

# THE ONE AND ONLY

Attic Angel: A Madison Original Since 1889



ATTIC ANGEL ASSOCIATION

ATTIC  ANGEL  
COMMUNITY

# DEDICATED TO

nearly 1,300 enterprising women  
who have been difference-makers  
in the health and well-being of  
Madison and Dane County  
for 130 years ...

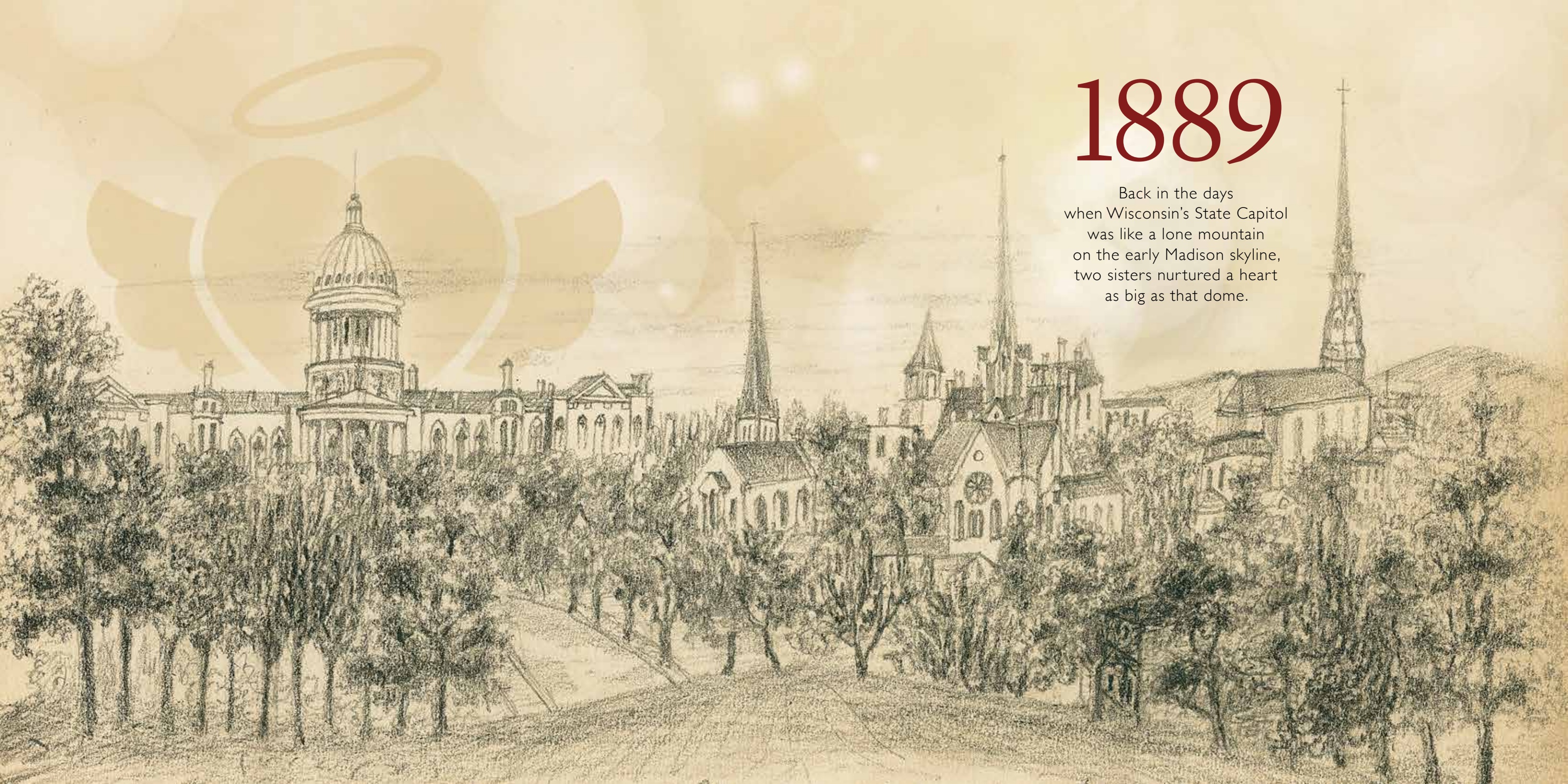


and to all the Angels  
who will follow in their footsteps.

Written by  
Kelly Cheramy

# 1889

Back in the days  
when Wisconsin's State Capitol  
was like a lone mountain  
on the early Madison skyline,  
two sisters nurtured a heart  
as big as that dome.



## It started with babies.

Elva Bryant loved the little ones—all full of life and wonder and promise. Her heart ached when she heard about twins being born into a family with no money to buy even clothes to keep the infants warm.

## So Elva and her sister, Mary, began to sew tiny outfits for the newborns.

The parents of the twins were overjoyed and grateful. The sisters beamed smiles of satisfaction, and their hearts grew even bigger.

They decided to help as many families as they could by sewing new baby garments and gathering used clothing stored away inside their home.

## One day the sisters came down from their attic, arms filled with items to share.

Their father was delighted by their kind hearts and he exclaimed, "Here come my attic angels!"



## Many friends wanted to become Attic Angels, too.

With the noble cause of helping the children of Madison, the Angels met weekly to discuss the needs they had discovered, and they explored creative ways to pay for dreams of making their hometown a better place for all.



For example they published a cookbook of sweets, arranged performances in one of the city's most grand theaters, sold tickets for tours of beautiful homes and started a Madison tradition of fancy evenings out, featuring food and dance to benefit a cause. They raised a lot of money.

The first Attic Angel Association charity ball was held in 1898 in the University Armory (known today as the Red Gym). It brought in almost \$500 to benefit the poor—the equivalent of \$15,000 some 130 years later.



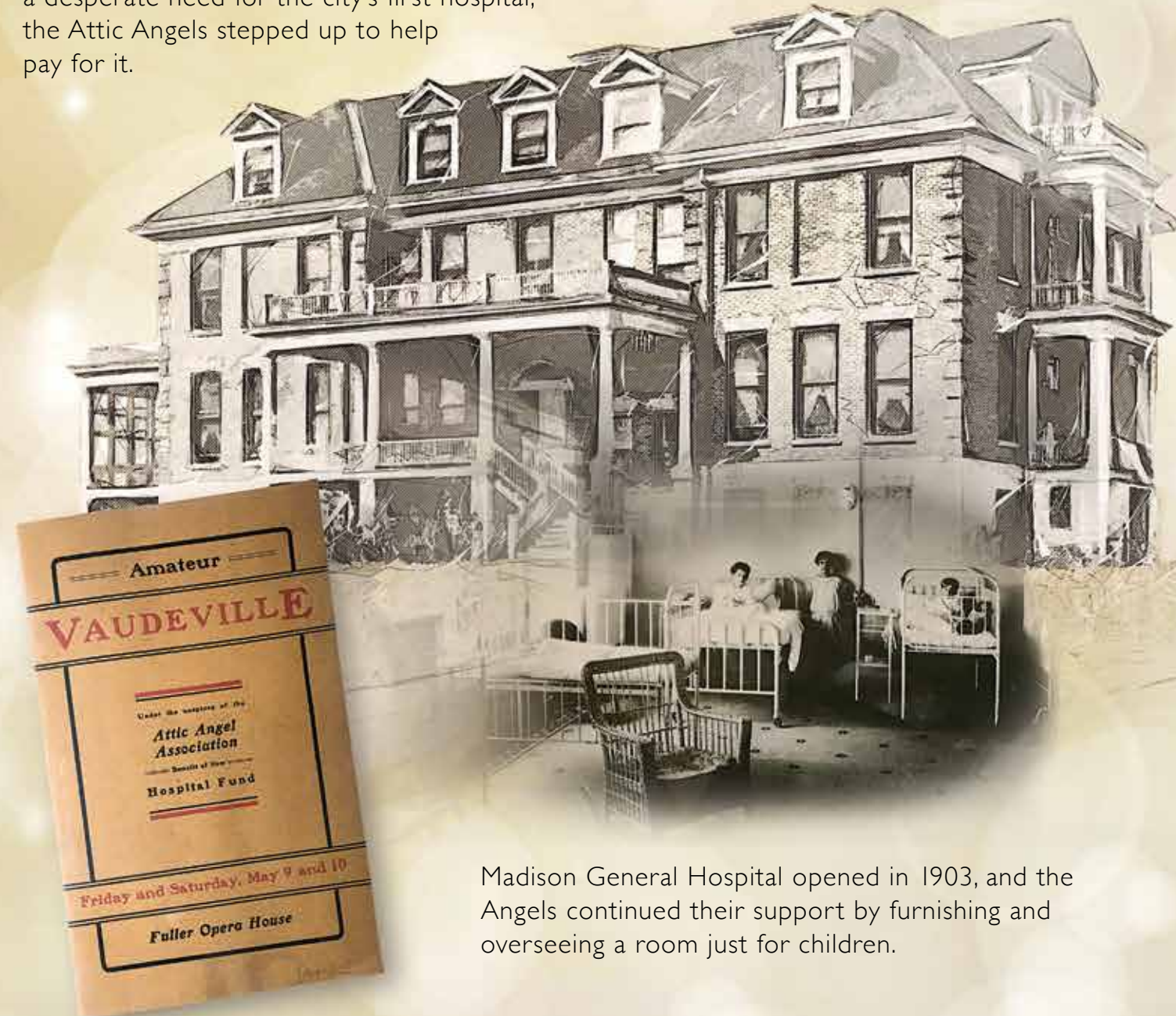
When Madison leaders announced a desperate need for the city's first hospital, the Attic Angels stepped up to help pay for it.



The more involved the Angels got, the more famous they became for

**their big hearts**

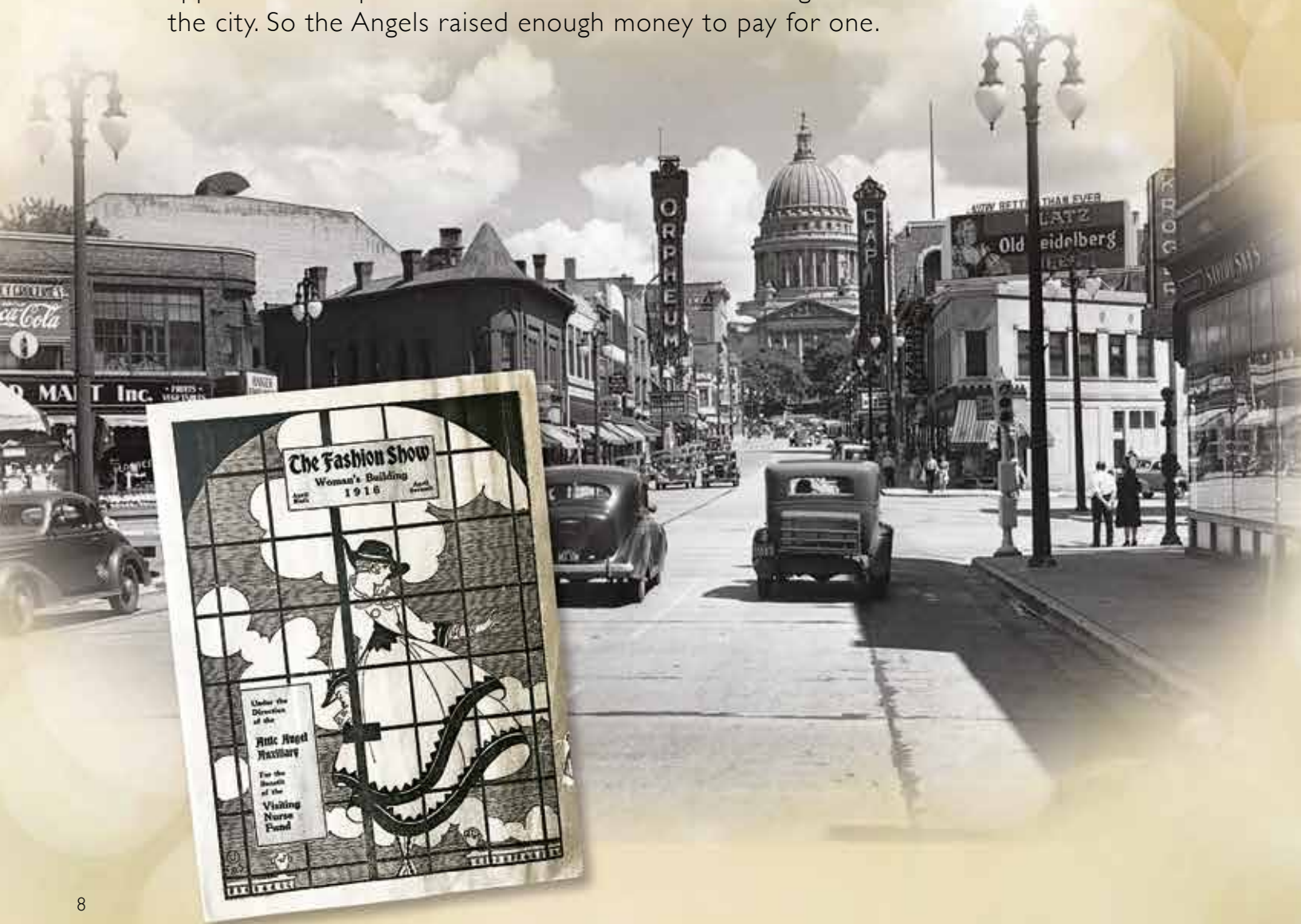
and their ability to make a difference.



Madison General Hospital opened in 1903, and the Angels continued their support by furnishing and overseeing a room just for children.

## The need for health care in Madison,

beyond the walls of a hospital, just kept growing. Families came to trust and appreciate the service of the Angels, often asking for help and advice in caring for their children. With no such thing as clinics at the time, it became apparent that a professional nurse was needed throughout the city. So the Angels raised enough money to pay for one.



In 1908, the Visiting Nurse Service of the Attic Angel Association brought a new level of care to Madison. The first nurse traveled to see patients in their homes on foot or by electric streetcar; later she rode a bicycle on her rounds and eventually drove an automobile.

## The Visiting Nurse Service

provided much-needed health education and medical advice, but the number of families a nurse could visit was limited by travel. The Angels soon offered

**their respected brand of care**

in a weekly well-baby clinic, which some called “a school for mothers.”



The idea of an actual school—this time for children—later blossomed as a child care center for low-income families in south Madison. Quality early education gives the Angels hope that children will grow up with confidence to improve their own lives and communities. The Angels provided the building to flock to, and

**education gives kids their wings!**





## Forward-thinking ideas

to care for Madison became a hallmark of Attic Angel Association. Over the first half-century, the Angels became quite good at identifying community needs, raising money and being the catalyst for programs both necessary and wonderful.



While continuing to work on behalf of children, the Attic Angels

**won the hearts of Madison again**

by caring for the elderly—all full of life and wonder and wisdom.



In 1953, the Angels embraced the cause of quality health care for seniors by opening the city's first non-government nursing home. They made a special effort to make it cozy and comfortable—a place to really call home.

Angel volunteers raised the money, secured the furnishings, directed the professional staff and provided a lot of extra support for the people who lived there through the gift of volunteer time, known as

**“the Attic Angel touch.”**

## Their historic reputation

for sound business decisions, quality and service led the way for future expansions. As the nursing home grew, so did the desire of Madison residents to have a safe place to retire that meets their own varied needs for safety, comfort and health care. In 1975, the Attic Angels pioneered the idea of a “well retirement” community in Madison when they opened the city’s first independent living community specifically for seniors.



Attic Angel Community expanded into multiple levels of health care and many living options, ranging from single-family homes to apartments to single suites with 24-hour care. The senior living campus is currently, perhaps, the most well-known contribution of the Attic Angel Association, but the



## Angels never lose sight of their calling

to improve quality of life in other ways for both children and seniors.



Throughout history, societal problems get a common response: "Somebody should do something about that." Since 1889 and continuing today,

**Attic Angel Association is that somebody!**



## **The organization grew**

from the original two sisters in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to more than 500 Angels and 280 employees in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Association continues to identify a major community need each year, and proceeds from the Angels' substantial fundraising activities provide grants to nonprofit organizations who meet that need.

In a world of corporations, profits and "bigger is better" attitudes, Attic Angel Community's volunteer association stays true to its hometown roots, not-for-profit health care, and historic, resourceful fundraising

**for the greater good.**

**There's no other**  
group, and no other place, like it in all the world.

That's Attic Angel Community,



**The One and Only.**

# ATTIC ANGEL'S TIME SPAN



## Attic Angel's Wing Span

### Attic Angel Association

One of Madison's oldest service organizations, where "Angels" give time and raise money to support children and seniors.

### Attic Angel Place

Senior living campus with lifestyle amenities and a continuum of health care: independent and assisted living, memory care, a health center and rehabilitation.

### Attic Angel Prairie Point

A neighborhood of ranch-style homes for seniors to live independently.

### Attic Angel Management Services

A service for hire (founded in 2018) that applies Attic Angel's successful practices to similar facilities.

The president/CEO of our not-for-profit Community works in tandem with volunteer boards of directors who are serious about caring for Greater Madison, as they have been for 130 years.

Elva and Mary Bryant became the first "Attic Angels," sharing goods from their attic with children of poor families in Madison.



Attic Angel started its first well-child clinic. In 1916, the service was formalized and the Angels ran several clinics for 34 years before turning them over to the Madison Health Department.

On East Gorham Street, Attic Angel opened its first nursing home.



Attic Angel built and maintained a building for a south Madison daycare. In 1991, Attic Angel gave the building to Child Development Inc. (CDI), which reorganized in 2015 as One City Early Learning Center.

1889.....1903.....1908.....1915.....1953.....1963.....1969.....1975.....



The growing Attic Angel group of civic-minded women pledged \$1,000 along with additional help to establish Madison's first hospital.

At a time when health care was hard to come by, Attic Angel established Madison's first visiting nurse service, which is today known as SSM Health at Home.



The newly built Attic Angel facility on North Segoe Road was hailed as a "model nursing home."



Madison's first retirement community for independent living was added to the Segoe Road complex.

Having outgrown space on Segoe Road, the senior living community moved to Old Sauk Road, just off the Madison/Middleton Beltline.



A 20-suite memory care unit opened, expanding Attic Angel's continuum of care.

Maintaining a path of innovation, Attic Angel Community was a national leader in deciding to convert its skilled nursing facility to high-level assisted living, where the emphasis is on "home." The change took effect in 2019.



.....2000.....2002.....2005.....2007.....2017.....2019.....



Attic Angel Prairie Point, a neighborhood of ranch-style homes, opened near Attic Angel Place, offering the ability to age in place with access to levels of care as they are needed.

Attic Angel helped launch SAIL (Sharing Active Independent Lives) to help seniors remain in the comfort of their own homes.



Mimicking early charitable efforts, in celebration of its 130th anniversary, Attic Angel rallied the whole city to join in its mission. An open event on Attic Angel's senior living campus enticed the public to view life at every age as a playground while also raising money to install a playground at The Playing Field, a Madison early learning center that serves homeless children and others.



## DID YOU KNOW?

**From its humble beginnings,** Attic Angel Association has been known for resourcefulness, with an affinity for giving new life to items no longer needed or wanted by others. Current signature fundraisers are the Attic Sale (furniture, home essentials, jewelry and more), Classic Clothing Sale (gently worn designer wear and accessories) and Holidays Galore & More Sale (decorations and gifts). All proceeds benefit nonprofit organizations that help children and seniors in Dane County. These sales have generated value for the buyers and millions of dollars for good causes.

**Marriage made women ineligible** for membership in the early Attic Angel Association. In other words, the sharp business-minded group wanted to be married to community work without having husbands and children. In the early years, membership was strictly limited.

Today's members remain all women, but many of them have spouses and work careers that bring a wealth of experience to advance the Attic Angel mission.

Because Angels commit to a specified number of education and service hours each year, they become valuable colleagues and true friends to Attic Angel Community residents.



### The Angels' public health endeavors

have evolved over the years. The Visiting Nurse Service, overseen by Attic Angel Association from 1908 to 1951, later became Home Health United and is now known as SSM Health at Home. A network of Well-Baby Centers, which had been run by the Angels since 1916, were handed over to the Madison Department of Health in 1950, after 34 years of grassroots health care.

### Quality child care for low-income families

is a priority for Attic Angel Association. In 1969, the Angels stepped forward to provide and maintain a building to start a south Madison daycare. In 1991, they gave the building to Child Development Inc. (CDI), which became One City Early Learning Center in 2015.

The school—a key to a better life—continues to receive grants and gifts.



### Volunteer work that needs to be done

has changed over the years. Early on, Angels gave their time to sew clothing and provide advice to new mothers. They went on to organize fundraising events, staff clinics, provide groundskeeping services, offer transportation, and share their talents, interests and friendship. Today, more than 20 committees represent 142 ways one can volunteer and make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and seniors in Dane County.

**Madison's first children's library** and reading room was the work of the Attic Angels. They maintained it from 1899 to 1902, when the city library opened a children's room and the Angels donated their collections and associated belongings. Similarly, in 1908, the Angels provided playground equipment and salary support to establish the city's first supervised playground, at Burr Jones Field on East Washington Avenue.

Today, Angels take children and seniors alike under their wings in various ways. For example, they gave a sizable grant to help build Warner Park Community Center; they have "adopted" Falk Elementary School, providing special attention for the physical and educational needs of the children and families; they serve meals to the homeless and provide health care scholarships to aspiring nurses; and they offer a continuing education program for adults that is free to the public as part of an open invitation to experience Attic Angel Community.



**The first Attic Angel nursing home,** in 1953, was at 102 East Gorham Street (this house still stands). Ten years later, the Angels opened a state-of-the-art facility at 602 North Segoe Road, where they added Madison's first community for independent living in 1975. To accommodate growth, the Association built a new Attic Angel Community campus in 2000 at 8301 Old Sauk Road, Middleton, and the Prairie Point neighborhood of homes began development in Madison, just a few blocks away.

**Government funds are not part** of Attic Angel's funding model for health care. By working mostly with insurance and private payments, Attic Angel can more easily focus on the value of quality care instead of the cost of bureaucratic administration.

Attic Angel provided rehabilitative skilled nursing that was paid through Medicare until 2017, when Attic Angel Association decided to give up its Medicare certification. In January 2019, the Health Center changed its license to a Community-Based Residential Facility (CBRF). The move avoided the mounting burden of Medicare-compliance costs, which would have been passed on to residents, and happily met the needs of a changing demographic. The new license offers the feel of assisted living within the Health Center, but Attic Angel's hybrid idea comes with a continued commitment to a high nursing staff ratio, ensuring exceptional round-the-clock care for those with greater clinical needs.

### Attic Angels have always been stewards

of the greater community. In 1922, Attic Angel Association was a founding member of the Community Union—the precursor to today's United Way of Dane County.





# TOUCHSTONES OF THE ATTIC ANGEL STORY

The two founding sisters are memorialized in this story, but countless more hands and minds have advanced the Attic Angel mission. The following examples offer broad-stroke illustration of the forward-thinking, generous partnership that came, and still comes, from all corners of our city.

## Values of Family and Citizenship

Attic Angel founders Elva and Mary Bryant were daughters of General E.E. Bryant, one of Madison's most influential citizens. Their father set an example of meaningful community service. In addition to being a Civil War veteran, he was a lawyer, newspaper editor, politician, public service leader in both Madison and Washington DC, and dean of the University of Wisconsin Law School. He and his law partner, U.S. Senator William Vilas, were loyal and generous supporters of the early "Attic Angels."



## Nurses as Heroes

Well before hospitals and clinics had become part of societal infrastructure, Attic Angel Association saw the dire need for organized health care. By 1908 they had raised enough money to hire a visiting nurse to serve Madison. Her personal care and commitment to wellness education for children and young mothers helped Madison thrive. The Angels also implemented well-child clinics and later applied their expertise to caring for the elderly. Today, Attic Angel Community celebrates a history of nurses as a backbone for healthy living and a strong community.

## The Hearts of Angels

Nearly 1,300 enterprising women have been difference-makers in the health and well-being of Madison and Dane County through their membership in Attic Angel Association. Each and every Angel's contributions (many spanning decades) create a sum that's greater than its parts. Six of these women gave a combined total of 300 years of service—that's 50 years each, starting as early as 1947 and as late as 1964: Honner Cooper, Marge Davenport, Lola Gordon Hickey, Rosalie Mayer, Martha Reynolds and Margie Stroud. The big hearts of all the Angels have built an even bigger reputation throughout history.

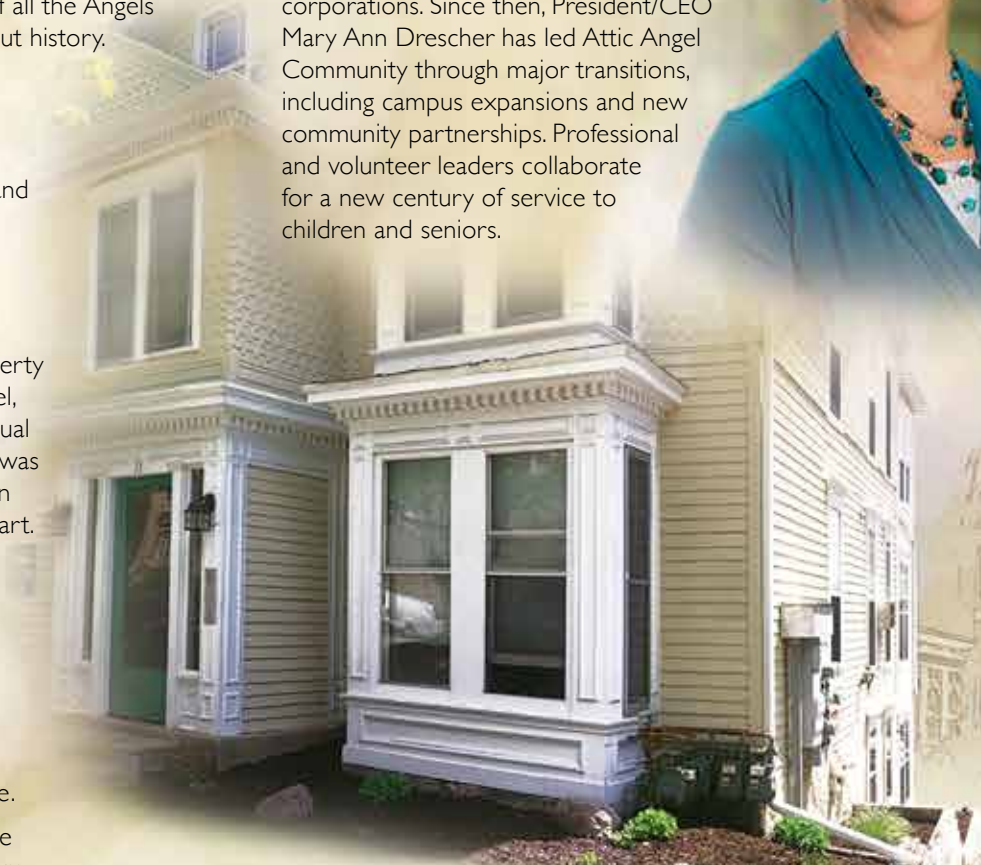
## Generous Donors

From the start, Attic Angel Association's good deeds have attracted attention, participation and money to make Madison a better place. From well-known to little-known, surprising donors and major gifts infused new momentum and direction over the years. Examples:

- **1938: John Mahoney's** will provided property for the Visiting Nurse Service of Attic Angel, along with a sizable gift of money that's equal to nearly half a million dollars in 2019. He was an orphan when he first arrived in Madison and appreciated the Association's good heart.
- **1970: Clarinda McKenzie**, a frugal schoolteacher with no direct connection to Attic Angel, gave a surprise estate gift worth more than \$6.5 million in 2019 dollars. Her gift allowed Attic Angel to expand offerings for older adults who want to retire to safe living quarters but who do not need concentrated health care.
- **1975: Oscar and Mary Rennebohm** were behind a series of gifts from the Rennebohm Foundation to establish Attic Angel's Resident Aid Fund. The couple's concern about residents who outlive their financial resources may have come from Oscar's experience as founder of a drugstore chain before becoming Wisconsin's governor (1947-51) and from Mary's work as a longtime Angel. This fund continues to grow.

## Focused Leadership

With clarity of mission as a guide, Attic Angel Association has benefited from the strategic leadership of savvy volunteers since its founding in 1889. Board rosters are still filled with Association members, but in 2000 the Angels hired a full-time professional to oversee the growing organization that now numbers four corporations. Since then, President/CEO Mary Ann Drescher has led Attic Angel Community through major transitions, including campus expansions and new community partnerships. Professional and volunteer leaders collaborate for a new century of service to children and seniors.



## Connecting Past and Present:

The Bryant home still stands on East Gilman Street, and founder Elva Bryant's gravestone rests in Madison's Resurrection Cemetery.





# SPECIAL THANKS AND CREDITS

This book was a labor of love, much like the 130-year story that is played out on its pages. In addition to honoring our selfless and forward-thinking Angels, **The One and Only** showcases the passion and commitment of everyday heroes through artful design, timeless photography and faithful historical resources. Special thanks go to the following behind-the-scenes contributors to this book:

**Archives of the following organizations:** Attic Angel Association (especially the 100 Year History published in 1989 and archivist Jean Lewis), Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS), University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives (UWAR), Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison (WVM), and Capital Newspapers.

**Cover:** Wisconsin State Capitol (stock image); One City Schools, children with teacher Jabari Caire; Attic Angel Association building; Attic Angel volunteers and residents Lynne and Paul Jacobsen

**Page 1:** 1885 sketch of Madison's downtown (the heart graphic behind the Capitol dome was added for storytelling effect), WHS-52897

**Page 3:** portraits above the staircase are Attic Angel founders Elva (left) and Mary Bryant

**Pages 4-5:** 1898 Charity Ball invitation; 1895 University Armory sketch, UWAR-2018s00398

**Pages 6-7:** 1955 sewing bee led by Mrs. John Ernest Roe (right) includes (from left) Daisy Breyer, Jane Harper, Rea Ragatz, WHS-36659; 1902 Vaudeville program; 1903 Madison General Hospital; 1920 children's ward, WHS-103167

**Pages 8-9:** 1940s State Street in Madison, UWAR-s05355; 1916 fashion show program; 1944 Visiting Nurse Myra Johnson, WHS-38971

**Pages 10-11:** 1933 *Wisconsin State Journal* article; 2018 One City Schools, children with teachers Lisa Cutting and Jabari Caire

**Pages 12-13:** 1961 annual fall luncheon, where Angels prepared for the inaugural Attic Sale

**Pages 14-15:** 2015 residents Jerry and Lori Richter; 1953 nursing home director Doris Keslin, RN, with donor Augusta Lee Giddings in the Gorham Street nursing home

**Pages 16-17:** 1995 sketch of the Segoe Road Tower by Barbara Rewey; 1975 Tower lobby with Marge Davenport (left), Marcie Gill and Charlotte Spohn; 2012 aerial photo; 2015 CNA Ayélé Dossavi with resident Alice Rusch

**Pages 18-19:** 2015 group of staff and Angels; 2018 Attic Angel Association building

## Pages 22-23, Time Line:

- 1889 – portraits of Elva and Mary Bryant
- 1903 – original building of Madison General Hospital
- 1908 – 1944 Visiting Nurse Service, WHS-38971
- 1953 – 102 East Gorham Street nursing home
- 1963 – Board President Dorcas Nickles and the newly constructed Segoe Road nursing home. In 2019-20, her leadership shoes were filled by daughter-in-law Amy Nickles.
- 1975 – sketch of the Attic Angel Tower at Segoe Road, by Angel Barbara Rewey
- 2000 – monument sign at the corner of Old Sauk and Junction roads
- 2002 – Prairie Point neighbors (from left) Grynnet Lonnebotn, Chuck and Diane Stumpf
- 2017 – group of residents as seen in 2017 "living here" marketing video
- 2019 – example playset for illustration only

## Pages 24-25, Did You Know?

- 2016 Attic Sale, the first year at a Middleton sports complex
- 2015 Angels Coky Klimpel (left), Pam Sacaridiz and Becky Braun
- 1947 Visiting Nurse Service at a child health center at Emerson School (from left: June McLean, Dr. Sally Cornell Mendenhall and Catherine Bassett), WHS-48521
- 1952 Angel Margaret Stroud with lawnmower, WHS-77739
- 2017 Falk Elementary School Principal Adam Zingsheim with students
- 2016 Attic Angel Place main entry for residents and visitors

**Graphic designers** Matt Schaser and Dan Cheramy

**Photographers** (in order of frequency) Andy Manis, Kelly Cheramy, Don Kerkhof and Greg Anderson. (Historical photos are attributed below to the appropriate archives.)

*Please note that some images throughout the book are illustrative depictions, not historical artifacts. Below are credits and information about actual historical artifacts used in this book. Factual images without specific credit come from Attic Angel Association and photographers listed above.*

— Kelly Cheramy, writer and editor



## Pages 26-27, Touchstones:

- c. 1890 General Edwin Eustace Bryant, WVM.1381.1001; Elva and Mary Bryant portraits
- 2015 Attic Angel nurses Carmen Hill, Christian Benzschawel, Ingrid Ortiz and Alex Partridge; 1944 Visiting Nurses L. Lee, Norma Epermann and Mary Sherburn, WHS-38965
- Mary Ann Drescher, president/CEO of Attic Angel Association since 2000 and of all Attic Angel corporations since 2001. Previous roles: executive director (1989) and marketing director (1998).
- The Mansion Hill house at 11 East Gilman Street is now known as the General Bryant Manor apartments. In 1894, the Bryant family moved to the home, where they welcomed children for Attic Angel's first Christmas party. (Upon Gen. Bryant's death in 1904, his body lay in state at the home before his funeral procession to Grace Episcopal Church.)
- Attic Angel founder Elva Bryant's gravestone is in Section 5 of Madison's Resurrection Cemetery.

**The irony of her married name  
– Elva Bryant Doolittle – is too great  
to ignore. For a woman who did so much  
for our city, "Doolittle" greatly downplays  
the credit she deserves!**

