



Annabella Ravenscroft
Gibson Jenkins
1827-1901, Richmond

Born in Richmond on July 13, 1827, Annabella Ravenscroft Gibson was the daughter of Patrick Gibson, a wealthy merchant. She grew up among the well-to-do families of Richmond and was active in the social life of the city. On August 31, 1848, she was married to William A. Jenkins, a merchant from New York who settled in Richmond. They had one child, who died in infancy.

A witness to the suffering and helplessness of the wounded soldiers during the Civil War, she devoted herself to their care. When Chimborazo General Hospital, the largest hospital in Richmond, became full, she opened her home to care for the wounded enlisted soldiers. Then, after the war, when Richmond was left without a hospital, at the suggestion of Dr. Hunter Holmes McGuire, she took it upon herself to organize a hospital that provided quality medical care for the sick, regardless of class, income, race or religion. Her efforts resulted in the creation of the Retreat Hospital for the Sick in Richmond. To support the new institution, she organized the Board of Lady Managers, made up of prominent women representing Richmond's churches and synagogues. This group shared her vision of providing health care for the underprivileged and became dedicated fundraisers and volunteers. On March 14, 1877, the hospital opened its doors, and in the first year alone treated 168 patients. Annabella Jenkins' compassion toward others and her skillful leadership were instrumental in developing a scaled system of payment that enabled the hospital to care for the poor as well as the rich. In 1883, when the hospital moved to a larger facility on 12th Street, a wing was opened for the care of African-Americans. Jenkins' vision also led to the foundation of a training school for nurses in 1896. The school provided thousands of Richmond women with skills and an education. In 1919, the hospital moved to its current address on Grove Avenue and continued to expand. More than a century after its founding, the hospital continues to serve the Richmond community.

Annabella Jenkins died on December 14, 1901. Driven by altruistic and unprejudiced ideals, she dedicated the last twenty-five years of her life to improving medical care in Richmond. She left behind an incomparable legacy of philanthropic initiative. Jenkins' indefatigable efforts for the improvement of health care in Virginia have secured her a place in the pantheon of Virginia women activists.