



Wilfred Grenfell

February 28, 1865 - October 9, 1940

Charlotte, Vermont

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, the English doctor who spent forty years carrying medicine up the cold coast of Labrador and found his second home in New England, died at his house in Charlotte, Vermont, on October 9, 1940. He was seventy-five.

He was born on February 28, 1865, in Parkgate, near Chester, England, where his father kept a school beside the estuary of the Dee. As a medical student in London he wandered into a revival meeting led by the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody and came out resolved to put his faith to practical use. In 1892 the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen sent him to look into the lives of the fishermen who worked the Labrador coast each summer. He found families with no doctor for hundreds of miles, scurvy, tuberculosis and debt to the merchants who bought their fish.

He stayed. Over the decades he built hospitals, nursing stations, schools, orphanages and cooperative stores along the coast, with St. Anthony, Newfoundland, as the hub. He reached patients by hospital ship in summer and by dog team in winter. In 1908, caught on drifting sea ice, he killed three of his dogs to wrap himself in their skins and survive the night, a story he told without vanity and never stopped telling.

Much of the money and many of the hands came from the United States. He lectured tirelessly in American churches and colleges, and generations of young volunteers, college students known as WOPs, worked a summer for the mission. He married Anne MacClanahan of Chicago in 1909, and the couple eventually settled in Vermont.

He was knighted in 1927. When he died, the mission he started was treating thousands of patients a year in a region that once had none. His ashes rest on a hill above the harbor at St. Anthony, where the work still goes on.

Services

Died at his home in Charlotte, Vermont, October 9, 1940, aged 75. Founder of the Grenfell Mission (International Grenfell Association) serving Labrador and northern Newfoundland. Ashes later placed at St. Anthony, Newfoundland. Portrait: photograph from his 1912 autobiography (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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