

---

**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**

**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

---

**File No. 411**

**1930 November 28**

**Warm Springs, GA -  
Radio Speech re Christmas Seals**

Radio Address, Warm Springs, Georgia, November 28, 1930

*Combating Tuberculosis with Christmas Seals*

I am speaking to you tonight from Warm Springs, Georgia, where we are doing our bit for many people, old and young, who have had infantile paralysis.

Christmas Seal season always seems to me to be the first harbinger of Christmas. We have come to associate these penny stickers with all that goes with the holiday season, and it is good to know they are on the market again.

We all know that these Christmas Seals are used to support the organized campaign to fight tuberculosis, but how many of us know how they came into use? It is an interesting and romantic story; this origin of the Christmas Seal.

In Wilmington, Delaware, Miss Emily P. Bissell, twenty-five years ago, was struggling to equip a tuberculosis hospital for a handful of tuberculous patients. She had read a story about the Danish Christmas Stamp written by Jacob Riis in the *Outlook*. She said to herself: Why not try this idea in Delaware. So on December 9, 1907, the first few Christmas Seals were offered for sale by two pretty girls in uniform.

Two days later Miss Bissell appeared in the office of the editor of the *North American* in Philadelphia. Briefly she told her story and unfolded her idea of the Christmas Stamp. Downstairs dashed the editor to the office of Mr. Van Valkenberg, president of the paper. A brief explanation and then, "Tell Miss Bissell the *North American* is hers from today." The next day the whole editorial space was devoted to a plea to "buy these bullets in the battle against our worst foe, tuberculosis—buy Christmas Seals!"

Demands for the stamps increased to such unexpected proportions that the lady from Delaware was bewildered. Of course, her hospital was built. The success of the enterprise soon spread. Little by little tuberculosis organizations were formed throughout the Country and each year a Christmas Seal Sale was conducted to support tuberculosis work.

The States began to realize that here was an enemy that must be fought with united effort. Only a few earnest men were present at a meeting twenty-five years ago to start the tuberculosis movement, and one of these early pioneers was our late Dr. Hermann Biggs, former Health Commissioner of New York. His famous remark that "Health is Purchasable" was one of the keynotes for our modern methods of bringing about health protection, the keynote of today's belief that prevention is better than cure.

Back in those days—only twenty-five years ago, remember—when this organized movement to control tuberculosis was started, no cure was known.

P. 840

Most of us can remember well that we used to look upon a person with tuberculosis as if he were an outcast. His relatives and friends shut him up in an airless room and there he remained, growing steadily worse, to await the inevitable end.

In 1882 Robert Koch in Germany had discovered the tubercle bacillus proving that the disease was infectious or "catching." The general public, however, did not know this, and few precautions were taken. It was a long time before people could understand that tuberculosis is not inherited. The campaign to fight tuberculosis sought to teach the public about the disease.

Accordingly, from the first it has been an educational campaign. Much of the money from the sale of Christmas Seals has been used to spread knowledge about tuberculosis.

One of the other services of Christmas Seal money is hospital provision where tuberculosis cases may be given a chance to recover and at the same time be removed from the danger of spreading the disease to others. Clinic service is maintained in order that communities may locate cases. Through schools, through newspapers, pamphlets, posters, and all kinds of other educational publicity methods the tuberculosis associations advocate the need for healthy living. Plenty of fresh air, rest, nourishing food, sunshine, happy surroundings are the great weapons to down tuberculosis.

How well have they succeeded in this work of the penny Christmas Seal? Today there are 600 sanatoria which send back to their homes annually about 100,000 patients, send them back in most cases cured. Every up-to-date community has its clinic and tuberculosis-fighting machinery. The public health nurse has become a familiar figure. Nearly everyone now knows something about tuberculosis and how it may be avoided. Moreover the crushing fear of the disease has been largely removed, for now we know that the disease is curable, especially if discovered early.

Most encouraging of all is the declining death rate. In a quarter of a century deaths from tuberculosis have been more than cut in half. Good news this, but still there is one disquieting note. Between the ages of 15 and 25 tuberculosis causes more deaths than any other disease and the decline has been less than from any other age group. This youth period, therefore, presents a problem that must be solved. The tuberculosis fight of the future must be more specifically aimed at the high-school group of boys and girls.

We cannot put down our weapons—we know that—we must carry forward the work begun by those early men and women who had the vision to realize that tuberculosis is a conquerable enemy. We may well acknowledge with gratitude the debt we owe to the courageous pioneers who planned so wisely. Some loved one in your family may have been one of 25,000 who would have died during the past year in our State alone had the death rate of 1904 not been reduced from 205 per 100,000 to 75 in 1929. For the declining death rate we may well thank the Christmas Seal.

The plans of the pioneers are being carried on efficiently today by trained workers. They need your encouragement and support more than ever. We all know that this past year has been especially difficult for many. Because of the severe economic pressure the problems of tuberculosis associations have been and will continue to be multiplied. Poor food, lack of food, exposure, worry, all tend to bring on tuberculosis. We cannot fail to help this year more than ever before. The contributions, big, little and medium, will all go to help this movement which more than any other is supported by all classes of people, for after all, all classes of people benefit or suffer alike when a contagious disease attacks them.

And so, between Thanksgiving and Christmas the Seals will be sold all over the Country. Let us buy them and let us use them, too. Let us paste them all over our letters and cards and packages. Keep up the good work. Good night and many thanks.