

# Ella Kehrler

*Anderson, Madison County*

1864 – October 26, 1962

Humanitarian work in Madison County has taken many forms in our history but the efforts of one woman and the hospital named for her exemplify the very highest level of service. Named the Ella B. Kehrler Tuberculosis Hospital for the local woman who was the driving force behind its establishment, the hospital provided comfort and rest for tubercular patients of Madison County. Today, nothing remains of the institution that was located at the east end of Tenth Street on the bluffs one hundred feet above White River. The hospital was dedicated in 1924 to the memory of the soldiers and sailors from Madison County who had lost their lives through tuberculosis while serving in World War I.

When Mrs. Kehrler arrived in Anderson in 1907 from Red Key, she was recovering from tuberculosis which had taken the lives of four family members. She immediately began her work traveling the county by horse and buggy to speak and show stereopticon views at public assemblies informing people about the disease. During 1909, she devised portable tuberculosis sleeping huts called “Kehrler Shacks” which were designed to make outdoor sleeping popular and beneficial. Sixteen shacks were built and furnished which were then placed in the yards at the patient’s home; thus, educating the whole neighborhood as well as preventing the family from contacting the disease at the same time.

In 1914, she organized the first ever observance of “Health Day” which was held in Anderson. Representatives from foreign countries and public officials from many cities attended. In 1918, an epidemic of influenza occurred. Mrs. Kehrler was given the task of directing the county’s efforts to combat the illness. She utilized the third story of St. John’s Hospital to care for the afflicted. She was a tireless worker for improving the health of our county, but her strongest passion was to establish a place where persons with tuberculosis could receive proper care.

Dr. Ernest M. Conrad, the Health Officer of Anderson, knowing the great need of a suitable place to take tuberculosis sufferers for their own good, and for the good of others, contacted Mrs. Kehrler and asked if she needed some ground. Dr. Conrad then gave her all the ground she needed in back of the Pest House (the location where smallpox and contagious patients were taken) on the river which became the hospital site. The huts were moved to the site but were inadequate for winter living quarters. Pipes froze and the huts were too cold for the sick patients. A more substantial building was needed and Dr. Conrad offered the Pest House. The building was in need of substantial renovations and was made ready early in 1927.

Mrs. Kehrler lived to the age of 98 passing away October 26, 1962. She and her husband, Albert, are buried in East Maplewood Cemetery. The life of Ella Bagot Kehrler is a tribute to what caring for our fellow man is really all about. It is to her memory that this article is dedicated.



MRS. ELLA BAGOT KEHRER

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This profile was provided to ICW by Stephen T. Jackson, Madison County Historian

For more information about Ella Kehrler, go to:  
[http://www.heraldbulletin.com/community/in-history-kehrer-tb-hospital-aided-thousands/article\\_d7ae1f60-41fb-5457-8241-12539e3bbe1d.html](http://www.heraldbulletin.com/community/in-history-kehrer-tb-hospital-aided-thousands/article_d7ae1f60-41fb-5457-8241-12539e3bbe1d.html).

*References will be published at the end of Women's History Month.*