

## Trailblazing Nurses Who Changed Nursing History (Who Weren't Florence Nightingale)



*Brandy Pinkerton, Oct 3, 2025*

From one nurse to another: most of what we do never makes headlines in a positive way—but it should. Behind every shift, every patient, and every breakthrough are nurses whose names history has too often overlooked. Across generations and specialties, these visionaries broke barriers, redefined care, and shaped nursing in ways we still feel today. Their stories deserve the spotlight—and it's time we shine it on them.

### **Lillian Wald (1867–1940): Pioneer of Community and Public Health Nursing**

Wald transformed health care for New York's Lower East Side as founder of the Henry Street Settlement. Wald coined the term "public health nurse," launched the nation's first visiting nurse service, and paid the salary of New York City's first public school nurse. Her work expanded access to care, created playgrounds and arts spaces, and championed racial integration, women's suffrage, labor protections, and child health. Wald's legacy continues through Henry Street Settlement and [VNS Health](#) (formerly the Visiting Nurse Service of New York.)

#### **Why This Matters—From One Nurse to Another**

Whether in community clinics, military hospitals, civil rights movements, or disaster zones, these nurses prove that our profession is about more than tasks and titles. It's about courage when resources are scarce, competence when the stakes are high, and advocacy that doesn't clock out at the end of a shift. Their legacies remind us that every chart we sign, every family we comfort, and every barrier we push through has the potential to ripple far beyond that moment. From one nurse to another—I hope these stories inspire you to see that the work you do today may become the history that shapes tomorrow.

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