Florence Church Bullard

Florence Bullard was an orphan and we know little about her past other than she had one sister named Maude Bullard and a brother. She was born on January 1, 1888 in New Sweden, a small settlement in the town of Ausable, New York. For high school she lived and attended a boarding school in Illinois. By the time she was 20, she was teaching school in Glen Falls, New York, where she boarded with other teachers. She enrolled and graduated in May of 1913 from St Mary's Hospital, the training facility for the Mayo Clinic of Rochester, Minnesota as a registered nurse in the State of New York. In December of 1916, she registered with the American Red Cross and sailed to France in November. She first worked for Ambulance Corps at a hospital in Neuilly, Seine et Marne, France caring for the injured French soldiers. On April 6, 1917, America entered the war but the first troops didn't arrive in Europe until the end of June. Until the Americans arrived, she served in a French hospital. She wrote home about just how excited the French were to have the United States involved in the war. American flags were suddenly flying everywhere. She was offered the position of hospital superintendent but turned it down. She wanted to provide care directly to those in need. In one evacuated village, Florence Bullard and her crew were required to work out of a cellar, which she described as a cave. Three times Florence's group was evacuated just ahead of approaching German troops. On July 31, 1918 the hospital cave was hit nine times, corridors caving in and pillars falling. The following day the hospital was evacuated but Florence and several of the doctors opted to stay behind despite warnings that they might be captured. Just two months later, the war ended. The French had long been aware of her contributions and she was awarded the Croix de Guerre Medal (Cross of War). A French decoration for bravery in action. She was also given the French flag of her field hospital before she sailed for home. She would later gift this award to St Mary's at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester in 1961. Florence returned home to Glen Falls, New York in February of 1919. She was treated to a grand reception and given a $600 donation. She accepted a new position with the Red Cross where she traveled all over the Midwest to promote good health and sanitation practices.

In March of 1922, Florence was hospitalized in critical condition where she underwent heart surgery to save her life. Her doctor and the head of nursing at the hospital in New York tried unsuccessfully to have her war insurance cover the costs. She recovered and went on to work as a teacher and supervisor at Browne Memorial Hospital where she lived on campus. She retired and lived with her sister in Poughkeepsie, New York until she died in 1967 at the age of 87.