



Mary McConnel (1824 - 1910)

Audio transcript

Now Mary McConnel was the founder of the Brisbane Children's Hospital. She founded it because she had to go to hospital, and her beloved first child, her first-born child, a son, died when she was in the adult hospital, and when she asked if she could bring her baby in with her, she was told "No, we don't admit children to hospital. It is the sacred duty of mothers to nurse their children at home."

Now this is very tough, if you are a nursing mother and you go into hospital. Her baby died, she was depressed, she recovered from this depression, she decided to do something active, and she had the education and the where-with-all to do something about this, but she got no help at all from parliament to found a children's hospital. When she went to the treasurer, he said "Oh, we've got no money in the treasury. Children's hospital is very low down the priorities".

So she raised the money herself with a group of women friends, and they did all the things that women traditionally do to raise money. She had garden fetes, lamington drives, raffles, all those sort of things to raise money. It took her 15 years to raise the rental of a little house in Spring Hill, and enough money to bring in a matron from the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital in London, because there were no children's nurses in Brisbane. She advertised first of all in Brisbane, the only people to reply were the Brisbane prostitutes who wanted to get out of the business, but didn't have any training!

And so she got a matron and a nurse to come from London, but that all cost money.

And so today, we celebrate the work of Mary McConnel in starting what became the largest children's hospital in the north of Australia. But it would've been a great deal easier if she had had a member of parliament. When you have a member of parliament, it makes life easier because you were a voter, but if you're not a voter, you have no voice, so this is why the vote was important.

If you have to take a child today to the Brisbane Children's Hospital on the *McConnel Ward*, there is a plaque commemorating Mary McConnel who died in 1910, so five years after the vote came in. She lived long enough to see the vote.