

# Slidell resident was yellow fever epidemic heroine

Miss Janie Dunham was born at Herwig's Bluff on Pearl River in St. Tammany parish on April 10, 1868. She was the daughter of Joshua R. Dunham and Isabelle Cooper.

During the early years of her life, the family moved to Pearlinton, Mississippi, where her father operated a shipyard. When she was 15 years old, her father died leaving her mother with six children. Having to earn a living for herself and her family, Mrs. Dunham loaded her family and all her worldly possessions on a flat boat and floated down-stream to Gause landing where they disembarked and were transferred by ox team to the village of Slidell, which by 1885, was teeming with workmen for the railroads which were being built to the north of New Orleans.

Lumber mills and a crossting plant were built to prepare piling and cross ties with which to build the bridge across the lake. It has been estimated that there must have been two hundred people in Slidell about that time. Stores and saloons began to spring up.

It was at the age of 28 that Janie continued to keep house for her bachelor brother, but since she wanted to have a nursing career, and since her brother was anticipating marriage, he encouraged her to go to New Orleans and enter the newly organized school of "Nurses' Training" at Touro Infirmary.

As soon as she was set upon her nursing career, she rented a home on Prytania Street, near the hospital and assumed the responsibility of an invalid sister and her three children. She would take cases on night duty in the hospital in order to keep house and care for her sister and the children during the day time. Her sister's death in 1911 left her that era.

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she began her training in the first year of school. While still in training, she volunteered to nurse yellow fever victims in the epidemic of 1897, and for this service, she was awarded a beautiful gold medal. It was inscribed "Presented to Miss Janie Dunham for Fearlessness and devotion during Yellow Fever epidemic of 1897."

On October 8, 1899, upon completion of her training, she received another gold medal from Touro for excellence in her work. Miss Dunham continued her nursing career in New Orleans, working closely with Drs. Rudolph Matas, Isadore Cohn, Urban Maes, and other eminent physicians and surgeons of that era.

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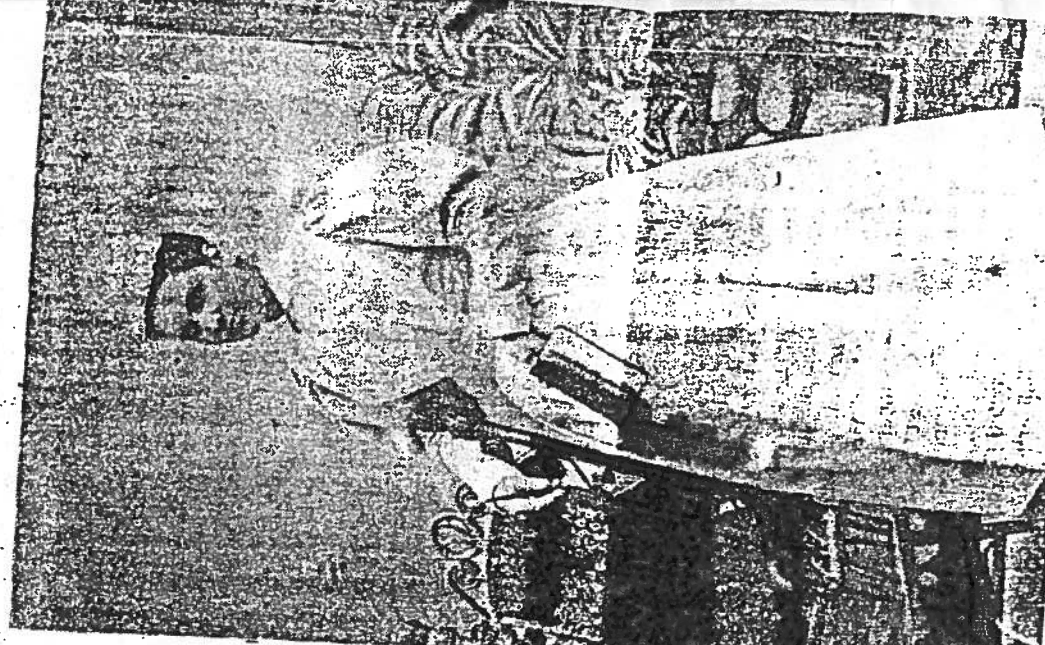
with the three children whom she reared until they were married, and the niece remained with her almost until her death.

At the outbreak of World War I, Miss Janie came to Slidell again to take over nursing services at the local shipyard, which had been given naval contracts and therefore needed a full time dispensary for their injured and sick personnel. She took possession of a large house in Slidell and managed a popular boarding house for some of the government personnel connected with the shipyard.

In 1918, when the terrible influenza epidemic hit the country, the high school, which was a three-story building on the present location of the Brock Elementary school, was transformed into a hospital, with Miss Janie as head nurse. Slidell lost some of its most loved citizens but due to the diligent medical and nursing care received in that makeshift hospital, many survived.

Following the war, Miss Dunham returned to New Orleans and resumed her nursing there. She did private duty nursing and kept house for her niece who was by then a successful businesswoman. She allowed herself time for her much loved hobbies cooking

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### Miss Janie Dunham

In her nurse's uniform, Miss Dunham appeared as elegant as when she was dressed for visiting. She devoted many long, hard hours to nursing the sick, particularly during the yellow fever and influenza epidemics, for which service she received a gold medal of commendation.

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 and sewing, and visiting  
 with old friends and  
 relatives in Slidell on  
 weekends.

In 1932, Miss Dunham  
 made plans to take the day  
 off to meet some friends for  
 the Mardi Gras parade on  
 Canal Street. They were to  
 have lunch at the famous  
 Roosevelt Hotel. On ap-  
 proaching a taxi, she  
 slipped and suffered a  
 fractured hip. She was  
 hospitalized for several  
 months in her beloved  
 Touro, where she received  
 tender and loving care from  
 many of her former  
 associates in medicine and  
 surgery.

I was fortunate enough to  
 be a student nurse there at  
 that time and heard many  
 words of praise and en-  
 couragement to her from  
 doctors and nurses of her  
 era. With her stamina and  
 their devoted care, she  
 recovered and retired to  
 live with her niece.

In 1936, she suffered a  
 stroke, which impaired her  
 eyesight and the use of one  
 arm and leg. However, with  
 some hospitalization, she  
 recovered sufficiently to be  
 ambulatory and was able to  
 return to Slidell for week-  
 long visits. Eventually, she  
 realized her need for constant  
 care and chose to go to the  
 Shakespeare Home, where  
 she remained until she  
 suffered a fatal stroke in  
 1937.

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Miss Janie Dunham, as she appeared stylishly dressed  
 out of her nurse's uniform.

Her funeral was con-  
 ducted from the first  
 Presbyterian Church in  
 Slidell, where she had  
 visited many times with her  
 brother and his family.  
 Rev. Long, who had  
 become well acquainted  
 with her during her work  
 with Red Cross and war  
 efforts, spoke highly of her  
 dedication to her  
 fellowman and in his  
 closing remark, said, "she  
 now dwells among the gray-  
 haired saints." (By Boots  
 Weston)

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