habit of—over time—forgetting its important values. Clara Maass gave her life to prove that “trying your utmost” and “caring beyond compassion” were values worthy to practice even in the face of risk.

On August 13th, wherever you are, think about Clara Maass. Perhaps that day you might do something special for another person to honor her? She is someone whom, we suspect, our Lord does not want us to forget.