

Dr. Marie Louise DePew Crothers (1833-1920)

Marie Louise DePew was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on July 19, 1833. At the age of seven, Louise made her way to Bloomington with her father Elijah DePew, a successful businessman who made a name for himself in the dry-goods trade.

Little is known about Louise prior to her marriage to fellow physician Dr. Eli K. Crothers on May 1, 1851. Louise arrived in the area 10 years before her husband, and apart from a brief stint on the east coast while completing her medical degree, was a resident of Bloomington until her death in 1920.

The doctors Crothers had nine children, four of whom lived to adulthood. Those that survived included two sons, Noble E. and E.K. Jr., and two daughters, Louise (Lulu) M. and Rachel A. Both sons went on to make careers as jewelers, whereas Lulu followed in her parents' footsteps, becoming the first female pharmacist in Bloomington. Rachel, the most famous of the Crothers children, followed her artistic ambitions to New York where she established herself as a well-respected playwright in the 1920s.

Louise's marriage to E.K. ultimately grew her own interest in the medical profession. At the age of 40, Louise began to educate herself by reading *Gray's Anatomy* and assisting her husband in his practice. Louise began her studies much like any other aspiring doctor of the time would have. Nineteenth century medical training was received in a variety of ways, most often amounting to a combination of apprenticeships and a few courses taken in medical theory. In 1877-78, Louise enrolled in the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia and went on to continue her studies at the Women's Medical College of Chicago in 1880-81. While in Chicago, Louise also took a specialized course in women's medicine at Rush Medical College. In the winter of 1882, Louise returned to Philadelphia to complete her studies and graduated in the Class of 1883. On several occasions, E.K. visited his wife at school when his own opportunities for professional development brought him out east. After graduation, she returned to Bloomington to engage in her own practice, specializing in women's medicine and pediatrics.

When Louise returned to Central Illinois after completing her medical degree in Philadelphia, her husband was only 10 years from death. As E.K.'s health and energy dwindled, Louise was able to take on more responsibilities in the practice, aiding "her husband very materially in his office practice." Louise is considered to be the "first successful female physician in Bloomington," but reportedly "met with a good deal of opposition" in the pursuit of her professional endeavors. But that opposition did not come from her husband. It was reported that Louise was free to conduct her practice out of her office at the Crothers' later residence at 414 E. Jefferson St. with E.K.'s blessing. In September 1887 the *Pantagraph* reported that the Doctors Crothers' *together* established a new infirmary and that the news was a "matter of importance to the people." Following her husband's death in 1893 from diabetes, Louise continued to actively practice medicine until roughly 1905; at which point she took to spending time in the south recuperating from the "strain" of her profession.

Prior to retiring, Louise served for four years as the attending physician at the Girls' Industrial Home in Bloomington (later renamed the Lucy Orme Morgan Home for Girls). Even before a location for the home—then named the McLean County Woman's Industrial Home—was secured, Louise was “made physician in charge with power to select a consulting staff of five other physicians.”

Her service to the home is just one example of the various community activities Louise was in. As stated in her obituary, Louise was “a life-long member of the Christian church and despite her professional career, which occupied so much of her time, she was active in spiritual affairs. She was a woman of strong intellect, was possessed of an indomitable will and was withal a woman of unusual capability. She was devoted to her home and family and her heart and soul were dedicated to the welfare of her children. Her death marks the passing of one of the city's most lovable characters, a woman whose memory will be cherished wherever she was known.”

Some records do show another side of Louise that was more reserved and particular. On more than one occasion, Louise is described as preferring the house to be quiet as to not be disturbed in her studies. To her daughter Rachel, Louise's study of *Gray's Anatomy* meant one thing: “Keep quiet. Mustn't talk to mother.” When Louise first enrolled in classes, Rachel was too young to stay at home and thus accompanied her mother in her travels east. While Louise was enrolled at school, Rachel stayed with an aunt in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

Louise Crothers died unexpectedly on May 31, 1920. Though she had been ill for two years prior, had suffered a broken hip following a fall, and had contracted a cold weeks before her death, Louise had appeared to be making progress, and thus her passing was seemingly a surprise. Louise was survived by her two daughters, Lulu and Rachel, and one son, Noble. Louise is buried beside her husband at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.