



*Audie Carr Wilkinson*

## *Dakota Images*

Among her earliest memories, wrote Audie Carr Wilkinson later in life, were childish feelings of resentment toward the sick neighbors whose care demanded so much of her mother—a grocer's wife who had become known as the neighborhood nurse. Eventually moved by the same humanitarian spirit, Wilkinson herself went on to make a career in nursing and is remembered as one of South Dakota's pioneers in the field.

Born in 1886, Audie Carr spent much of her childhood in Rapid City and later on a ranch, where she rode horseback six miles each way to a country school. When she had "reached the age when girls either had a young cowboy present himself or became a career woman," she "chose the latter" and left South Dakota for Chicago to study nursing at Children's Memorial Hospital. After spending one winter as a graduate nurse in California, she joined the Army Nursing Corps and, during World War I, was stationed at Camp Lewis, Washington, and Langres, France. Upon returning to the United States, she received a Red Cross scholarship and, in 1920, completed courses at the University of Minnesota in the new field of public health nursing. She then moved back to Rapid City to become Pennington County's first public health nurse, traveling to schools and homes throughout the large county in a Model T Ford.

In 1926, Audie Carr married Edward G. Wilkinson, and the couple went to live at a ranch on the Cheyenne River north of Philip. A few years after the birth of her two sons, Wilkinson began enlisting doctors from Rapid City and the State Board of Health to assist her in conducting immunization and well-baby clinics in the area. During her ranch years, she also became the first woman to serve as commander of Philip's American Legion Post. In 1934, when South Dakota began organizing county health programs under the Federal Emergency Relief Act, she was recalled to serve as a county nurse. For the next eleven years, she worked as one of the program's supervisors, often traveling over one thousand miles each week across the entire west-river region. In 1940, she moved back to Rapid City, where she recruited nurses and volunteered at Black Hills General Hospital during World War II and assisted during a local polio outbreak. Shortly before her death, she was named honorary director of the Pennington County Red Cross chapter for her thirty-five years of service in public health. Audie Carr Wilkinson died at Rapid City in 1954.

by JEANNE KILEN ODE

Copyright of South Dakota History is the property of South Dakota State Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

All illustrations in this issue are property of the South Dakota State Historical Society except those on the following pages: covers, from South Dakota Memorial Art Center Collection, Brookings; pp. 311, 332, from *The History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 1, 1848–1861, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1887); p. 316, from *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 4, 1883–1900, ed. Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1902).