

Mary McConnel (1824 –1910)



Courtesy: Queensland Women's Historical Association

Originally from Scotland Mary moved to Australia with her husband in 1848 and settled at Cressbrook, a sheep and cattle station west of Brisbane. Mary experienced all the hardships of pioneer life which included farm work, domestic duties, child rearing, lack of conveniences, and loneliness.

Mary was the mother of six children, two of whom died as infants. She was saddened by the young children she saw dying or permanently disabled as they were deprived of medical treatment and care. Children were denied beds in the adult hospitals.

On one of her trips home to Britain Mary visited the Sick Children's Hospital in Edinburgh and the famous Great Ormond Hospital for Sick Children to observe their methods. As an active grandmother living in Brisbane she worked hard for 15 years to raise money to establish a local children's hospital.

The first hospital for children was set up in rented premises in Spring Hill in 1878. As there were no children's nurses in Brisbane, Mary organised for a matron and nurse to come from England to work in the hospital. They were to provide the initial care and then train local women to meet the growing needs of the community.

In that first year, 105 children were patients of the tiny 15 bed hospital. The hospital eventually moved to a two storey building in Herston on land provided by the state government and ultimately became the Royal Children's Hospital, Brisbane.