

DONOR STORIES

MINNIE CRIPPEN “Minnie M. Crippen Fund”

Minnie Crippen was a remarkable woman who accomplished many things in her 106 years. She was born January 5, 1858 in Monroe, Wisconsin to parents George W. and Susan Clingman. Minnie lost her father at a very young age, and moved to Waterloo when her mother married Sam Diener. Mr. Diener was a stone mason and built many of the early stone buildings in Waterloo, including the first dam across the Cedar River.



MINNIE CRIPPEN

As a young woman, Minnie was an art student in Chicago. Her talent caught the eye of instructors at the art school she attended, and she was thought to have a great deal of potential as an artist. Minnie, however, had different ideas for what she wanted for her life. In 1877, she married Dr. John H. Crippen in Waterloo, Iowa. She continued to paint beautifully throughout her lifetime, but it was her commitment to children that allowed her to make her permanent mark on the community.

Dr. John H. Crippen, was a well-known and well-respected doctor in Black Hawk County. He often saw patients who were unable to pay for his services. Dr. Crippen never turned a patient away, and saw those in need at all hours of the day and night. Through this dedication, he realized a great need for help beyond what he was able to give. He influenced his wife to help coordinate Waterloo's first charity organization, "The Silent Ministry" (now Family Service League) in 1893. The members of this organization would visit the sick and poor every week, and assist them in a variety of ways.

Through their selfless work, the Crippens became aware of the great needs of children in their community. They saw siblings separated when parents divorced or had difficulties that caused them to give up their children for short periods of time. Dr. Crippen encouraged Minnie to visit and study children's homes all over the world in preparation for opening a similar home in the Waterloo area. Their dream was to have a place that children in emergency situations could really call "home" and be properly cared for until their families could be reunited. This dream later became a reality when the Minnie Crippen Home for Children was established at 211 Independence Avenue in Waterloo.

“The life of one outstanding woman has changed the lives of many...”

Minnie Crippen was a very involved member of her community. She was a member of the following organizations during her lifetime: Literary Society (later the Waterloo Women's Club); PEO Chapter Z (Waterloo's first PEO group); Order of the Eastern Star; First Methodist Church; First Congregational Church; and Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR); and the Ladies' Musical Improvement Club. Minnie also represented Waterloo at many worldwide conventions of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Her many travels and interests made her a unique woman of her time, and one that was greatly admired and respected.

Minnie's life had its share of tragedy. In 1898 she lost her only son at age 19. An oil painting of her son as a young child, created by her own hand, hung in her apartment until her death. 13 years later, she would lose her beloved husband of complications of Bright's Disease, with her mother's death following only two years after that. Minnie was left to live more than a half century alone, with only good friends and her burning desire to help children and families in tact.

On the occasion of her 100th birthday she planned no special celebration to observe the anniversary, but hoped that friends would drop in. Her achievements did not go unnoticed by her community, and the Waterloo Courier did an article honoring her on this special day. Minnie was quoted as saying, "If I had daughters, or sisters, they would probably want a formal observation of some kind. But there's no one to feel any responsibility. I have no relatives closer than first cousins." Minnie was not surprised that she lived to be more than 100, as her grandmother lived until she was 107. She celebrated the day in a quiet and unassuming way.

Minnie Crippen passed away on March 22, 1964 at the age of 106. Her obituary heralded her as a pioneer of welfare work in Waterloo. She was also believed to be Waterloo's oldest resident at the time of her death. Minnie left more than her memory and good works when she died, she left more than \$800,000 to her community to be used to aid "orphaned and friendless children, and children in destitute circumstances". Nearly 40 years later, those funds continue to impact the community in a positive way.

The Minnie M. Crippen Fund, now a part of the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa, has given hundreds of thousands of dollars to community organizations benefiting children. Just a few of the non-profit agencies that have been greatly impacted are River Hills School, Quakerdale, YMCA, Grout Museum of History & Science, Boys' and Girls' Club of Waterloo, YWCA, Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony, Cedar Valley Food Bank, Hartman Reserve, Family & Children's Council, Family Service League, Waterloo Public Library, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, and many more. The life of one outstanding woman has changed the lives of many through services that might not otherwise have been available.

Minnie Clingman Crippen had a pioneering spirit where issues of child welfare were concerned and her work as a community activist must have been unusual if not unheard of in her day. Her long and meaningful life had its share of tragedies, but Minnie Crippen never let those events overshadow her enduring spirit that was a catalyst for improving life in her community. Her generous gift will continue to grow, and be disbursed over and over again in perpetuity. Ultimately, Minnie Crippen's artistic canvas was that of the community she loved. She created a beautiful work of art that will continue to benefit many generations in the future..