

Theresa Ericksen, “The Little Minnesota Nurse”

Theresa was born on June 13, 1868 in Christiania, Norway to John and Marie Ericksen. She was orphaned within the first 5 years of her life, and for several years she lived and traveled with her aunt and uncle until she was brought to America by relatives. She graduated from Northwestern Hospital School for Nursing in 1894. She volunteered in 1898 to serve in the Spanish American War and in the Philippines. She returned to the U.S. in 1901 and worked in New Mexico and Manila until 1907, and then as a nurse for Anoka County until 1917.

As a Nurse for the American Red Cross, Ericksen served at a hospital near Chateau-Thierry until the Armistice in late 1919. From there she was reassigned to another French hospital, and she saw U.S. President Woodrow Wilson in Paris during his visit to establish peace in Europe after the war.

When she returned home, she continued to advocate for important health issues, such as tuberculosis, and worked as a County Nurse for Hubbard County after she was discharged. Ericksen retired in 1930, and she served as a member of and advocate for various veterans organizations. In 1936 she was the first woman to receive the Distinguished Service Medal from the Minnesota Public Health Association, which was presented to her by the Mayo brothers. One of her major accomplishments was the establishment of Fort Snelling National Cemetery. Formerly Fort Snelling Military Cemetery, it was reserved for active military attached to the post, but Ericksen, along with her friend and fellow veteran F.W. Pederson, lobbied State Representatives to create Minnesota’s first National Cemetery. Their push was successful, and Fort Snelling National Cemetery was completed in 1940. Ericksen, known to her patients during the wars as “the Little Minnesota Nurse” never married. In 1943, she died at the age of 76 at Fort Snelling Veterans Hospital. She is buried at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis, Minnesota.