



Kate Pelham Newcomb

July 26, 1885 – May 30, 1956

What do you want to be when you grow up? A firefighter? A scientist? Kate Pelham wanted to be a doctor.

Kate Pelham was born in 1885. Sadly, her mother and baby brother died when Kate was very young. She didn't think it was right that she lost her mother. Kate decided to become a doctor and work to save people's lives.

Kate's father didn't think being a doctor was a proper career for a young woman. He wouldn't allow Kate to become a doctor. Kate became a teacher instead, but she wasn't very happy. When her stepmother died, Kate had to return home to take care of her family. Finally, in 1913, her father gave his approval. Kate left home and went to medical school.

In 1917, Kate opened her own medical practice in Detroit, Michigan, where she met her future husband, Bill. Bill had a problem with his lungs. The polluted air was making him sick, so Bill moved to the cleaner air of Boulder Junction, Wisconsin. Bill's health mattered more to Kate than her clinic. Kate left behind Detroit and her doctor's license to be with him.

In 1928 they had a son, William Thomas (called Tommy). One day, Tommy hurt his finger badly. Kate cleaned it up and took him to the town doctor. Just by looking at the expertly wrapped finger, Dr. Torpy knew Kate was skilled.

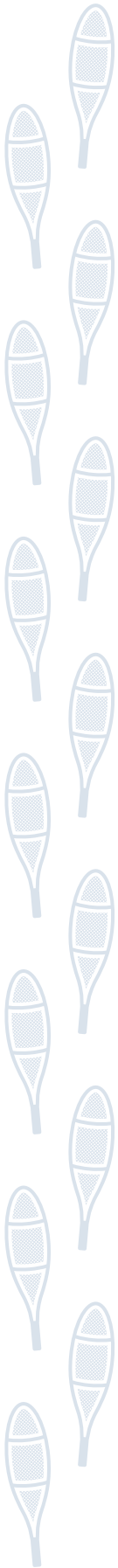
Late one winter night, Dr. Torpy called Kate. A woman was very sick, and Dr. Torpy couldn't get to her. He asked Kate to go. Kate wasn't a doctor anymore, but she went out into the blizzard and saved that woman's life. After that night, Kate decided to go to Madison to renew her license. Dr. Kate was back!

Dr. Kate canoed icy rivers, walked miles in snowshoes, and drove through blizzards to see patients. Once, Dr. Kate's canoe sunk in an icy river. So, she waded to shore and walked the rest of the way! She delivered more than 3,000 babies and never lost a mother. Dr. Kate became a hero to the people of northern Wisconsin, but she dreamed of doing even more. The nearest hospital was miles away. Wouldn't it be better to have one nearby?

One day, Kate saved the life of Josephine Rubloff. The Rubloffs were very wealthy. They asked what they could do to thank her. Kate told them about her dream of building a hospital. The Rubloffs donated \$1,000 to the cause. Soon the whole town of Woodruff got involved. Local high school students started the Million Penny Parade. They raised thousands of dollars! Kate appeared on the popular TV show "This Is Your Life." Donations started coming in from all over the United States! Lakeland Memorial Hospital opened its doors in 1954. Dr. Kate Pelham Newcomb died in 1956, but not before changing the lives of the people of Wisconsin for the better.

Learn more about Dr. Kate and her life: [Dr. Kate: Angel on Snowshoes](#) from the Wisconsin Historical Society Press.

Illustration by Carrie Griesemer carrie@littlecabincreative.com.





Kate Pelham Newcomb was a doctor in northern Wisconsin. She delivered over 3000 babies and helped build a hospital. Learn more about her life in [Dr. Kate: Angel on Snowshoes](#) from the Wisconsin Historical Society Press.



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