

**ANNA
LUELLA
WITTEMAN
(1871-1957)**



**BIRTH
OF
DEACONESS
HOSPITAL**

Anna Witteman was a strong, hard-working, courageous woman who never refused a challenge. Her unwavering dedication was a key factor in establishing what is now Deaconess Hospital in Oklahoma City.

Anna Luella Witteman was born in December 1871 in Ohio. She came to Oklahoma with her parents at age eighteen in the 1889 Land Run. They settled in Morena, near Stillwater. Not long after, she returned to Kansas to attend school for two years in Arkansas City and four years at South West Kansas College of Winfield (now Southwestern College).

In 1894, Witteman was approved for missionary work in Africa for her church, the Free Methodist Church. But just before she was to leave, she was stricken with typhoid fever. Before she was well enough to start on her trip, her life changed. A young girl working in the Witteman home in Arkansas City sought her help. She arranged care for the girl in a Wichita home.

That incident convinced her there was a great need for helping unfortunate girls. At age 23, armed with a course in nursing and first aid, she was elected as assistant matron of the Wichita Rescue Home for girls. The following year, she became superintendent of the home.

In 1900, a small group of women in Guthrie started the Home of Redeeming Love, a rescue mission for widows, orphans and unwed mothers. Witteman joined the small staff a short time later and was appointed superintendent in 1901.

In 1910, Witteman moved the House of Redeeming Love to an 80-acre farm in Oklahoma City. "There was nothing on the land then except some farm buildings and one house." The women moved into a barren 30-foot-by-50-foot building with the first girls from the Guthrie home. They had no furniture for three days. From the first, it was a struggle against heat, cold, and bills.

The place was also a working farm, and the women supported themselves by raising everything they could, including produce, cows, chickens and pigs. Anything that was not consumed was sold – like cream, eggs, and some produce. At the end of each year, if there was any money left, it would be distributed among the women.

In 1931, a medical building was constructed for a hospital and a nursing school with a licensed practical nursing program. The sign on the building simply read 'Hospital'. Between 1931 and 1944, people started coming there for medical care, and since all the women who operated the facility were deaconesses in the Free Methodist Church, it became known as "the hospital that the deaconess ladies run". That was how Deaconess Hospital got its name.

Witteman served 42 years as superintendent before retiring in 1952. In 1955, Deaconess Hospital in Oklahoma City was expanded to include a new wing, which was dedicated to Anna Witteman. She continued to live there until her death in November 1957 at age 85.

When she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1938, Witteman accepted it "as a compliment, not to me, but to the great work I represent." During her 58-year career, Anna Witteman sheltered more than 10,000 girls who came to her for assistance.