

This Day in History... May 31, 1861

Birth of Emily Bissell

Emily Perkins Bissell was born on May 31, 1861, in Wilmington, Delaware. Bissell was a noted social worker and activist, best known as the creator of America's Christmas Seals program, which raised money to fight tuberculosis.

Bissell was born into a prominent Wilmington family. Educated in private schools, her kind and gentle nature led her to embrace charity work. At the young age of 15, she began a life-long commitment to volunteer work after a church trip to an impoverished urban neighborhood.

Bissell helped establish Wilmington's West End Reading Room, which was the city's first free kindergarten. Her organization provided a playground, free milk, classes for children and adults, and a baby clinic. Bissell was an advocate for children's causes and assisted new immigrants with naturalization classes. She also helped found Delaware's first chapter of the Red Cross in 1904 and was an active member of the American Lung Association.



Bissell helped found the first Red Cross chapter in Delaware in 1904.

In 1907, Bissell was contacted by her cousin, Dr. John Wales, who served at Brandywine Shack, an open-air tuberculosis sanatorium. These sanatoriums were built to halt the spread of the deadly disease by keeping infected patients safely out of society's mainstream. Wales feared that the facility lacked the funds required to stay open and that patients would soon have to be released – and spread the deadly disease before they died themselves. Bissell was experienced at fundraising, and Wales asked her for help. They needed to raise \$300 or they would have to close their doors. Bissell had read about Denmark's Christmas Seals and decided to introduce the idea to the United States.

With borrowed money, she designed a small stamp, had an artist execute the design, and had 50,000 stamps printed. The 1¢ seals first went on sale at Delaware post offices on December 7, 1907. The seals raised \$25 on the first day, but sales quickly slowed down. Bissell then contacted a Philadelphia newspaper, The North American, which began selling the seals in their lobby. They ran daily articles under the heading "Stamp Out Tuberculosis." Soon, President Theodore Roosevelt learned of the campaign and offered his support, further bringing attention to it. By the end of the year, Christmas Seals had raised \$3,000 – 10 times the amount of money needed to save the Sanitarium.

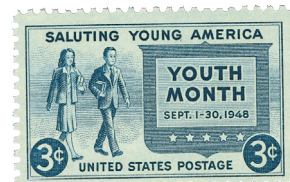


A 1910 Christmas Seal

Bissell spent the rest of her life promoting Christmas Seals and fighting the devastation of tuberculosis. She is credited with raising national awareness and uniting healthcare professionals with the public to wage a war against the disease. Bissell died on March 8, 1948. In 1957, the Brandywine Sanatorium became the Emily P. Bissell Hospital, a long-term care facility and nursing home.



This 1980 stamp was issued on Emily Bissell's 119th birthday.



Bissell helped establish Wilmington's first kindergarten and was dedicated to several children's causes.

Bissell's success ignited a national campaign the following year. For the 1908 holiday season, Delaware illustrator Howard Pyle designed the stamp. National sales raised more than \$100,000, which is equal to more than one billion dollars in today's wages. The Christmas Seals program continued to grow and evolve over the years, becoming the largest nonprofit direct mail campaign in the US. As tuberculosis became a more treatable disease, the program evolved, becoming the National Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association from 1968-1972, and the American Lung Association from 1973 forward. Today, there are over 100 different lung associations around the world that issue Christmas Seals.

This Day in History... May 31, 1861

Birth of Emily Bissell

Emily Perkins Bissell was born on May 31, 1861, in Wilmington, Delaware. Bissell was a noted social worker and activist, best known as the creator of America's Christmas Seals program, which raised money to fight tuberculosis.

Bissell was born into a prominent Wilmington family. Educated in private schools, her kind and gentle nature led her to embrace charity work. At the young age of 15, she began a life-long commitment to volunteer work after a church trip to an impoverished urban neighborhood.

Bissell helped establish Wilmington's West End Reading Room, which was the city's first free kindergarten. Her organization provided a playground, free milk, classes for children and adults, and a baby clinic. Bissell was an advocate for children's causes and assisted new immigrants with naturalization classes. She also helped found Delaware's first chapter of the Red Cross in 1904 and was an active member of the American Lung Association.



Bissell helped found the first Red Cross chapter in Delaware in 1904.

In 1907, Bissell was contacted by her cousin, Dr. John Wales, who served at Brandywine Shack, an open-air tuberculosis sanatorium. These sanatoriums were built to halt the spread of the deadly disease by keeping infected patients safely out of society's mainstream. Wales feared that the facility lacked the funds required to stay open and that patients would soon have to be released – and spread the deadly disease before they died themselves. Bissell was experienced at fundraising, and Wales asked her for help. They needed to raise \$300 or they would have to close their doors. Bissell had read about Denmark's Christmas Seals and decided to introduce the idea to the United States.

With borrowed money, she designed a small stamp, had an artist execute the design, and had 50,000 stamps printed. The 1¢ seals first went on sale at Delaware post offices on December 7, 1907. The seals raised \$25 on the first day, but sales quickly slowed down. Bissell then contacted a Philadelphia newspaper, The North American, which began selling the seals in their lobby. They ran daily articles under the heading "Stamp Out Tuberculosis." Soon, President Theodore Roosevelt learned of the campaign and offered his support, further bringing attention to it. By the end of the year, Christmas Seals had raised \$3,000 – 10 times the amount of money needed to save the Sanitarium.

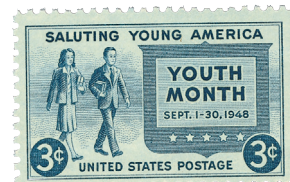


A 1910 Christmas Seal

Bissell spent the rest of her life promoting Christmas Seals and fighting the devastation of tuberculosis. She is credited with raising national awareness and uniting healthcare professionals with the public to wage a war against the disease. Bissell died on March 8, 1948. In 1957, the Brandywine Sanatorium became the Emily P. Bissell Hospital, a long-term care facility and nursing home.



This 1980 stamp was issued on Emily Bissell's 119th birthday.



Bissell helped establish Wilmington's first kindergarten and was dedicated to several children's causes.

Bissell's success ignited a national campaign the following year. For the 1908 holiday season, Delaware illustrator Howard Pyle designed the stamp. National sales raised more than \$100,000, which is equal to more than one billion dollars in today's wages. The Christmas Seals program continued to grow and evolve over the years, becoming the largest nonprofit direct mail campaign in the US. As tuberculosis became a more treatable disease, the program evolved, becoming the National Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association from 1968-1972, and the American Lung Association from 1973 forward. Today, there are over 100 different lung associations around the world that issue Christmas Seals.