

MISSOURI STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



Proudly Honors
PATRIOT OF THE MONTH
DECEMBER 2024



MARY KENNEDY WHEELER
UNITED STATES NAVY WAVES
JANUARY 1943 – NOVEMBER 1945
PHARMACIST MATE SECOND CLASS

Sponsored by:
Caroline Close Stuart Chapter, NSDAR



Mary Kennedy Wheeler was born in St. Louis, Missouri, the eldest daughter of ten children. She wanted to follow three of her brothers who enlisted in the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army during World War II. But, because she was not yet 21 years old, she needed her father's permission to join, and she needed to quickly gain a few pounds to achieve the 98-pound minimum required.

In 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Navy Women's Reserve Act, establishing the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). The Act was designed to free up officers and enlisted men so they could serve at sea during World War II and replace them with women. Mary convinced her father to grant his permission and followed a friend's advice to eat as many bananas as she could before weigh-in.

In January 1943, Mary successfully enlisted as a Seaman in the WAVES. Basic training involved six weeks of classroom training at Iowa State Teachers College (now the University of Northern Iowa) in Cedar Falls, Iowa. She was assigned to Jacksonville Naval Station in Florida where she served as a lab technician, drawing blood and handling x-rays, until her discharge in November 1945. She attained the rank of Pharmacist Mate 2nd Class.

Mary returned to St. Louis after her discharge and later married. She and her husband raised seven children. After the children became more independent, Mary used her GI Bill benefits to attend Gradwohl School of Laboratory Technique in St. Louis and became a certified medical technologist. She returned to the lab and eventually finished out her career at John Cochran Veterans Hospital in St. Louis, retiring in her 70s. Mary will celebrate her 103rd birthday in January 2025, a life well-lived.

Daughters of the Caroline Close Stuart Chapter, NSDAR, are so proud to honor and recognize Mary Kennedy Wheeler as Patriot of the Month for her patriotism, courage, and invaluable service to our great country, as well as her pioneering spirit.