

Hicks, Ellen Thompson ^[1]

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By Anastatia Sims, 1988

9 Sept. 1866–21 Oct. 1951

Ellen Thompson Hicks, nurse and Episcopal missionary, was born in Oxford, the daughter of Edward Hubbell and Harriet Virginia Britton Hicks. Her father, a lawyer and a graduate of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[2], had given up his practice to manage the family estate after the death of his mother.

Ellen received her first formal education at a private school and then attended [Oxford Female Academy](#) ^[3] for two years. When she was twenty-one, her father died after a long illness. The experience of caring for him inspired her to become a professional nurse. Shortly after her husband's death, Harriet Hicks learned of a training program for nurses at Philadelphia General Hospital. Ellen applied and was accepted. Because of opposition from family and friends, however, she did not enroll. Nursing had not yet been established as an acceptable occupation for women. Many years later, Ellen recalled that relatives and acquaintances feared either that the training would be too strenuous for her, or that, because of her career, she would disgrace the family name.

Yet Ellen did not abandon her ambition. The following year she earned money by chaperoning a statewide tour of the Oxford Orphanage's singing class. She then reapplied to the nursing program at the Philadelphia hospital and again was accepted. She enrolled in September 1899 and was graduated a year later. During the next few years she gained a variety of medical experience, working at St. Timothy's Hospital, Roxborough, Pa.; the [Home of the Merciful Saviour for Crippled Children](#) ^[4], Philadelphia; and Dr. Howard Kelly's private sanatorium in Baltimore, Md. She returned to Philadelphia to become superintendent of the [Bryn Mawr Hospital](#) ^[5], a post she held until 1903.

After her resignation she traveled in Europe for several months. Upon returning to the United States, she decided to enter the mission field and applied through the Protestant Episcopal church for an assignment in China. Before the arrangements could be made, she met Charles Henry Brent, Bishop of the Philippines, who persuaded her to go to Manila. She sailed in 1904. Failing health forced her return home a year later, but in 1905 she went back to the Philippines where she remained for twelve years. At St. Luke's Hospital in Manila, she was instrumental in establishing a nurses' training program for young Filipino women.

Miss Hicks left the Philippines in 1917, intending to go to Europe to nurse soldiers wounded in World War I. Instead, the church mission board sent her to [St. Luke's Hospital in Ponce, Puerto Rico](#) ^[6]. Although originally planning to stay only three months, she lived in Puerto Rico for twenty years. There she assisted in rebuilding the hospital after an earthquake in 1918 and a hurricane in 1928, and taught in the hospital's nursing school. She retired in 1938 and moved with her sister, Harriet Britton Hicks, to Sarasota, Fla., where she died at age eighty-five.

During Ellen Hicks's lifetime, a nurses' dormitory at [St. Luke's Hospital in Ponce](#) ^[6] was named after her. In 1974 St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, her home church in Oxford, established a nursing scholarship in her name in the Diocese of the Northern Philippines.

References:

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