

Lucy Orme Morgan (1858-1944)

Bloomington needed a home for girls. It was the late 1880s and there were young children who had no one to care for them, who were neglected, or whose mothers no longer had the ability or means to make homes for them. Helping to establish, maintain, and run this home would become the passion of Lucy Morgan's life. So much so, the Home would eventually bear her name.

Lucy was born in Bloomington on January 12, 1858 into a very distinguished family. Her father, William Orme, was a lawyer in Bloomington. When the Civil War began in 1861, Lucy's father, her maternal grandfather, and an uncle, all joined the Union Army. Her father was instrumental in founding the 94th Illinois Volunteer Regiment and was elected its Colonel. Because of his valor in battle, President Lincoln promoted him to Brigadier General. Unfortunately, at the Battle of Vicksburg he contracted tuberculosis which ended his life in 1866. Lucy's grandfather and uncle were both killed in battle.

Lucy's mother remarried in 1876. By then, Lucy was a young woman. She graduated the following year from Monticello Ladies Seminary as the Salutatorian of her class. The Seminary was a finishing school which emphasized cultural and social activities to prepare young women for their lives as wives and mothers. This school would become part of today's Lewis and Clark Community College.

Three years after returning from school, Lucy married Edward R. Morgan. They were married at her mother's home in a simple ceremony attended by a few close friends and family, followed by a honeymoon in St. Louis. They had three children: Richard (Dick), Nan, and Frank. Only Nan remained in Bloomington to raise her family.

Lucy and Ed were very active in social and civic affairs. Ed was a successful businessman. He became the first Commissioner of Finance in Bloomington. He is also credited with helping the city acquire the tract of land that would become Highland Park Golf Course.

Lucy's passion was social service. She hoped to help others, especially young people, to become independent and successful. She was a charter member of the McLean County Chapter of the Red Cross which was founded in 1915. She was also a member of the Bureau of Social Services, a history club, and served on the Brokaw Hospital board. In 1897, she had co-founded The Bloomington Women's Club. This was a group devoted to the social welfare of the community. Here women would discuss women's suffrage (of which Lucy was a firm believer), children's literature, domestic science, home sanitation, juvenile delinquency and child labor laws. The group was active in supporting such causes as free public school kindergarten, city cleaning, hiring a police matron, and establishing traveling libraries.

Her greatest effort would go to what was first known as *The Women's Industrial Home of McLean County*. Lucy probably became involved in the Home through her work with the Women's Club. The home was opened in March of 1889 on West Market Street. It was hoped that here, girls "would be taught useful things to prepare them for a life of independence." In the beginning, no woman or girl who was helpless, homeless, or in need, was turned away. The oldest woman who resided in the home in its early days was 87, the youngest were infants. The number of residents at the Home quickly outgrew capacity at its first location, and in each succeeding location as the Home moved from West Market Street, to Grove Street, and finally to 403 South State Street. In 1895, the board voted to "confine the work of the home to the relief and protection of orphans, destitute, and dependent children." It was then the name was changed to *The Girls Industrial Home*. Young boys were sometimes allowed to stay at the Home if they

had no place else to go. Later, a boys' home named Victory Hall was built on Hovey Avenue in Normal with much the same goals and standards as the girls' home.

Lucy became president of the Home in 1906, the same year the Home moved to a larger building on South State Street. She remained in that position for the next 33 years. The South State Street home had five acres with a garden, a pasture for cows, and a playground for the children living there. But again the house itself quickly became too small. By 1915, the building was 75 years old and in desperate need of repairs. It was replaced on the same site with a three story building with "magnificent and large windows" allowing plenty of light and ventilation. The first floor had a large dining room which could feed 100 children. There were play rooms and sewing rooms as well. On the third floor were three dormitories where the girls were separated by age. Each girl had her own dresser and mirror.

Lucy always sought to provide the girls a loving and caring family for as long as they lived at the home. The girls attended local schools, went to church services, and joined the Girl Scouts and 4-H Clubs. She wanted to make sure the girls had a full, rich and happy childhood. She said that her hobby was to make sure the Home was "far from being an institution" but rather a place where each girl received individual attention and knew that someone cared about them. She was also concerned that each girl received the skills she needed to be independent later in life. Lucy was an almost daily visitor to the Home and knew each girl personally.

In 1929, the board of the Home honored Lucy for her 24 years as president and her faithful service The Girls' Industrial Home by renaming it *The Lucy Orme Morgan Home*. At the time, The Pantagraph wrote "it is Mrs. Morgan's years of love and effort that have made the home what it is."

The Home continued to flourish, even through the difficult years of the Great Depression. Under Lucy's leadership, and by stretching every penny to its furthest, the Home remained open to welcome all those who needed it. In January of 1939, Lucy felt it was time to step aside and declined re-election as board president. However, she was named president emeritus for life.

Through all her life, Lucy enjoyed being involved in her own family and being involved in her community. She enjoyed the companionship of her husband, Ed, and traveling with him. They were married 58 years when he died of complications of the flu. During her last years she lived with her daughter, Nan and her family. On February 28, 1944, Lucy died after a short illness. After a small funeral held in Nan's home, she was buried next to Ed in Evergreen Cemetery. Her grandson remembered her as a person totally devoted to social justice, decency and the improvement of the human situation. She made a real difference in her community.

Discussion Question: What needs did Lucy find in her community? What needs could you find today?

Bullet Points:

*Born 1858 in Bloomington, died 1944 in Normal. Lifelong resident of twin cities

*Member of distinguished Bloomington family, father, uncle and grandfather fought in civil war and gave their lives.

*Married Edward R. Morgan in 1880 in simple ceremony at mother's home in Bloomington.
Had three children

*Always active in community, particularly social service. Was president of the board of "The Industrial Home for Girls" for 33 years. This Home was later renamed in her honor The Lucy Orme Morgan Home.