AnMed Health

A Century of Healing

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By
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and
Richard L. Gorrell

This book is dedicated

to my friend and friend to many,

Dan Corrigan.

John A. Miller, Jr., F.A.C.H.E.
President
AnMed Health

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"The little bride made a sweet and dainty home, but she was not too busy to see much that transpired in the streets around her. The sick, wounded and suffering people that were sometimes carried past her house appealed strongly to her sympathy."

– Louise Ayer Vandiver
The History of Anderson

Part I
AnMed Health: The Beginning
CHAPTER ONE

Anderson Gets a New Hospital

New hospitals aren't usually envisioned through a kitchen window or from the bed of a woman undergoing a painful birth at home without help of any kind. Today, such structures and the ever-growing life-saving services they offer emerge from offices and board rooms where medical needs – and the financial means that can bring them into existence – are assessed.

AnMed Health founder Jennie Gilmer as a young adult

Anderson's first general hospital opened its doors 100 years ago through the determination of one woman, Jennie Gilmer, and a band of sisters she attracted to her cause. The men called their mission "foolish woman talk, " but their efforts began the long and difficult process that produced a much-needed hospital and the "seed" of what today has become one of the largest and most modern healthcare systems in the state – AnMed Health.

Louise Ayer Vandiver preserved what Jennie Gilmer saw from her kitchen window in her book, *The History of Anderson:*

"The little bride made a sweet and dainty home, but she was not too busy to see much that transpired in the streets around her. The sick, wounded and suffering people that were sometimes carried past her house appealed strongly to her sympathy."

Mrs. Gilmer often fretted about the lack of medical care available to the poor and to people of color in the early 1900s, but she became convinced of the need for a hospital in Anderson during the birth of her second child in late 1903. It was a difficult – and frightening – delivery accompanied by excruciating pain, and Mrs. Gilmer would recall that night years later:

"I had a pretty rough time of it, and I made my

promise to God right then that if He would let me live to take care of my child I'd see that a hospital was built in Anderson to give women a proper place to have their babies, with care by trained nurses."

Her child-bearing experience and what she saw on the streets outside her wood-framed, two-story home on South Main Street was a far cry from the grace and beauty of her pre-marital life.

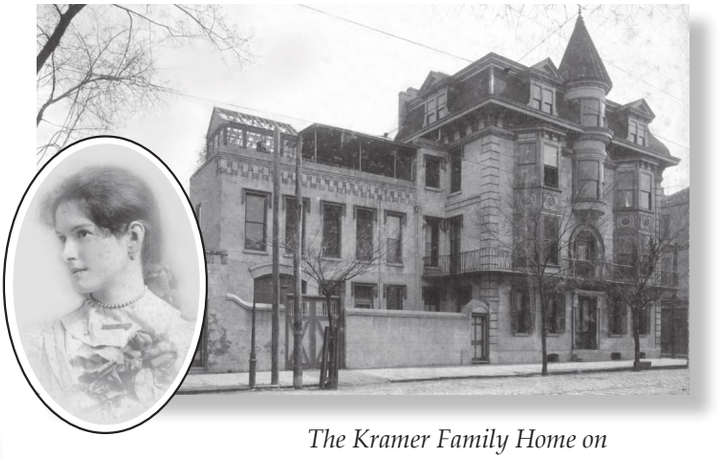
Born Virginia Lee Kramer in Charleston in 1876, Jennie was the daughter of a prominent Low Country couple, Bertram Frederick Kramer and Harriette Catherine McCants Kramer.

Jennie's parents - Bertram Frederick Kramer and Harriette Catherine McCants Kramer

Bertram Kramer was a successful businessman and a riverboat captain. He had been at Fort Sumter when the Union Army fired the salvo that signaled the beginning of the War Between the States. Later, he joined the Third South Carolina Cavalry, known as the Ashley Dragoons. Serving with distinction, he rose to the rank of captain in the Confederate Army.

Jennie's mother was a woman of French Huguenot descent. She later would hold the distinction of having lived through three major wars, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War and World War One.

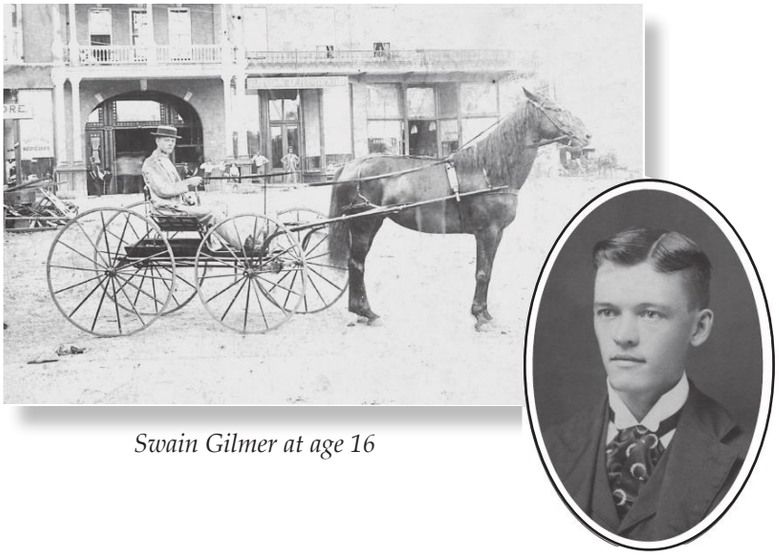
Every summer, Jennie and her two sisters would leave their Victorian home on Meeting Street in Charleston and travel to Anderson to escape the sweltering temperatures of the Low Country.



The Kramer Family Home on Meeting Street in Charleston, South Carolina

While staying in Anderson, Jennie met and fell in love with a young man, Swain Gilmer, a descendant of one of the oldest and most prominent families in Anderson.

Jennie and Swain were married at the turn of the century at the home of Jennie's parents in Charleston. The wedding announcement that



Swain Gilmer at age 16

In May of 1904, Mrs. Gilmer and several of her friends met in her home to discuss the need for a hospital to serve Anderson residents. Joining Jennie were Mrs. R. C. Webb, Mrs. Thomas Walton, Mrs. J. R. Vandiver, Mrs. Raymond Beaty, Mrs. J. J. Gilmer, Miss Lucia Taylor and Dr. Walter Nardin, Jr. Dr. Nardin told them that $25,000 – a staggering sum at the time – would be needed to build and equip a hospital.

appeared in the Anderson newspaper described the new Mrs. Gilmer as "vivacious, refined, cultivated and winsome."

The newlyweds returned to the Upstate and moved into their home where Mrs. Gilmer gave birth to her first child, Virginia Calhoun Gilmer. She later gave birth to a hospital!

Swain and Jennie Gilmer on their wedding day

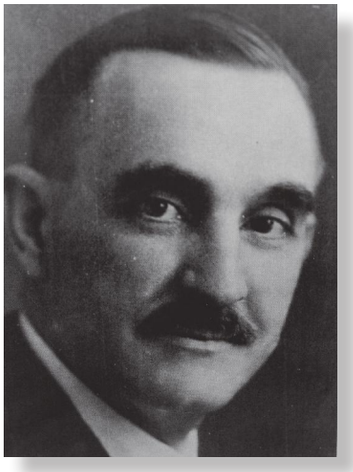
A second meeting, attended by 100 persons, was held a week later, and the campaign to build a hospital was launched.

Opposition came right behind the announcement.

"Except for the doctors, the men in Anderson thought we had lost our minds," Mrs. Gilmer said years later, "and they weren't reticent about saying so. I must have heard it said a thousand times, 'Why do we need a hospital in Anderson? We have one in Columbia and another one in Baltimore.'"

Undeterred, Mrs. Gilmer and her small band of supporters forged ahead, holding a number of bake sales and bazaars over the next year. The women even served as conductors on the trolley line for a day. The nickel fares they collected went into the fund for the hospital.

"I think we had gotten up about $500 at the end of the first year," Mrs. Gilmer said. "We worked hard. Once we sold chances on cakes, and



Dr. Walter Nardin

a preacher in town got up in the pulpit the next Sunday and said it was 'tainted money raised in a gambling joint,' and we gave all the money back to keep from desecrating the hospital."

By the second year, the group had raised $2,600, more than enough to purchase a $2,000 lot near the corner of Fant Street and Summit Avenue, where part of the present-day hospital now stands.

The critics continued their attacks, declaring the site too remote. "They said it was nothing but a pine grove and showed the women didn't have any business judgment," Mrs. Gilmer said.

A public meeting to discuss the proposed hospital was held on September 4, 1906. It drew 150 people to the Anderson Courthouse. The *Daily Mail* published an editorial that declared:

"This meeting ought to be well attended by the people of both the city and the county.

"For some two years a devoted and patriotic band of ladies have been working to secure the establishment of a public hospital in the city," the editorial writer explained. "They have worked hard and they have really accomplished a great deal. They have bought and paid for a lot and have some money in the treasury, besides having a great deal more in pledges which can be secured at any time.

"But they have now reached the point where they cannot go much further without help. In fact, it is about time for the men to put their shoulders to the wheel more earnestly and zealously than they yet have done and push the enterprise through to completion."

Help was on the way.

On October 12, 1906, the Anderson County Hospital Association, the group that would oversee the building of the hospital, was chartered.

Under the direction of Richard S. Ligon, the new association's president, fundraising efforts were accelerated. And the community responded, providing the funds that were needed.

ERSON, S. C., WEDNESDAY AFTERN

THE BAZAAR TOMORROW

EVERYTHING IN READINESS FOR THE OCCASION.

Many Booths in Charge of Ladies of of the Society—Elegant Dinners to be Served.

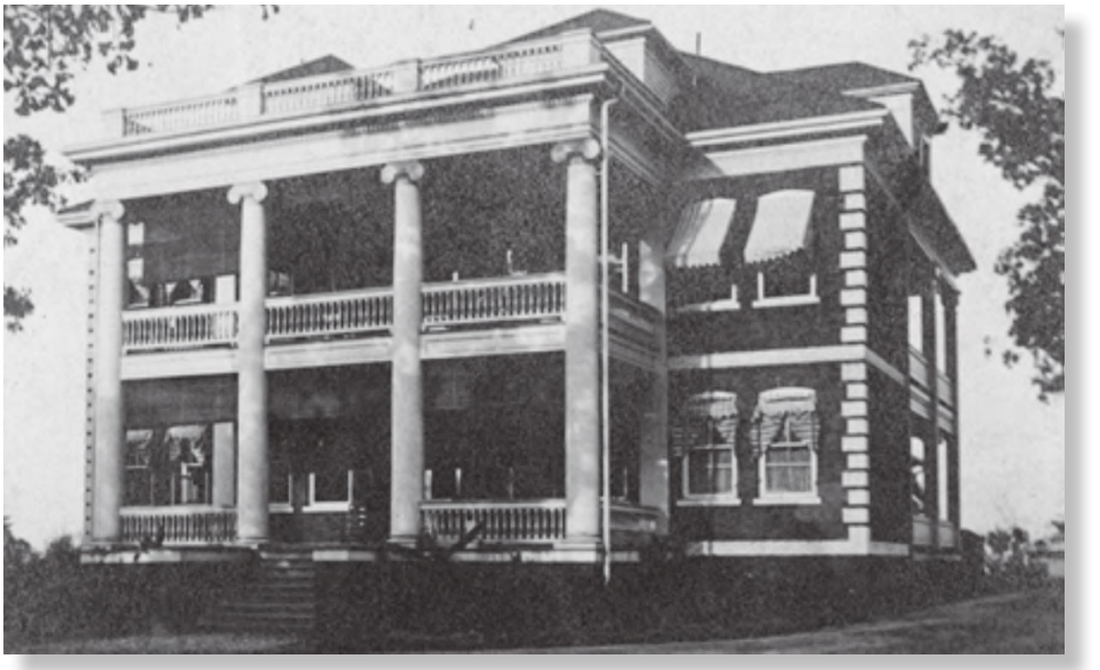
The bazaar of the ladies' society of the hospital association will open up for business tomorrow morning at 11 o'clock in the hall over J. F. Fant's store, next to The Daily Mail office and will continue in business through Friday. There will be "something doing" at all hours from the time of

Newspaper announcement of a 1904 bazaar to raise funds for the new hospital

On April 20, 1908, a brand new, 25-bed Anderson County Hospital opened its doors. The Anderson hospital was one of the finest of its day.

Mrs. Gilmer had overcome nearly insurmountable obstacles to realize her dream of a hospital for Anderson County – where women could deliver their babies safely and people from all walks of life could receive the medical care they needed.

Association President Richard S. Ligon



Anderson County Hospital opened on April 20, 1908.

"The training school enrolled seven

young ladies in its first class….

Let me say these young ladies are all from

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themselves to make money but that they may

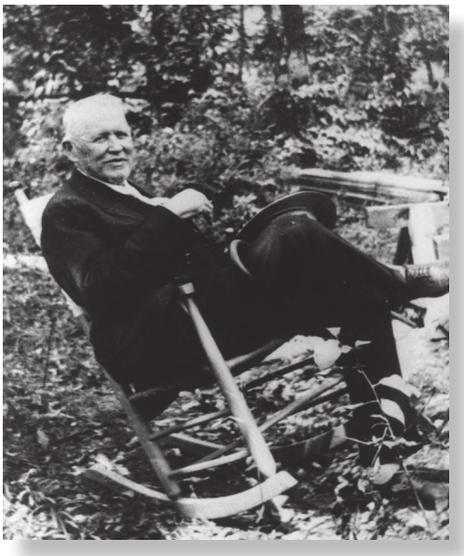
be of service to those of whom God afflicts."

– Richard S. Ligon

CHAPTER TWO

New Hospital Proves Popular

Richard Ligon, who was elected president of the Anderson County Hospital Association in 1906, became the first president of the new Anderson County Hospital in 1908.



R. S. "Uncle Dick" Ligon

Born in Pendleton in 1860, Mr. Ligon was a prominent Anderson businessman. He opened a wholesale grocery in 1893 and later founded the Bank of Anderson and several mills. He also helped organize Anderson College in 1911.

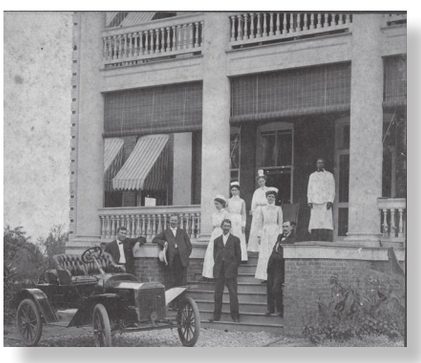
Mr. Ligon would rise on some days at 3 a.m. to gather vegetables from his family's garden and take them to the hospital before daybreak. Still dirty from digging in the garden, he would work at his desk through the morning.

He served as president of the Anderson County Hospital Association and the Anderson County Hospital until 1931.

Anderson residents liked Mr. Ligon. They called him "Uncle Dick." And they liked his hospital. During the hospital's first six months, 125 patients were admitted. Patients paid $1 a day for accommodations in a six-bed ward, or, if they could afford it, $2.50 a day for a private room.

To assure a sufficient supply of nurses to care for the growing number of patients, the trustees established a nursing school three months after the hospital opened.

In his report to the association in late 1908, Mr. Ligon said, "The training school enrolled seven young ladies in its first class…. Let me say these young ladies are all from elegant homes and are not sacrificing their pleasure in order that they may fit themselves to make money but that they may be of service to those of whom God afflicts."



Anderson County Hospital was one of the finest of its day.

He assessed the hospital's impact on the community by saying, "Our

A nursing school was established shortly after the hospital opened.

reputation as a public benefactor and preserver of life is growing and extending every day. We are to be congratulated on the good work done by our local surgeons, and while we have had a great many serious operations, it is a very rare thing that a surgeon from outside is called.... God has wonderfully blessed our efforts in the salvation of life, and we hope that everyone will pray for a continuance of this blessing in the future."

It wasn't long before the trustees realized more beds were needed. It was a situation that would repeat itself many times in the decades that followed.

In 1910, the board approved a $20,000 expansion, more than doubling the number of beds to 62. Staffing was also increased from nine nurses to 14 and from five orderlies to eight.

Reporting to the association at its annual meeting in October, Mr. Ligon said, "The plant at present is in excellent condition and compares favorably with hospitals of its size in the country."

He added, "The rooms and wards have all been furnished according to regular hospital regulations with good and substantial furniture, practically free of cost to the hospital because of (the generosity of) friends of the institution."

Mr. Ligon's report also included some financial concerns. "We have a debt of some $10,000," he said. "We are now putting in a steam plant, which will cost about $2,000. We have had a great struggle to meet our monthly expenses as they have naturally increased, and it is only through the many gifts of provisions, vegetables, etcetera, from friends of the institution that we can do it."

Despite a rigorous training program, student nurses found time to relax on the front porch of the hospital.

To make ends meet, he added, "we have relied considerably on the greatness of our cause and money has come in one way or another. The money will still come from the good people of this world. After you have been in existence for one or two years, the community begins to see what a great thing the hospital is, properly

This book was designed for AnMed Health.
169 pages.
Full book is available at local libraries.