



The King's Daughters History

The King's Daughters has a fascinating history of caring and giving to the Hampton Roads' community.

A Century of Caring

In 1896, the world was galloping toward a new century at a breath-taking pace. Grover Cleveland was President and women were marching for the right to vote. Henry Ford's first automobile rolled onto the streets of Detroit. In Germany, an exciting invention called X-rays gave physicians a new window into the human body. The world mourned the recent death of Louis Pasteur, whose research on bacteria was already revolutionizing medicine. And a new medical specialty, called pediatrics, was just coming into its own.

In Norfolk, a small group of women was setting out to make a difference in the lives of young people. Barely older than children themselves, these daughters of privilege had no firsthand experience of hardship. They did, however, have that gentler era's social conscience and a feeling of profound responsibility toward those less fortunate than themselves. They didn't realize it at the time, but their efforts were destined to outlive them and to touch generations of families to come.

The women, who were all members of Granby Street Methodist Church (later Epworth Methodist), had learned 10 years earlier of an association called the International Order of The King's Daughters and Sons, a brand-new group founded on the principle of service to others. Its motto was "Look up, not down; Look forward, not back; Look out, not in; Lend a hand." The small church group embraced the motto and signed on to form the first King's Daughters Circle in Norfolk in 1886.

The generous spirit of these pioneering young women inspired their friends and neighbors to form several more Circles, each working independently to follow their mission of service. With the vision of a King's Daughter named Miss Margaret Roper, the Circles came together to strengthen their shared devotion to serve others, forming the Norfolk City Union of The King's Daughters in 1896. (NCUKD is referred to as simply "The King's Daughters".)

From the beginning, the women focused their attention on improving the plight of poor families, devoting their time, energy and influence on administering to the indigent families of Norfolk. Their first action in 1897 was to establish a Visiting Nurse Service. With \$602.06 raised "by voluntary contributions," they hired Miss Edith Nason, RN, a graduate of the nursing program at St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago.

Miss Nason was a brave and tireless worker who became a beloved figure in Norfolk. She labored six days a week, from eight in the morning to seven in the evening, in an era when women were often considered too fragile and too delicate to work at all. Miss Nason went from house to house, on foot, through Norfolk's poorest neighborhoods to care for the sick. If the family couldn't afford to pay, there was no charge for her services. Those who could, paid five or ten cents a visit. During her first year, Miss Nason made 1,771 visits. The next year, the NCUKD bought her a bicycle so she could cover even more ground!

Miss Nason and her successors nursed the sick, but they also helped prevent illness by educating families about proper hygiene and good basic health habits. In those days, most babies were born at home and there was no such thing as a simple, safe and nutritious infant formula or antibiotics to fight deadly infectious diseases. Childhood mortality rates were incredibly high. The city's water and sewage systems were brand-new and confined mostly to the homes of well-to-do citizens. A primitive storm drainage system had been installed, but rainy days still left dangerous pools of standing water throughout the city.

Furthermore, Norfolk's waterfront location made it especially susceptible to epidemics of infectious diseases, which were often brought into town by sailors on ships from around the world. Epidemics of yellow fever and smallpox had caused widespread terror throughout the city in the 1800s, and by the turn of the century, scientists were beginning to realize the important role that good hygiene plays in the prevention of illness. The King's Daughters Visiting Nurses helped pass that vital information along to the citizens of Norfolk, thus slowing the spread of many illnesses. And they established a Diet Kitchen to provide nourishing food for the sick. Families could purchase a pint of beef tea for 25 cents, chicken "jelly" for 20 cents and custard for a dime.

Miss Nason served The King's Daughters faithfully until her sudden death in 1912. By that time there were seven nurses in the service. And the territory they traveled was broadened to cover the then-outlying areas of Lafayette, Campostella, Lamberts Point, Pinnars Point and Portsmouth. The region was coming of age. A gleaming new network of railways served a port bursting with shiploads of cotton and coal. And though World War I, which erupted two years later, was a difficult time for our nation and our soldiers, it further strengthened the commerce of Norfolk with an influx of military personnel.

Growth in Response to Need

As the city's population grew so did the demand for the services of The King's Daughters. The women were always quick to identify and respond to the needs of their community, especially during times of such hardships as war, epidemics and economic depression. Their ledger books from these early days contain many references to the kind of assistance they provided to families. One entry reads, "The Circle decided to continue sending one quart of milk a day to the Smithson family." Another states, "The amount of \$3.60 was spent for coal for the Phelps family."

The women rolled up their sleeves to help those in need in many other ways, as well. They accompanied the Visiting Nurses on their house calls and made thousands of what they called "friendly visits," delivering diapers, food, milk, toys and clothes to poor families -- often using

their own money to pay for these gifts and essentials. They rolled bandages, knitted booties and taught new mothers how to bathe their babies. During a flu epidemic in 1918, the women even provided daily sustenance to some 200 Norfolk residents from their headquarters near downtown Norfolk.

Long-time King's Daughter Henrietta Delk, a member of Helpful Circle, remembers folding newspapers into makeshift bags for the Visiting Nurses and setting the lunch tables at the old Armory building downtown to raise money for the organization.

"That was the era of the full-time homemaker," says NCUKD member Gladys Vogel, who remembers accompanying her mother on a door-to-door fund-raising project called "Block Day" in the 1920s. "In those days, women didn't have jobs. We looked at volunteer work in the community as our duty, and for many of us, The King's Daughters was a family legacy. The notion of service to those less fortunate than ourselves was a value instilled in us by our mothers."

The King's Daughters often collaborated with other organizations and businesses to achieve their goals. They asked for and received help from the United Community Fund, the Kiwanis Club and the Lions Club to support their activities. They joined The Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch newspaper for a project called "the Milk and Ice Fund" to provide an inexpensive source of milk and ice to poor families, an endeavor helped immeasurably by the Lions Club for years. They also worked with the Anti-Tuberculosis League in the early 1900s to help thwart the spread of that deadly illness and with the Norfolk Health Department to complete the first birth registration in the city, which took place in 1917. Along with the Red Cross, they established 12 Health Stations throughout the city, where mothers could bring their children for check-ups.

Other projects were theirs alone. These included, of course, their enduring Children's Clinic and a Home Delivery Service, which they started in 1915 to send doctors and nurses to the bedsides of women in labor.

Clinic Years

One of the organization's most significant early achievements started in 1913, when The King's Daughters established a Baby Clinic at their 420 Duke Street Headquarters. That small clinic, staffed by Dr. Lawrence T. Royster and a nurse named Ethel Smith with the help of many physician volunteers, grew in stages and was the forerunner of their most lasting achievement, Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters.

Even in its first year, the Baby Clinic was busy. By 1914, three more pediatricians were assisting Dr. Royster and two more nurses were on staff. In 1916, the NCUKD purchased a residence at 300 W. York Street and gave their home a formal name: The King's Daughters Children's Clinic. In 1921, new space was provided by the Kiwanis Club, which donated \$14,000 to build a two-story structure behind King's Daughters Headquarters. Three years later, the Kiwanis Club again came to the rescue and paid to have a third floor added to accommodate beds for patients. From then on, the reference to the Clinic as a "hospital" was frequently made by patients who needed to spend the night.

Like the organization's other projects, the Children's Clinic required lots of labor from The King's Daughters. When the doors opened in the morning, the women were always there, getting the examination rooms ready, straightening the chairs in the waiting room and sweeping the floor before that day's influx of families. They mixed infant formula, took children's temperatures and paid the bills -- a task which was rarely easy!

Records of Circle meetings tell just how tightly The King's Daughters had to run the Clinic. They saved every penny they could, wherever they could. Secretary's minutes from the June 1934 Board of Directors meeting, for instance, mention that "the corresponding secretary will write to Mr. Scarry of Pender Grocery Co., thanking him for giving broken packages of food to the Clinic. Also to Duffy's Garage, who had on several occasions fixed The King's Daughters' cars -- gratis."

Despite such generosity, the Clinic struggled to survive. By 1936, they faced a shortfall of \$2,000. At a special meeting of the Board of Directors, the women discussed "the necessity of curtailing our work." President Margaret Roper Moss and the ladies of the Board penned a letter to the citizens of Norfolk:

"It is with deep regret that the Norfolk City Union of The King's Daughters announces the closing of its nursery for sick children... This decision was made necessary by lack of funds required to operate this important part of its work. The closing of this branch of the work will handicap the organization, and work a greater handicap on the helpless little ones... They are the sufferers, and if people knew how patiently they suffer and how grateful they are for help, it would not be permitted that any part of our service should be denied them in their affliction."

The letter, dated February 21, 1936, ended with an appeal to the community to make up the \$2,000 shortfall. It was sent to the local media. The Norfolk newspapers and WTAR radio station responded by joining The King's Daughters in their appeal to the community for the needed funds, and in a few short weeks, the community pledged \$3,625 to keep the nursery open.

The King's Daughters, though pressed to the edge, never closed their doors. Yet they rarely carried a bank balance of larger than \$100 from month-to-month. In fact, on the first day of 1936, the balance that precipitated the frantic public appeal was just \$156.07.

Mildred Johnson, who became a member of Bessie Billups Circle in the early 1940s, remembers volunteering in the Clinic. "We held a well-baby clinic every Tuesday, and those mothers would start coming in early in the morning. Some days, we'd see up to 100 patients. We had two nurses working, and there was always a volunteer situated by the door to collect dimes from the families that could afford to pay."

Over the years, many community physicians donated their time to the Clinic. As early as the 1920s, special Clinics for dentistry, ear-nose-and-throat, surgery, ophthalmology and orthopedics were held regularly. In 1935, the NCUKD opened a Maternity Center, where groups of fourth-year medical students from the University of Virginia were sent to gain experience in obstetrics.

One medical student was Dr. William Murphy, who became a loyal friend to The King's Daughters during his long career as a pediatrician in Norfolk. Other familiar names and faces seen at the Clinic during the '50s belonged to pediatricians Drs. Ide Smith, Sidney Coren, Al Bisese, John Rydeen, Forrest White and William Fink. In addition to Dr. Royster, Drs. William McDowell and Laura Morris worked as full-time staff physicians for the Clinic.

Camaraderie prevailed among the physicians, nurses and volunteers. Sadie Frink, head nurse of the outpatient clinic in the late 1950s, remembers the Clinic as a wonderful place to work. "Everyone there felt like family," she says. "It was like working in a small family business." And many of those dedicated workers returned year after year in faithful service. Blanche Webb and Elizabeth Mackenzie each served as Clinic director for approximately 20 years.

Dr. Morris was a member of the medical team in the Clinic for 22 years. "I first went to work for The King's Daughters in 1939," she said in an interview two years ago. "I don't think there's anyone alive today who could believe what it was like in those days. The changes in medicine have been phenomenal."

A Hospital for Children

For almost 50 years, The King's Daughters Clinic provided free or low-cost medical care for the children of Norfolk. But by the mid-50s, the Clinic, like the buildings around it, was showing its age. The King's Daughters soon learned that their beloved home was marked for demolition as part of a widespread city redevelopment program.

It was time to look to the future, to reach for a goal many King's Daughters had secretly held for years: a full-fledged hospital exclusively for children, where no patient would be turned away for lack of funds. It was an ambitious goal. The women would have to raise more than a million dollars. And few people outside of the NCUKD believed they could do it.

The late Marie M. Monroe served as president of the Norfolk City Union of The King's Daughters from 1957 to 1961. "No one expected us to raise the money," she recalled in a 1992 interview. "In those days, people didn't take women seriously from a business standpoint. But we were determined to succeed."

They first had to gain the support of the local medical community. "Even among the local pediatricians, support for a children's hospital was not unanimous," Mrs. Monroe recalled. "Some of them felt we simply didn't need it, and they were quite vocal about it." Another problem arose from the fact that the building would house offices for The King's Daughters as well as hospital beds. As a multi-purpose building, it might not be eligible for federal funds.

But there's an old saying that long-time observers of The King's Daughters often quote: "It never rains on The King's Daughters." The federal government solved the dilemma by dividing government aid into separate grants for different parts of the building. On September 5, 1958, The King's Daughters learned that \$614,000 in federal funds had been allocated to construct Virginia's first and only free-standing hospital for children. Most of the remaining money needed came from two sources: the United Community Fund (predecessor to the United Way) and the NCUKD. Circle members worked feverishly to raise their share, saving coupons, frozen

food wrappers and trading stamps; hosting bake sales and white elephant sales, and donating \$15,000 from their own pockets.

On April 23, 1961, The King's Daughters celebrated the culmination of all their hard work and the rewards of their unquenchable faith and optimism. Their hospital was dedicated and its doors were open to the children of their community.

A story in *The Virginian-Pilot* reported on the opening:

"From its tiny drinking fountains and Lilliputian furnishings to its vast medical service, (the hospital) shows the influence of the 1,400 women who have taken a possessive interest in every detail." The women, most of them mothers, make up the 50 circles of the Norfolk City Union of The King's Daughters -- circles given such quaint names as Daisy Chain, In-As-Much, Speak Kindly, Sunshine and Workers of Mercy. But there's nothing quaint about the building they have managed to erect."

Growing Up

The King's Daughters actually ran the hospital in its earliest days, so there was no time to rest and reflect on their remarkable achievement. Instead, there were two immediate goals: establishing a pediatric residency program and gaining accreditation. To ensure that the residency program was established, they relied on their Professional Staff, headed by Dr. William Murphy, and their medical education director, Dr. Melissa Warfield. Within 19 months of the hospital opening, the residency program was approved by the American Medical Association.

Full accreditation for the hospital came a year later. Preparing for the on-site inspection of the accreditation team was an enormous undertaking for a fledgling hospital. Everyone put in extra hours: hospital staff, physicians and volunteers. They all pulled together to make it work, and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals awarded CHKD full accreditation on September 27, 1963. Mildred Johnson, president of the NCUKD at the time, remembers that day and all the hard work that preceded it. "We were so happy. There was whooping and hollering in the halls."

The 1960s and 70s were a period of incredible advancements in medicine. The Salk vaccine had eliminated the scourge of polio, and vaccinations for other childhood illnesses were commonplace. A new pediatric specialty called neonatology was saving the lives of tiny premature infants. And the demand for the hospital's services was growing. By 1965, the hospital was admitting over 4,000 inpatients and treating almost 30,000 children in 15 special outpatient clinics. Nearly 50 percent of the inpatients were "service" patients who were unable to pay. In the outpatient arena, the percentage of service patients was even higher. The clinic for general pediatrics, for example, drew nearly 100 percent non-paying patients.

In the four years since its opening, the hospital had tripled its operating budget, going from \$300,000 to \$900,000 -- each penny of which was watched over by The King's Daughters. At the NCUKD's 1965 annual meeting, hospital administrator William M. Selvey Jr. reported on an

"acute" shortage of space. But he added graciously, "we may be short of space and short of funds, but we are not short of enthusiasm."

It is this combination of business acumen and heartfelt enthusiasm for the concerns of children that most distinguishes The King's Daughters as an organization. Yes, they raised and administered a budget of nearly \$1 million every year throughout those early years of the hospital. But the same women who signed the checks stayed up until the wee hours of the night sewing hand puppets so every child who walked into the hospital could be greeted by a volunteer and given a special gift. They made gowns and pajamas, booties and slippers, crib bumpers, pillows and blankets. They interviewed doctors and administrators and traveled to Richmond to lobby state legislators for funds to help support their fledgling Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. But they also painted fanciful animals on the walls to make their hospital cheerful and friendly. They pinched pennies and cut corners by saving pill bottles, glass jars, toys, books and outgrown clothes. And they volunteered hour upon hour, handling the monthly billing, staffing the playroom, assisting in the admitting office and typing hundreds of reports and records.

Throughout the 60s and 70s, medical technology and the money needed to support it were increasing by leaps and bounds. Eastern Virginia Medical School was established in 1973, and from the beginning, physicians from Children's Hospital formed the school's department of pediatrics, while the hospital provided the primary pediatric training ground for medical students. An area once served by a handful of pediatricians was now home to a wide range of pediatric subspecialists.

By 1976, The King's Daughters knew they could delay a major expansion no longer. Their hospital was bursting at the seams. A goal was established for the organization's second and most ambitious fund-raising campaign to that date: to expand the hospital's capacity to 128 beds at a cost of \$14 million.

Eleanor Bradshaw, president of the NCUKD at that time, recalls, "The response from the community was incredible. We raised \$6.5 million dollars in private contributions, and got an \$8 million loan to meet our goal. It was stressful at times, but we always had an incredible feeling of accomplishment."

Mrs. Bradshaw is a volunteer who followed in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother in working for The King's Daughters, so she sees the NCUKD from a historical perspective. "Any group goes through cycles," she says, "but The King's Daughters has always remained vibrant. I think that's because of our mission. Providing health care for children touches such an emotional chord. I wish we could go out of business. But our philosophy has always been, 'If we must be here, then let's be the best.' The most important thing is the quality of care we can offer the children."

Such King's Daughters leadership and determination helped direct the hospital toward a higher level of care. In September 1979, the expanded hospital was dedicated. Just one year later, the hospital's annual report declared "a record 34,162 inpatient days, 22,849 outpatients, 37

general pediatric and specialty clinics, and the largest staff of physicians ever to serve at this institution."

By 1980, the Neonatal Intensive Care and Pediatric Intensive Care Units were receiving more than 500 transfers a year from other hospitals. The state's only pediatric surgery center was established in 1985. Children's Hospital had truly come of age, established as the regional referral center for pediatrics and able to intervene in even the most severe illnesses. And, as the final decade of the century dawned, heart transplantation and cochlear implant surgeries were being performed.

Reorganizing for the Future

Bruce Forsberg, great niece of Norfolk City Union founder Margaret Roper Moss, led The King's Daughters through its first years in the expanded hospital (1979-1983). "My family has had a strong connection to the hospital for a hundred years," she says, "but I like to think my own era was one of the most exciting. We grew so much. Not just in size, but in the level of care we could offer, even to the sickest children. The changes were miraculous."

As the level of care became more sophisticated, so did the job of running the hospital. By the mid-80s, operating budgets approached the 20-million-dollar mark, and the business of medicine was becoming increasingly complex. Mrs. Forsberg said in a 1984 interview, "The climate has changed dramatically in the health care industry. It's a constant challenge to keep the hospital in the forefront of pediatric care."

That same year, the Norfolk City Union's board of trustees formed Children's Health System, a not-for-profit corporation established to safeguard and strengthen Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters. It was a major decision for the organization -- and one that proved wise.

Children's Health System was established with the NCUKD maintaining responsibility as Class A members. The women of the 66 senior and junior Circles could turn their collective focus toward fund raising, volunteer activities and leadership, all in support of the hospital. Within the new structure, separate boards were formed for the NCUKD, the hospital and Children's Health System.

Eleanor T. Stanton switched gavels from that of president of NCUKD to chairman of the Children's Health System's board, which consists of King's Daughters, community leaders and physicians. "Most people don't think of hospitals in terms of whether or not they are healthy -- that is, financially healthy," she said at the time. "The corporate reorganization will help ensure that the hospital and its vital services are available to all our children, now and in the future."

The formation of Children's Health System gave the Norfolk City Union an exciting opportunity to explore new areas of growth -- although its devotion to the hospital has never wavered. "During the 1980s, we increased our fund-raising activities and grouped some of the smaller Circle events together to make larger fund-raisers," says Betty Harmon Edwards, who was president of the NCUKD during these important transition years.

Their annual reports illustrate the incredible growth of the KD's top fund-raisers since the early years of the hospital. The first Holly Ball in 1963 raised \$2,000; in 2008, now a long-standing tradition, the 45th Annual Holly Ball raised \$40,000. The 25th Annual Holly Festival of Trees raised an exciting \$110,000 to benefit CHKD.

The King's Daughters chose a decidedly wholesome outdoor event to add to their list of major fund-raisers in 2006. The RunWalk for the Kids became an annual spring happening in Norfolk's Ghent, bringing in over \$50,000 its first year. This year, it raised \$60,000!

The King's Daughters' major fund-raisers take on a community-wide perspective, but they are by no means the only way that NCUKD members raise over a million dollars a year. The Circles stage scores of projects throughout the year, including bus trips, golf tournaments, card parties, bake sales, Fantasy Shopping Night, spaghetti dinners, cocktail parties, Christmas shops, oyster roasts, scarecrow making events, picnics, and much more. One circle, Circle of Friends, produces and sells holiday greeting cards featuring artwork by children.

It's probably no coincidence, however, that the single largest producer of revenue is one that truly embodies the frugal spirit and generosity of The King's Daughters. Since the mid-80s, the CHKD Thrift Stores have sold gently used clothing, furniture and office equipment in a caring, quality environment for those in need and those in search of great values for their families. These stores, now over 20 throughout Hampton Roads and one in Elizabeth City, N.C., have been phenomenally successful, raising over 2 million dollars last year.

While many of the organization's current projects take place around the community, The King's Daughters are active members of the hospital's volunteer corps. "All you have to do is walk through those hospital doors to remember why we do what we do," says Betty Edwards.

Barbara Henry of Ruth Sargeant Circle agrees. She has volunteered in the hospital's gift shop weekly since 1979. "Working in the hospital keeps me in touch. It gives me a feeling for what's going on at the hospital."

Over the past 100+ years, thousands of children and their families have themselves gotten a "feeling for what's going on" with The King's Daughters. These children have felt the devotion and commitment of women who choose to give their time to children in need. To some children, The King's Daughters provide a hand to hold on the way to surgery or a shoulder to snuggle afterwards. To others, the organization represents a staunch advocate for children's health issues on local, state and national levels.

The King's Daughters, now 1,100+ strong in 47 circles, work in so many different ways for our children. They are mothers, doctors, homemakers, attorneys, single and married women whose achievements -- from a single visiting nurse, to a hospital exclusively for children, to hugely successful fund-raising activities -- have been phenomenal.

Probably their truest, most indelible legacy is love for children. For that is the feeling, the spirit and the motivation behind every activity the The King's Daughters undertakes. They love children. And for over 100 years, our children have benefited immeasurably from that unselfish love.

