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Dr. Arthur Gillette: a pioneer in children's care

by [Emma Wagner](#) // July 8th, 2011



Although it serves a small proportion of the population, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare of St. Paul has an interesting history. It is unique in that its mission is to serve patients who have physical disabilities. Gillette is the first of its kind for treatment of patients with disabilities. What is now is that Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare was founded as the State Hospital for Crippled Children in 1897 by Dr. Arthur Gillette, a St. Paul orthopedic surgeon and Jessie Haskins, a young Carleton College student who had a disability. In the late 1890s it was not thought that kids would have serious physical disabilities, but that was not true. Dr. Gillette had many patients with orthopedic problems.

Arthur Gillette was born in 1864 in Prairieville in Rice County. Shortly after, his family moved to the South St. Paul area. In medical school, his professors discouraged him from doing orthopedic surgery, but he went through with it and was able to improve the lives of more than 80 percent of his patients.

Jessie Haskins was born in 1866. She had a curved spine as an infant. She became an advocate for the treatment of children who have disabilities. Together, she and Gillette started a hospital that specialized in this kind of treatment.

While Haskins was a student at Carleton College in 1897, she wrote a letter to the Minnesota Legislature urging them to build a treatment hospital. Her request was heard and the State Hospital for Crippled Children was started. When it was founded, the conditions that children were treated for included club foot, tuberculosis and Pott's disease. Today, Gillette patients are treated for hundreds of conditions including cerebral palsy, brain and spinal cord injuries, neuromuscular conditions and spina bifida.

In the 1920s, the hospital was named Gillette State Hospital for Crippled Children in honor of Gillette, who died a year later in 1921. In the 1970s it was renamed Gillette Children's Hospital. The name of the hospital reflected the era. The hospital was again renamed Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare in 1996 to reflect the variety services offered such as an imaging center, a gait lab, a casting room, and a shop where leg, ankle and other medical braces are fabricated.

Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare has existed for 114 years, but surprisingly, not many people have heard of it. This is likely because only a small numbers of the population that use the hospital for their specialty, disability related treatments. Gillette facilities have branched out over the years. The hospital has changed in different ways, but it maintains its original mission of Dr. Arthur Gillette and Jessie Haskins, to treat children with childhood onset disabilities.

The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com