

1844-1994



*Our*

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# *Our Medical Heritage*



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Lancaster City & County Medical Society

## Section 1

# *The History of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society*



LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA, 1844



## Chapter 12

# *Women In Medicine In Lancaster County*

*Mary Ellen Smith Meiser, M.D.*

One hundred and fifty years ago there were no women physicians in the United States. In 1848, a school teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio, while nursing a sick neighbor, decided she wanted to become a physician. Elizabeth Blackwell applied to all nine Philadelphia medical schools, eight of which turned her down flat. One told her that they would accept her if she would dress like a man, a condition which Miss Blackwell refused.

Her plea reached the medical school in Geneva, New York. The faculty did not want a female enrolled there, but in all fairness agreed to accept the lady if there was complete agreement by the whole student body, which had never been known to vote unanimously on anything. The students, as a prank, unanimously accepted Miss Blackwell's entry, thus forcing her admission. Elizabeth Blackwell became America's first woman medical school graduate.

This incident was followed by an increasing interest by women in becoming physicians. Dr. Joseph S. Longshore of Philadelphia, father of two daughters, spearheaded a drive to establish the first women's medical school in the United States, culminating in 1850 with the establishment of the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania. Despite the anger and indignation of male physicians, the first class of eight women, including the two Longshore sisters, received their medical degrees in 1852.

The opposition to women physicians continued over the next forty years. An 1862 announcement by the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania stated that "they are sustained by the profound conviction that their object was right, and was destined to succeed; and every year's experience has but confirmed their belief that the study and practice of medicine are admirably adapted to woman's nature; that the world and the profession need her; that success awaits her when duly educated for her office; and, that her entrance into this fitting and enlarged sphere of virtuous activity is the harbinger of increased happiness and health for women and for the race."

Soon after the establishment of the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania State Medical Society adopted a resolution forbidding professional recognition of, or consultation or collaboration with any graduate of a female medical college, or with any faculty members of such institutions.

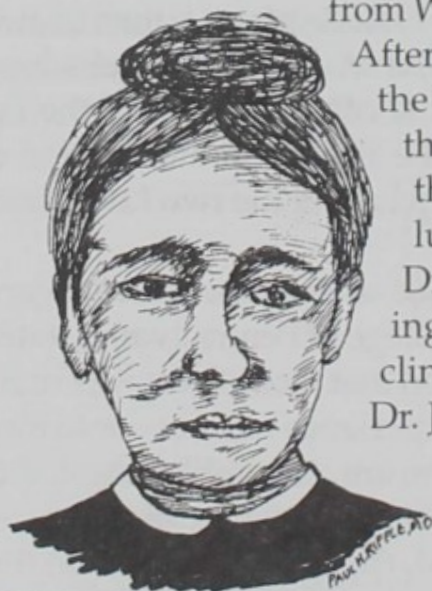
The Lancaster City & County Medical Society decried this discrimination, and tried for more than ten years to have this prejudicial resolution rescinded. Resolutions to that effect were introduced annually, but it was not until 1871 that the resolution was changed, being careful to insert the words "the new resolution does not commit this Society to acknowledge the right of women to representation in the Society."



The more liberal attitude of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society and the local hospitals paved the way for an early influx of female physicians into the county.

In recording a history of medical care in Lancaster County, it is fitting to go back to the year 1756, when *Susanna Muller* was born in Lampeter. This daughter of John Rohrer married Peter Muller from Switzerland, and became well known as a skilled midwife. Though possessing no medical degree, she became very competent and respected. One time during a delivery she became worried about some aspect of the case and hastily dispatched a messenger to Lancaster to consult a physician. It was in the middle of the night, and the doctor, upon learning that the attendant was Susanna Muller, replied, "Then, it is all right, she knows as much about the case as I do." Susanna proceeded to bring the case to a successful conclusion. Her beautifully kept complete records of all her 1667 deliveries, dated between 1795 and 1815, are on file at the Lancaster County Historical Society.

The honors for becoming the first academically trained woman physician to sustain a practice in Lancaster County fall to *Mary Eleanor Conyngham Wilson*, who was born in New Providence in 1839, and received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1868.



**DR. MARY C. WILSON**

After attending the Girls High School in Lancaster and the Washington Institute at Columbia, she became the first woman to teach in the public schools in this County, teaching at Girls High School in Columbia and in Bart Township. She studied under Dr. John K. Raub in New Providence before attending medical school. After a short stint in New York clinics, she returned to Lancaster as an assistant to Dr. John L. Atlee, grandfather of the late Drs. John L. Atlee Jr. and William A. Atlee. She inspired many young women to enter the profession, and took a deep interest in scientific investigation and research. She developed an extensive practice at 134 North Duke St., where the Bell Telephone

Company building now stands, and remained active until just before her death in 1898. Her death occasioned accolades to her pioneering career and her efforts in bettering the welfare of the community and its citizens. She was the grandmother of Nathaniel Hager, and her memory is immortalized through a 1948 gift by the William H. Hager family of a doctor's lounge and conference room in the Lancaster General Hospital.

*Dr. Letitia Frantz* was born near Lancaster in 1858. A graduate of Millersville State Normal School, she first taught school, then received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1884. She returned to Lancaster to practice, specializing in nose and throat diseases.



*Dr. Marcella L. Schweitzer* was born in Lincoln in 1883, and received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College in 1905. She is registered at an Ephrata address in 1906.

*Dr. Marie R. Van Hess* is listed in the 1897 census at 332 N. Lime Street in Lancaster.

*Dr. Elizabeth Kendig* was born in Lancaster in 1854, received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College in 1886, and began practice in her home at 32 South Duke Street. She placed an ad in the newspaper, and was busy from the start. Her sister, Nellie, had been given only six weeks to live by her physician, and Dr. Kendig accepted the challenge to treat her. Nellie was so thin and weak she could not walk upstairs. Dr. Kendig encouraged her to eat and watched her carefully; gradually Nellie recovered from her neurasthenia and in three years weighed 160 pounds. Her father was so pleased with the treatment Nellie had received that he gave Dr. Kendig a fee of \$100, the largest fee she ever received during her practice! When Dr. Kendig was interviewed for the newspaper in August 1941 at age 87, she was in good health and still had a few patients. She recommended "close observation of a patient, then one can give more thought to a case. I sometimes think that women take more pains in this way, even though they may have less ability than men. The elixir to a long life is simply more sleep."

*Dr. Adelaide M. Underwood* has the honor of being the first female physician to be admitted to membership in the Lancaster City and County Medical Society. She had applied for membership on March 2, 1898; despite a favorable report from the Board of Censors, her acceptance was defeated by a vote of 36-17. She finally was elected to membership on September 6, 1899 by a vote of 26-6, one and a half years after her original application. Dr. Underwood wrote two scientific papers published in *Pennsylvania Medicine*, one on leukemia and one on infant feeding.

Born in 1877, *Dr. Elizabeth Bricker* attended Penn State University and received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1903. She first did hospital work in Philadelphia, then was honored by an appointment to Wernersville Mental Hospital. After the very sudden death of her father, followed in one week by the death of a younger sister, she went home to Lititz to live and practice. In 1915, eight years later, she was appointed to a position with the Division of Women and Children of the State Department of Labor in Harrisburg, a position which she held until 1935, at which time she resumed her practice in Lititz. She never married. The April 1977 meeting of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society was held at the Luther Acres Nursing Home, with the guest of honor Dr. Elizabeth Bricker, who was celebrating her 100th birthday.

A close friend of Dr. Bricker's, *Dr. Georgianna Walter*, from Christiana, graduated from Woman's Medical College a year ahead of Dr. Bricker. She commenced practice in Christiana, delivered a few babies, but was uncom-



fortable with the prejudice she felt there, and returned to Philadelphia for hospital work. She eventually joined the staff at Wernersville to work with Dr. Bricker. Later she became Assistant Bacteriologist of the Philadelphia Board of Health. After retirement, she kept current in medicine and maintained her registration for many years. She also lived to be a centenarian, spending her final days in Harrison House in her native Christiana.

In 1909 and 1912, there is a record of two women osteopathic physicians; *Dr. R. Annette Ploss* and *Dr. Bessie Mabel Spencer*, at 217 Woolworth Bldg.

In 1910, *Dr. Mary K. Bowman* began practice in Mount Joy. A graduate of Wilson College, Dr. Bowman received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1907, then worked in New York in the field of mental health. Her grandfather and two uncles were also physicians. She was awarded her 50 year plaque in 1957, and died in 1970.

Also practicing in Mount Joy in 1913 was *Dr. Winifred Throne* of Milton Grove.

Lancaster General Hospital, established in 1893, accepted its first intern, Dr. A. L. Henry, in 1903. Nineteen years later, in 1922, *Dr. Hannah Seitzick Robbins* became its first woman intern. After internship, she returned to her native Trenton, NJ to practice.

The following year, 1923, *Dr. Wilhelmina Scott Bomberger* interned at Lancaster General, and soon became a prominent member of the local medical group in Lancaster. Dr. Scott was active in tuberculosis work at Rossmere Sanitarium. She then joined the Department of Radiology at Lancaster General Hospital, where she remained 34 years, becoming head of the Department. When, in 1973, Dr. Scott received her 50-year plaque, she also received the Lancaster City & County Medical Society's Distinguished Service Award, for "a half a century of Outstanding Service to her Community and to the Medical Profession."



By 1924, Lancaster General Hospital was accepting as many as two, three, four or even five women interns each year. In 1926, *Dr. Anna Place Klemmer* interned with four other women and one man, and served as Chief Resident the next year. The brave lone male was Dr. Harold K. Hogg, who not only survived the ordeal but, after a long career in surgery in Lancaster, lived to retire in Florida. Dr. Klemmer was married to Dr. Roland A.



Klemmer, and was a pediatrician. She was a member of the American College of Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics, and died in 1974.

There were five women interns in 1927 when *Dr. Irene Bott Davis* came to Lancaster from England. After her internship and a brief sojourn to her native England, she returned to Lancaster and married Dr. Henry Davis, and established a general practice specializing in obstetrics. When she received her 50 year plaque in 1976, the newspaper headlines read, "50 Years and 6000 Babies Haven't Dulled her Interest." That's our "Reenie," the "youngest" oldest practicing woman physician.

*Dr. Marvel Scott Kirk* interned at Lancaster General in 1929. A long-time Lancaster practitioner, Dr. Kirk is married to Dr. Norris Kirk, who interned with her, a case of Cupid stalking the hospital corridors.

Also interning with Dr. Kirk was *Dr. Sally Rutledge Johnson*. Dr. Johnson died suddenly after doing general practice for about eight years.

Dr. Marcella Deprey began the practice of medicine in Lancaster after completing her education at the School of Osteopathy in Missouri in 1927. She was married to a Dr. Al Czaph, a high school chemistry teacher, and they moved to York County in 1956.

About 1930, *Dr. B. Elizabeth Herbert* became active in general practice in her native Columbia. Dr. Herbert graduated from Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1927, and interned at Misericordia Hospital in Philadelphia.

*Dr. Louisa E. Keasbey*, a brilliant pathologist, was Head of the Department of Pathology at Lancaster General Hospital from about 1927 to 1940, when she left Lancaster for California with her surgeon husband, Dr. Ross Proctor.

*Dr. Corrine Dryer* of Ohio came to Lancaster in 1935 and opened her office for general practice. She was in active practice here until 1960, when she returned to Ohio.

In the year 1935, *Drs. Clara May Hileman, Catherine LaRue Hayes, and Mary Ellen Smith* interned at Lancaster General hospital. Dr. Hayes went home to Force, Pa. to practice; Dr. Hileman practiced in the Pathology Department at Lancaster General for a few years before she married Dr. Robert Lehman and moved to Pittsburgh, where she practiced until her retirement.

*Dr. Mary Ellen Smith* became Chief Resident Physician at Lancaster General Hospital for two years, then married Dr. Edgar W. Meiser and opened her office for general practice in Lancaster in 1938. After nine years of practice followed by eight years of motherhood, she resumed practice as a part time physician at Millersville State Teachers College and an examining physician in the Lancaster City and Solanco School Districts until her retirement in 1980.

*Dr. Evelyn Merrick*, from Orange, NJ, a 1936 graduate of Woman's Medical College, practiced in Lancaster after her internship at Lancaster General. She left Lancaster after a few years practice.



*Dr. Louise W. Slack*, a graduate of Woman's Medical College, interned at Lancaster General in 1937, then began the practice of pediatrics in Lancaster. She became the only local woman physician to serve in the Armed Forces in World War II. Her call to active duty in the Navy came addressed to "Dr. Louis Slack," thus she probably served as a result of a typographical error. After the war she practiced in Silver Springs, MD, until her death in 1958.

*Dr. Beatrice Weisberg Sandhaus* received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College in 1938 and interned at St. Joseph's Hospital. She married Dr. Julius Sandhaus, and has been a very active general practitioner in Lancaster.

*Dr. Ruth Crouse Moore* graduated from Woman's Medical College in 1934, and actively practiced in the Ephrata area until her death in October, 1970.

*Dr. Ruth Brenner*, Manheim, received her M.D. from Woman's Medical College in 1939. She maintained a very active general practice and will always be remembered for her extensive efforts in occupational therapy. She was an authority on hooked rugs, and she taught this art to many of her patients. She died in 1973.

A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, *Dr. Jane Findley Hoffman* interned at Lancaster General in 1942, married Dr. Charles M. Hoffman and practiced pediatrics for a short time with an obstetrician, Dr. George Stoler. She was active intermittently in school examinations and baby clinics.

*Dr. Arlene Schlott's* name appears as a practicing physician in the Ephrata area.

*Dr. Thelma Boughton* spent some time in the Pathology Department at Lancaster General Hospital about 1940.

1944 was the Centennial Year for the Lancaster City & County Medical Society. Out of a total membership of 217, 16 were women. Since prejudice against women physicians had all but disappeared at this time, and 61 members of the Society were serving actively in the Armed Forces, women physicians became very busy. Women physicians joined the local ranks at an increasing pace: *Drs. Margaret Eyler*, General Practice (Lititz); *Jacqueline Roe*, General Practice; *Virginia Mears*, Psychiatry; *Hilary Becker*, Pediatrics; *Grace Kaiser*, Obstetrics, (Ephrata); *Maxine Montgomery*, Neurology; *Cynthia Harrison*, Emergency Medicine; *Carol Scatarig*, Internal Medicine; and *Margarite Shultz*, Radiology, to name a few.

By 1993, 90 women were practicing medicine in Lancaster County. The number of women physicians had nearly quadrupled in the preceding 20 years; they now represented 18% of all United States physicians. Organized medicine, once reluctant to admit females to the elite fraternity, now campaigned to recruit more women to the field, and conducted and encouraged studies pertaining to the dual role of women in their professional and family care lives.

The American Medical Association predicts by the year 2010, women will account for nearly 30% of the total physician population.