

## Louis Israel Dublin (1882–1969)

*A Statistics and Social  
Welfare Titan*

“As a man of science, I have found that it is the truth that makes us free.”

by Patsy McClellan  
ASA Executive Secretary

Louis Israel Dublin was born November 1, 1882, in Kovno, Lithuania, and died March 7, 1969, in Orange, Florida. He came to America with his parents, Max and Sarah (Rozenzweig) Dublin, when he was 4 years old.

Dublin's life was heavily influenced by his mother, who encouraged him to learn. Growing up on the Lower East Side of New York City, Dublin's childhood was determined by poverty. In addition to school and studies, he sold newspapers to help the family. His father, who was a factory worker, expected him to go to work full time when he was 14, but his mother saw to it that he furthered his education, instead.

Dublin was studious and had a strong interest in mathematics and biology—two subjects he would excel in and that would directly impact his life. His love of education was enhanced by frequent visits to the Educational Alliance, which had a library and reading room in which he spent many hours studying. When he graduated head of his class

in May 1896, he was accepted to City College of New York and won the Adams Medal for Highest Standings.

The first three years at City College were difficult. To earn money for personal expenses, Dublin taught English several hours each week for first \$.25 per hour and later \$.50 per hour. The money covered his expenses, and he enjoyed teaching. His last two years at City College were easier and he came into contact with several mentors, including Alfred G. Compton, professor of physics and astronomy; James Weir Mason, professor of mathematics; and William Stratford, professor of natural history.

Dublin went on to do graduate work at Columbia and was assigned to review issues of *Biometrika*, which forced him to learn theory of probability and developments in the higher mathematics with Franz Boas. Dublin said of Boas, “He taught me how to proceed in the investigation of problems of much broader scope in human affairs, such as public health and welfare.” Also during his graduate years,



Metropolitan Life Insurance Building,  
New York City  
photo by photodisc.com

he studied medicine with Frederick S. Lee and investigated newer developments in medicine in physiology and biological chemistry. In Dublin's autobiography, he recalls commencement: "There were only a few of us in the line of march on Commencement Day.... I was clearly the youngest of the group, for I had not yet arrived at my 22nd birthday. This is significant in view of the fact that I have for some time been the senior living alumnus of the Graduate Zoology Department at Columbia."

Following his years at Columbia, he continued to teach algebra and geometry at City College of New York until he married Augusta Salik on April 5, 1908, an event he called momentous and credited with giving purpose to his life. At this time, he went into insurance with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and stopped teaching.

He worked as statistical assistant to Brandeth Symonds, medical director of the firm, who provided Dublin with the opportunity to combine mathematics and social work. He realized he and the company had a great opportunity to take an active part in advancing public health. He had to establish a method of record-keeping that would allow

**Excerpts from *After Eighty Years: the Impact of Life Insurance on the Public Health*, by Louis Israel Dublin, 1966**

### On Life Insurance:

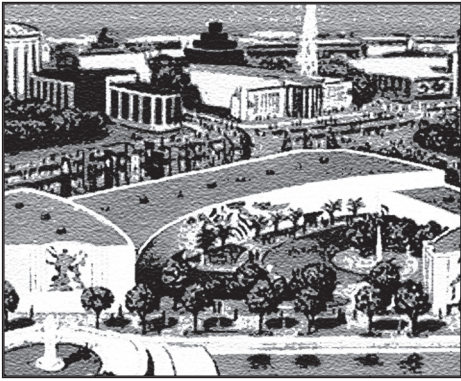
"My major commitment was to the life insurance business. This provided me with a base of operations and afforded me every opportunity that one could hope for in developing skills and services. From the very beginning, I threw myself with enthusiasm into the study of various problems [that] affected the quality of the services rendered by the company and the training of the men who carried its message to the people of the country. Thus began the correspondence school for the training of agents in the principles of life insurance, the first such effort attempted by any company to that date. This, I have seen grow into a major operation through which the men in the field have attained professional status and have learned the true social significance of their work. Then came the various studies of the effectiveness of the business, the proper balance of the insurance dollars of clients so that the family as a whole would be best protected. The most recent development, the Social Security Program, involving all of the companies, is a good index of the new spirit of the business. Mine has been an essential role in this long-time operation. Life insurance today is much more than a commercial enterprise; it is an invaluable public service."

### On Public Health:

"Paralleling my commitment to life insurance, and equally significant, has been my involvement in the growth of public health in our country. My fortunate position at the Metropolitan made my contribution possible. I have seen over the years the development of public health as a function of government in our cities, states, and, more recently on the largest scale, in the federal establishment, itself. I have seen the clarification of health laws and their more effective administration by well-trained staffs of health workers, aided by an army of volunteers working through private health agencies. A veritable revolution has taken place, which I had the good fortune to encourage and advance. The consequences were enormous increases in the length of life of the average citizen and in the economic productivity of the country."

### On Truth:

"I believe in the truth. I have, of course, accumulated a lot of other beliefs [that] add warmth and color to living. Some of them I find too personal to express in public, and they would be of little interest to others anyway. But for this occasion, I have chosen to consider my cardinal belief in truth because it will have interest for everybody and because my whole way of life would become chaotic and meaningless without it. I ask myself: How have I arrived at this conviction? My parents were immigrants from Lithuania and brought me to this country when I was a child. My home, religious training, and early schooling all impressed on me the importance of the Ninth Commandment—which is essentially an injunction against lying. I clung to this through a hurly-burly boyhood on New York's East Side. Later, as a junior at the College of the City of New York, I came under the influence of Thomas Davidson, the Scottish philosopher and educator. He was in his time one of the 10 leading scholars in the world, and certainly one of the most extraordinary persons I have ever known. His deep religious sense and dedication to the betterment of mankind were contagious. His work impressed on me the high vocation of scholarship with its emphasis on the sacredness of truth. Henceforth, life for me was a serious business. As a man of science, I have found that it is the truth that makes us free."



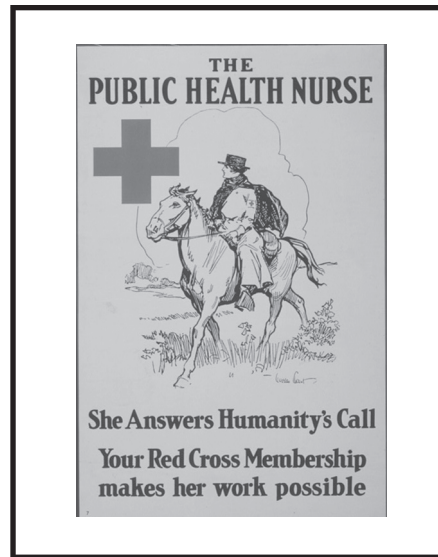
1939 Worlds Fair picture  
Courtesy Library of Congress

the company to know exactly what caused the death of a policyholder and the number of policyholders it had as well as policies. Dublin said, "As soon as you know the number of your policyholders, then you can begin to investigate what is happening to them."

In 1909, he experienced a quick move to the welfare division, where he joined pioneer ranks of public health investigators led by Lee K. Frankel. Again, he viewed this as an opportunity combine mathematics and social work. As statistician of the company, he worked with the American Public Health Association (APHA), the Bureau of Census, American Red Cross, and the Rockefeller Foundation, among others, to learn the facts and study the facilities. As he advanced, he became Frankel's assistant and was freed from performing some of the day-to-day administrative duties. He used this opportunity to begin creating a body of health literature to be distributed among policyholders. "*The War on Consumption*" was the first and most successful. It was translated into 12 languages and set the pattern for popular health literature. Other works include "*Principles of Life Insurance*," "*Typhoid Fever and Its Sequelae*," "*Scarlet Fever*," and "*A Life Table for the City of New Haven*."

All the while, he continued to participate actively in the APHA organization as vice president, treasurer, president, and chairman of numerous committees. Also, he completed multiple missions with the American Red Cross, and returned in 1919 to find himself a member of the Board of Directors at Metropolitan Life. During the mid-1920s, he worked with the Maternity Center Association of New York as a board member.

The Depression of the early thirties and a series of death claims caused Dublin to focus on the subject of suicide. In 1933, he and Bessie Bunzel, his research assistant, published "*To Be or Not to Be: a Full-Length Study*



Medical Poster, 1914-1918  
Courtesy Library of Congress

*of Suicide.*" This was one of his more well-known books and widely received by both lay and scientific critics.

After five decades, Dublin retired from Metropolitan Life in 1952, but continued his public service work for the next eight years as a health and welfare consultant for the Institute of Life Insurance (ILI). He also guided a radio program, "The Search That Never Ends," which acquainted 4 million listeners with the problems and progress of various health and welfare matters. Overall, he wrote more than 10 volumes on various topics and contributed more than 650 scientific papers and addresses. Since 1971, the American Association of Suicidology has presented The Louis I. Dublin Award in recognition of a career of outstanding service and contributions to the field of suicide prevention as evidenced by leadership, devotion, and creativity.

Dublin was a titan in the fields of demographic statistics, public health, and social welfare. As an academic from Columbia University, he took his knowledge of statistics and biology and applied it to the world around him. His research in home nursing, health education, disease, and mortality provided great insight into how medicine and public health programs could be used to extend life expectancy. His statistical research programs at Metropolitan Life gave the insurance industry a new dimension in public health and welfare service. Finally, an outgrowth of his combined interests in insurance and public health was the focusing of national attention on welfare problems through the use of statistical studies on population trends. ■

- 1899-1900** Graduated from City College with a bachelor's degree. Awarded the Gold Belden Medal for proficiency in calculus.
- 1901-1904** Attended Columbia University, studied zoology. Taught mathematics at Columbia University.
- 1905** The History of the Germ Cells of *Pedicellina Americana* Leidy, his thesis, appeared in the New York Academy of Science's February Annals.
- 1908** Married Augusta Salik. Served as statistical assistant. Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.
- 1908-1918** Wrote *Principles of Life Insurance*, *Typhoid Fever* and its sequel, *Scarlet Fever*, *A Life Table for the City of New Haven*.
- 1917** Elected as chairman of Section I (Social and Economic Science) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science
- 1919** Served on the Board of Directors at Metropolitan Life
- 1920-1935** Served as secretary of the APHA's Committee on Administrative Practice
- 1924** Elected as 19th president of the American Statistical Association
- 1926** Wrote *Population Problems in the United States and Canada*
- 1928** Wrote *Health and Wealth*
- 1930** Member of the directorate of the International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation. Made an inspection trip to Europe. Wrote *The Money Value of a Man*
- 1931** Named chairman of the American National Committee of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP). Made a vice president of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company
- 1931-1932** Served the American Public Health Association
- 1935-1936** Served the Population Association of America
- 1936** Served as editor of *The American People: Studies in Population*
- 1937** Chaired a committee that brought the Museum of Health to the World's Fair in New York. Chaired a committee that created an effective exhibit for the Metropolitan. Wrote *Twenty-Five Years of Health Progress*
- 1938-1947** Served the American Museum of Health
- 1942** Wrote *A Forty-Year Campaign Against Tuberculosis*
- 1942-1944** Appointed by the Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, to study the operations of the Medical Department. Headed a committee that examined the record system of the Surgeon General of the Navy
- 1943** Wrote *A Family of Thirty Million: The Story of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company*
- 1944-1946** Served as Assistant to the Chairman of the American National Red Cross, Basil O'Connor. Joined the American Red Cross. Commissioned to France to study the medical and health needs of children who had suffered during the war.
- 1952** Retired from Metropolitan Life
- 1952-1969** Served as an honorary director the Board of the Tuberculosis.
- 1954** Served as chairman of the local Red Cross Chapter for Westport, Connecticut.
- 1959** Awarded the William Thompson Sedgwick Memorial Medal by the American Public Health Association.
- 1960** Presented a grant to revise *To Be or Not To Be* Wife dies at age 80.
- 1961** Inducted into the Insurance Hall of Fame
- 1962** Married Ethel Reed Jasspon
- 1963** *To Be or Not To Be* is published as *Suicide—a Sociological and Statistical Study*.