

PIONEER WOMEN PHYSICIANS IN INDIANA

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Background History

In nineteenth century America doctors were educated by apprenticing themselves to physicians or by attending “proprietary” medical schools run by a few practicing physicians who gave lectures to aspiring physicians in return for fees. Apprenticeships and proprietary school courses in the United States might last months or a year or two and seldom required even college education as a prerequisite. They varied widely in quality. Because of low entrance requirements, medical students were considered by the public to be a group of young immature rowdies. Proper fathers would not want their daughters to associate with such a group. In addition, ideas about True Womanhood saw women as homemakers raising their children to be patriotic citizens. Women, themselves, were not to venture outside the home into the world of business and professional men. It would be especially shocking for ladies to attend classes such as those dealing with subjects like human anatomy or sexually transmitted diseases.

A few male physicians especially Quakers, who had always promoted equality of women, would allow women to apprentice with them. Proprietary schools occasionally admitted a woman especially toward the end of the century. Most of the proprietary schools disappeared or merged with newer schools as the transition to the modern university medical school occurred between 1885 and 1925 as happened at Indiana University School of Medicine in the first decade of the twentieth century.

At the middle of the 1800s women began to enter medicine. The first to graduate with an MD—in this county or in the world—was Elizabeth Blackwell in 1849 in Geneva, New York. After this historic event, medical education became open to women

especially through sectarian schools of medicine and through the establishment of woman's medical colleges. Women not infrequently worked as teachers, seamstresses, or the like in order to save money for medical training. Between 1850 and 1870 four medical colleges for women were founded, first in Philadelphia with support from Quakers, then in Boston, New York City, and Chicago. Other schools and hospitals were founded to train women as the century progressed. There were fewer objections by the public to women treating women and children. Women physicians often made house calls and were able to educate mothers about hygiene. These women contributed to the founding of Public Health as a specialty in medicine.

Sectarian schools, fewer in number than traditional medical schools, promoted a variety of alternative theories of healing like homeopathy, hydrotherapy, eclectic medicine, or physio-medicine and were entitled to grant medical degrees. They advocated herbal remedies, mineral baths, or other "natural" therapies. Although these practices of medicine were looked down upon by regular physicians, traditional medicine itself was not always popular with the public. There were harsh treatments like bleeding, purging, inducing skin blisters, and administering toxic doses of chemicals that seemed worse than the illnesses they were purported to cure. Sectarian treatments were often associated with popular health reforms of interest to women and tended to be more open to women practitioners.

Abram, Ruth J., ed., Send Us a Lady Physician, Women Doctors in America, 1835-1920. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1985.

Bacon, Margaret Hope, Mothers of Feminism; The Story of Quaker Women in America. Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 1986, 151-156.

Bonner, T. N., Becoming a Physician: Medical Education in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States, 1750-1945, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 207-13.

Indiana Nineteenth Century Women Physicians

The following biographies are based on data in the Indiana Nineteenth Century Physicians biographical database, History of Medicine Collection, Ruth Lilly Medical Library, Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis. The data base was compiled under the direction of Special Collections Librarian Nancy Eckerman, using publications of medical societies and others listing physicians of the time. Additional information was found at the Indiana Historical Society, the Indiana State Library, and the Indiana Medical History Museum as well as in other materials in the History of Medicine Collection.

Counties in Indiana licensed physicians during most of the nineteenth century. Acts of the Indiana State Legislature in 1897, chapter 169, established for the first time a Medical Licensing Board for state licensing. Requirements for medical schools and for individuals to take state licensure exams were established. The 1897 Act, chapter 169, and state licensure records were reviewed at the Indiana State Archives, Commission on Public Records (“Book 1, Record of Certificates 1897-1913, Board of Medical Registration and Examination”) for women who were licensed by the state in 1897, 1898, and 1899. Information was combined with data from records obtained as described above. Records from different sources do not always agree in all details about a specific individual.

In all records, physician’s first initials are often given along with their last names. In some cases, many of them women, first names are given. For the purposes of this compilation, it is assumed that all women’s first names, rather than initials, were recorded. Based on first names in the nineteenth century, it is not always easy to

determine gender. Judgment calls were made, for example, “Jesse” was assumed to be a man and “Jessie” was assumed to be a woman. Thus, it is possible that some women were excluded from lists below and that some men were inadvertently included. Some women were listed at “Mrs.” Absence of such a prefix doesn’t necessarily imply that a woman was not married, borne out by the fact that some women were listed next to a man with the same last name in the same town, possibly husband and wife practicing together.

In 1897, the first year state licenses to practice medicine, surgery, and obstetrics were granted, 4,858 licenses were given. Graduates of regular medical schools comprised 78% of licensees; the rest had received training at sectarian schools. Women licensees numbered 115 or 2% of the total. Only 48% of women had graduated from regular medical schools, the rest from sectarian school consistent with the tendency of sectarian schools to be more likely to admit women than were regular medical schools.

Almost one third of the women licensed in 1897 had graduated from medical school in the 1890s. This decade began the first wave of feminism that ended with votes for women in national elections in 1920. Women were mobilized from their homes into the public sphere. There were large national organizations of women’s clubs promoting a variety of progressive causes beneficial to the nation. Womanly activities were being used to impact many areas of society including improving the health of families. Women would not begin to enter medicine in larger numbers until the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. In the twenty-first century, at least half of all medical students are women, and woman’s medical colleges have merged into co-educational schools.

For the purposes of this compilation of Indiana pioneer women physicians, only women who graduated from medical school before 1890 will be included. A few were

licensed by examination and years of practice without having obtained a medical diploma. They are included if over age forty in 1897-9. Date of graduation does not indicate whether or not a woman might have apprenticed with a physician or taken medical courses and practiced for some time before actually completing medical school. Resources at libraries noted provided more than basic information about a few women. They will be listed first.

Mary Frame Myers Thomas

The life of the remarkable Dr. Mary Thomas follows the trajectory of nineteenth century women physicians in America. Like many others, she was related to a male physician—she was married to a physician and worked with him. In addition, her step-sister was a physician who lectured at Penn Medical College where Mary began her first medical courses after arranging for the care of her children. She soon had to leave to care for an ill child. She later attended lectures at Western Reserve University in Cleveland where her husband graduated in 1854. She received her degree at Penn Medical College in 1856.

At first she was not accepted by all-male medical societies but later in the century became a pioneer woman in them. Her medical career involved work with the poor. She was active in her church and in many charitable organizations and was a proponent of women's rights and votes for women.

Mary Frame Myers was born to Quaker parents in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1816. When she was an infant, her parents moved to Washington, DC. In 1833, they

moved to New Lisbon, Ohio. Her father served as her teacher for basic education. In 1839, she married Dr. Owen Thomas who became her instructor in medicine.

The Thomases had three daughters. She “was described as a model wife and mother. She not only attended to the usual household chores, at a time when there were no labor saving devices, she also made all of her children’s clothing by hand; and she not only found time to study and practice medicine, she also found time to participate in numerous other activities, and was able to achieve all this, as she stated, ‘by the most vigorous discipline of my mind . . . and systematic arrangement of [my] time . . .’”

(Bonsett, a)

She attended medical lectures in Indianapolis in 1869-70, during the first session of the Indiana Medical College which opened in 1869. Harassment by some of the male students there led to a paper she presented to the Indiana State Medical Society, published in its annual *Transactions*, urging acceptance of women physicians and acceptance of women into medical schools.

Governor Morton of Indiana appointed her to hospital service during the Civil War. Under this appointment she served in Washington, Nashville, and elsewhere. She later provided special hospital service in Nashville under the direction of the Christian Association. In Richmond, Indiana she was the physician for the Home for the Friendless for twelve years and for eight years provided medical care for the poor in one district of the city.

She was active in the Methodist Episcopal Church and many charitable organizations including groups supporting temperance (prohibition of alcohol use), woman’s suffrage, and women’s rights. She gave a speech to the Indiana Senate in 1859

urging property rights for women and amending the state constitution to allow women to vote, but the legislation she proposed was not enacted. She edited and published a women's rights paper, *The Lilly*. Among the causes for which she worked were the establishment of a separate state prison for women and a separate reformatory for girls. (Bonsett a)

She and her husband first lived in Fort Wayne. As a woman, she was twice refused admission to the Allen County Medical Society. After they moved to Richmond, she was eventually admitted to the Wayne County Medical Society in 1875, and was later an officer of that society, "a faithful worker in everything that aimed to make the human race better . . . an industrious writer and contributed a number of articles to the State Medical Society." (Kemper) She had been admitted to the state organization of the time in 1876 as its first woman member and became a member of the American Medical Association.

O. THOMAS, M.D.,
 - AND -
 MARY F. THOMAS, M.D.,
 Surgeons, Physicians,
 AND
 ACCOUCHEURS.
 Dr. O. THOMAS will attend to Surgery and General Practice. Dr. M. F. THOMAS will give particular attention to Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children. Office and residence on
 FORT WAYNE AVENUE (opposite Friends' Meeting House.)
 RICHMOND, IND.

From Directory of the City of Richmond, 1857

Her publications in *Transactions of the Indiana State Medical Society* include a talk describing why there should be women physicians for female patients in state institutions for the insane and requesting a committee to look into it (1880, p. 184); a report of that committee (1882, p. 80); the speech about the influence of medical colleges on the medical education of women (1883, p. 228); another article about women physicians in hospitals for the insane, noting that Dr. Sarah Stockton had recently been appointed at the hospital in Indianapolis (1884, p. 203); and two later papers, one on post-partum hemorrhage (1885, p. 125) and one about heredity (1887, p.97) that gives a thoughtful and balanced view of the knowledge of the time as well as a sermon against environmental factors like alcohol and tobacco.

Dr. Mary Thomas died August 19, 1888, in Richmond, Indiana, at age 72. “She was well liked by all and revered by some.” (Bonsett, a)

References

- Bacon, Margaret Hope, Mothers of Feminism, The Story of Quaker Women in America. Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 1986, p. 154.
- Bonsett, Charles A., a, *J. IN State Med. Assn.*, 73:270, 1980.
- _____, b, Dictionary of American Medical Biography, 1984, pp.738-9.
- Hibbard, J.F., *Trans. Ind. State Med. Soc.*, 1889, 210.
- Indiana Biography Index, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.
- Kemper, W.H., A Medical History of the State of Indiana, Chicago: American Medical Association Press, 1911, obituaries.

Dr. Sarah Stockton

Dr. Mary Thomas had urged the appointment of a woman physician to work with woman patients at the Indiana Hospital for the Insane and had noted that Dr. Stockton had been appointed. Sarah Stockton was born in 1842 on a farm near Lafayette and later operated the Stockton House hotel in Lafayette with her sister after their parents had died.

She graduated from the Women's Medical College, Philadelphia in 1882. During this time she also received training at the Boston Women's Hospital. Her thesis for the M. D. degree had been on the topic of "Insanity." She returned to Indianapolis to practice medicine in a private practice and at the hospital for the insane. At the time of her appointment, she was one of only twenty-two women physicians working in eighteen state hospitals in nine states. The *New York Times*, December 7, 1883, reported that her appointment was the first official recognition of a female physician in the history of Indiana.

Dr. William Fletcher, the superintendent who appointed her later wrote in his 1884 Annual Report that there was "... general and special improved condition of the female patients under her charge. She has had to take charge of one division of the house as a general practitioner, and do all the special work for the whole establishment, and has given complete satisfaction in every capacity." All the special work for the establishment probably refers to her role as pathologist.

A woman patient at the insane hospital who was suffering from incapacitating depression, speaking of the advantage of having a woman physician, wrote, "I felt the first time she came into my darkened room, where I lay in such agony as only miserable women suffer, and seating herself at my bedside, looking pityingly at me, the expression in her lovely blue eyes in itself a mute promise of assistance, before a word was spoken, that an angel had been with me."

Dr. Stockton served on the State Board of Charities, which oversaw state institutions, and at one time was physician in charge at the Indiana Women's Prison,

Indianapolis. After her earlier work at the hospital for the insane, she later served there full-time as a physician for twenty-five years until her death in 1924.

Reference

King, L. J., From Under the Cloud At Seven Steeples, 1878-1883; The Peculiarly Saddened Life of Anna Agnew at the Indiana Hospital for the Insane. Zionsville, IN: Guild Press/ Emmis Publishing, LP, 2002. 100-1, 121, 175.

Dr. Mary Angela Spink

Mary Spink was born in Washington, IN, 1863. She was another protégé of Dr. William Fletcher. When she was serving as a nurse at the hospital for the insane, Dr. Fletcher encouraged her to enter medical school. In 1887, she became one of the first woman graduates of one of the schools that would later merge to become Indiana University School of Medicine. She served as a pathologist at the hospital for the insane and developed a system for preserving circulation within the skull that was considered a significant contribution to the field of neurology. For a time she was a surgeon at the Indianapolis City Hospital. She later took a post-graduate course in nervous and mental disease in New York City.

Dr. Fletcher left the state institution in 1888 and opened a private sanitarium, Neuronhurst. Dr. Spink joined him, and on his death in 1907, became head of Neuronhurst. She specialized in psychiatry and neurology. In her capacity as a physician at the sanitarium, she would have also attended to the general medical needs of patients. Neuronhurst sponsored a school for training nurses in which Dr. Spink no doubt participated. She served on the Indiana State Board of Charities for thirty years.

She was a close friend of the family of Vice President Charles W. Fairbanks, of Indianapolis, and a frequent visitor at the White House at the time that Fairbanks was

vice president and Theodore Roosevelt was president. Some idea of Dr. Spink's interests and duties as a physician is given in a letter Mrs. Fairbanks wrote to her husband when he was away from Indianapolis in 1894. Mrs. Fairbanks noted that Dr. Spink had dropped by for dinner "and stayed till a quarter of seven. She had to hasten away as she has some more curious cases placed under her care in the last day or two. We were reading some French history in the little library. She said, 'How lovely it is here. I wish I could stay, but I must away to work.' I think she is better now than she has been for several days. She looked worn and [sickly], but she said it was 'La Grippe' working upon her."

She was a member of local and state medical societies and of the American Medical Association. Active in civic affairs, she was considered among the "most respected and beloved citizens" of Indiana. She died in 1939, age 75, at the home of a sister in New Hampshire.

References

- "Dr. Mary Angela Spink, 75, Dies; President of Fletcher Sanitarium," *Indianapolis Star*, Sept. 7, 1939.
- Journal of the Indiana State Medical Association*, October 1939, 593.
- "Spink, Mary Angela," Eckerman, N. P., in Bodenhamer, D.J. and Barrows, R.G., The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, 1285.
- King, L.J., Madame President, 1901-1905; Nellie Fairbanks, Path Finder to Politics for American Women. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2008, 39.

Dr. Eva A. Cropper

Eva A. Cropper, who was born in 1854, was one of the pioneering women physicians of Indianapolis. She had been one of the first female students of Fort Wayne College of Medicine, graduating in 1883. She became a general practitioner immediately, making house calls by horse and buggy, driving herself even at night. Initially, she practiced in Elmore, Ohio and Sheridan, Indiana before moving to Indianapolis where she

practiced for more than forty-five years. In the later years of her practice, she specialized in the diseases of women. She was a charter member of the Indianapolis chapter of the Theosophical Society. She died, at age 82, in 1937, survived by a daughter, a grandson, and two great grandsons.

Ind.Biog.Service, 16:51, clipping from *Indianapolis Star*, January 24, 1937

Dr. Mary Anna Elson

Mary Anna Elson was born in Würtzburg, Germany, in 1833. She graduated from the Women's Medical College, in Philadelphia, in 1858, the first Jewess to do so. She practiced in that city at first as well as giving lectures on medical topics. She later practiced medicine in Goshen, Indiana.

Morais, Henry Samuel, *The Jews of Philadelphia*, Philadelphia: The Levytype Co., 1894, p. 427. <http://books.google.com/books>

Dr. Nellie E. Green

Dr. Green was born in Vermont in 1843. When she was a child, her parents moved to Detroit, Michigan where she received her early education. Her father was a doctor, and during her school days she began a course of reading in his library. Her biography reports that she “clandestinely” attended lectures at Rush Medical College in Chicago. This might possibly mean that she was disguised as a man so as not to be noticed in the all-male classes—a subterfuge to which some women resorted in the nineteenth century in order to gain medical training. Perhaps, with the knowledge of some accepting faculty members, she just stayed in a hiding place next to the classroom; the biography continued, “so great an interest was manifested that she was eventually admitted to the classroom.” (Biographical History)

These experiences further fueled her ambition to become a physician. She enrolled in the Keokuk College of Physicians and Surgeons, Keokuk, Iowa and graduated in 1884. The school was a propriety school, staffed by physicians who charged students fees to cover expenses. It had been established permanently in Keokuk in 1850 after moving in 1846 from Laporte, Indiana where it began; to Madison, Wisconsin in 1847; to Rock Island, Illinois in 1848; and to Davenport, Iowa in 1849. In 1851, it became the Medical Department of Iowa State University. Keokuk was the medical center of Iowa in mid-nineteenth century and attracted students not only from that state but also from several neighboring states. (Biography of Dr. John Hughes)

She practiced briefly in Yorktown, Illinois and then moved to Princeton, Illinois. While there she visited patients in other towns in the surrounding area. Later, she was able to establish a very successful practice in Fowler, Indiana with the help of a woman in Princeton who had been greatly helped by Dr. Greene's medical treatment. She was a family physician and surgeon but particularly attended to women and children. Her good health and energy enabled her to visit the bedsides of patients day and night as necessary. She had her own horses and carriages and a "trustworthy man" to take care of them and drive her to house calls.

The *Journal of the Indiana State Medical Association* noted that she had died in September, 1941 at age 98.

References

Biographical History of Tippecanoe, White, Jasper, Newton, Benton, Warren Counties. Lewis Publishing Company, <http://books.google.com/books>
Journal of the Indiana State Medical Association (34:629, 1941)
 Biography of Dr. John Hughes, Dean of the Keokuk School
<http://iagenweb.org/history/Medicine/H/htm>

As with many nineteenth century records searches, some discrepancies appear here. Listings of Indiana physicians give her birth date as 1857, refer to her as Mrs. Nellie Greene, and note the 1884 graduation from Keokuk College of Physicians and Surgeons. The biography, probably written by Dr. Greene or a friend in the early twentieth century, does not mention a birth date, marriage, or date of graduation at Keokuk. It does state that after practicing medicine in Illinois for several years she moved to Indiana in 1884. It is possible that she completed her training at Keokuk while practicing in Illinois. The *Journal of the Indiana State Medical Association* gives her age at death in 1941 as 98 which would make her date of birth 1843. Indiana State Licensure records for 1897 indicate that she was 47 at the time, lived in Fowler, and had not completed a diploma.

Dr. Martha E. Hutchings Griffith

Dr. Griffith's career represents the gradual change from apprenticeship with a physician sympathetic with the cause of women in medicine to training in medical schools and hospitals established especially to educate women. Her later career demonstrated the gradual admission of women to previously all-male medical societies.

Martha Hutchings was born in 1842. As a young woman, she studied for two years with a physician in Vernon, Indiana. She then attended Women's Medical College, Philadelphia, graduating in 1870, and interned at the New England Hospital for Women and Children, Boston. She practiced for about a year and a half in Madison, Indiana before marrying Dr. Thomas Griffith who was a member of a family of physicians.

They both practiced in Darlington until 1888 when they moved to Crawfordsville. Dr. Martha Griffith specialized in diseases of women and children. Because of her work educating women about the health of their families, she was considered a pioneer in the field of Public Health. She participated actively in many charitable activities in

Crawfordsville, including helping to found the Community House Association for Women and Girls.

The Montgomery County Medical society was founded in 1872 but did not admit women at that time. She became a member in 1880 and was later vice president of the society. Her husband was also a prominent citizen of Crawfordsville. Their son James became a physician and practiced in Crawfordsville.

Dr. Martha Hutchings Griffith was an ardent suffragist. In 1894, she and some other women went to the polls. They were admitted but not allowed to vote. They returned later with her lawyer. He took the case to court, but their petition was denied.

Dr. Griffith practiced medicine until she broke her hip in 1923. She died in 1924, in Crawfordsville, at age 82.

Thompson, Jean, "Women Enter Medicine," *Montgomery Magazine*, 13:14, 1988, microfilm, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

Dr. Maria Allen Jessup

Maria Allen was born in 1846 on a farm near Fairfield, Indiana. She received her early education at the Fairfield Friends School in Camby and the Academy in Spiceland. She taught for twenty years in one room school houses. She was a tall, medium-built woman with brown curly hair, worn straight back in a knot as was typical of Quaker women of her time. Both her brother and a cousin were physicians. At the age of 38, she began the study of medicine, graduating from Northwestern University Women's Medical College in 1887. Soon after, she married widower Joel Jessup, a dairy farmer and businessman. She maintained a medical practice in Hendricks, Morgan, and Marion counties for thirty years until reasons of health forced her retirement.

“Dr. Ria” had an office in her husband’s historic home in Friendswood. She visited the sick and delivered babies day or night. A young man frequently accompanied her to care for her horse and buggy while she made house calls. She was active in the Fairfield Friends Meeting, the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. She was an ardent Bible student and taught weekly women’s Bible class until shortly before her death. She continued medical practice until 1914. Her husband died in 1908, and she died in 1921.

Dr. Jessup’s obituary in the *Plainfield Messenger* described her as “an exponent of the gospel of good cheer, a sympathetic and conscientious physician and [she] did not spare herself where duty came. She was charitable to the utmost degree and always ready to help the needy whether she expected remuneration or not.” She was described in a Hendricks County history as “a woman of great strength of character and with a tender and sympathetic feeling which should be the necessary concomitant of the technical experience needed for the successful physician.”

Fox, Paul G., *Mooreville Times*, January 30, 2002, clipping file, Indiana Historical Society

Dr. Fannie McClelland Rich

Fannie McClelland was born in 1841. She was a niece of Dr. J. S. McClelland. She graduated from an Eclectic Medical College in 1875 and practiced in Crawfordsville, Lafayette, and Franklin. In 1888, she married a farmer, James Rich, and subsequently ran a boarding house in Crawfordsville.

Dr. Hannah C. Rous

Hannah Rous was born in Switzerland County in 1854 and graduated from Vevay High School. After attending Moore's Hill Normal School, she taught for several years in order to save money for medical school. In 1886, she graduated from the University of Michigan, School of Medicine, one of the pioneering schools in modern medical education. She practiced medicine in Vevay until her final illness, cerebrospinal meningitis, and died in 1905. Dr. Rous was active in the Methodist Episcopal Church and in the Switzerland County Medical Society, of which she was secretary from its organization until just before her death. "She was faithful in her reports to the State Medical Society." (Kemper) "In her death the county, State and American Medical Association [lost] one of their most valued and useful members. (Ward)

Ward, J.P., *Trans. Ind. State Medical Society*, p. 457, 1905.

Kemper, W.H., *A Medical History of the State of Indiana*, Chicago: American Medical Association Press, 1911, p. 338.

Dr. Elizabeth Schmidt

Elizabeth Schmidt was born in Germany in 1826. She practiced midwifery in Indianapolis for more than twenty years. In 1880, at the age of 54 she completed the two year course and graduated from Central College of Physicians and Surgeons in Indianapolis. She retired at age 70 and died in 1904 at age 77.

Dr. Schmidt was described as "in every way a noble woman. . . . Early left a widow, she went on with her work supporting and educating a family of nine children, six sons and three daughters, all prominent citizens of Indianapolis and ever dutiful and

helpful to their heroic mother.”

Indiana Medical Journal, 22:418, 1903-04)

Dr. Sarah Fowler Stockwell

Sarah Fowler was born in Lagrange County, Indiana, in 1841. She attended public schools and later the Wolcottville Seminary. Sarah married James Stockwell of Lagrange County in 1857. She did not decide to attend medical school until she was thirty years old in 1870, and had to sell most of her worldly goods to afford it. She graduated with honors from the University of Michigan, School of Medicine in 1876 and began practicing pediatrics and gynecology in South Bend, Indiana, developing new surgical procedures. Except for one year in Portland, Oregon, she practiced continuously in South Bend until just before her death of uterine cancer at age 63 in 1904. She “won the esteem and regard of community and professional associates . . . and was a woman of ‘wide experience and resolute and determined character.’” (South Bend Tribune)

Mitchell, H.F., *Trans.Ind.StateMed.Society*, p.362, 1904.

South Bend Tribune, May 12, 1991, clipping file, Indiana Historical Society

Dr. Mary Mitchell Holloway Wilhite

Mary Holloway was quite possibly the first woman in Indiana to graduate from a medical school. [Both she and Mary Thomas are recorded as having graduated from Penn Medical College in 1856.] She was the daughter of pioneer settlers, born near Crawfordsville in 1831. Her mother died when Mary was seventeen.

A newspaper article written by Dr. Holloway’s granddaughter years later noted, “Early in life, this tall, imposing-looking girl manifested a studious character, becoming convinced while yet a young woman that it was not only possible, but proper, for a

female to acquire knowledge of humanity's ills as well as their remedies." (Pearce)
Because she had few financial resources, her plans to become a physician involved earning money as a country school teacher and a seamstress.

During this time, a local individual asked, "Do you expect to practice among decent people?" She replied, "Yes, why not?" The questioner retorted, "Well, I would rather bury my daughter than have her turn out so." Mary Holloway replied, "Perhaps in a few years you may have changed your mind and will be asking my aid." Indeed, six years later, she was called as a physician to see a member of that family and was retained as their physician. (Pearce)

When she had a few savings, she applied to Penn Medical College, in Philadelphia. Like many schools of the day, it was Eclectic, teaching methods of many medical theories of the day, including homeopathy. But unlike most other schools, it admitted women students. Edgar Thomson, one of the founders, became interested in Mary Holloway and gave her money from a fund for needy women students. In October, 1854 she began her journey to Philadelphia. Excerpts from her letters home, later published by her granddaughter note that she took the train from Crawfordsville and arrived in Greencastle at 4:00 p.m. Taking a bus to the other train station in town, she was able to board a train for Indianapolis at 11:00 p.m., arriving at Union Station at 12:30 a.m. Sometime after 3:00 a.m. she boarded a train of the Union and Belfontaine Railroad. The car was warm, and there were few other passengers. Unfortunately, her much needed sleep was interrupted when the train hit three horses on a bridge. She eventually arrived in Philadelphia in time for supper, having eaten only one meal during the journey. She was able to find a boarding house near the school for \$2.50 weekly, heat and lights extra.

Her letters indicate that she was invited out socially by other students, “but days for dress, beaux, and gaiety are over. . . I am going to acquit myself with all the honors of the institution.” She had the good fortune to befriend a wealthy Philadelphia woman, a Mrs. Young, who was able to provide additional help.

Near the end of her two year training, she wrote to her father, Judge Washington Holloway, “I feel much as a sailor does after a long weary voyage, just coming in sight of land . . . I am struggling on and hope for the best . . . I am improving rapidly in my studies, yet how much remains to be learned! . . . You do not wonder that I at times grow impatient. I am tired of being dependent on others for my bread and butter, and pray for the hour that will be the price of my own exertions. And not for me alone, for ere long woman, the last and noblest work of God, will take her own position in society. Man’s equal she is, and she will prove it . . . I think it a duty I owe Mr. Thomson and our university to show the people of the [Mid]West that a female may be a physician. Five months more I will be transformed from a poor student to Doctor Holloway. My Eastern friends think I have a spark of genius worth cultivating. It is for the future to determine whether I have or not.” Her thesis was “Constituents of Organic Bodies.” She graduated in 1856 in a class in which there were twenty-six other women. (Pearce)

She returned to Crawfordsville to practice and four years later married Eleazer Wilhite. He had a tailoring shop and was an accomplished violinist and flutist. They had seven children, three of whom died in infancy, unfortunately not uncommon at the time.

Initially only one other physician in Crawfordsville accepted her; and she was not allowed to join local medical societies. She ultimately “gained a popularity of which any physician might be proud. She made several important discoveries regarding the effects

of medicine in certain diseases. Her greatest success was in treatment of women and children. . . . She was especially interested in the welfare of young girls who were beset by temptations, and helped many such to obtain employment . . . when employed as physician to the county almshouse, she was grieved at the condition of the children associated with the class of adult paupers, and she never rested until she had, with the help of others, established the county children's home." (Willard and Livermore)

She joined the Christian Church as a young woman. In 1850, she canvassed for the first woman's rights paper published in America, the *Woman's Advocate*. She arranged meetings of women's rights groups including one attended by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. She was active in writing for newspapers about this and other causes that she supported including work against the use of tobacco and alcohol. (Willard and Livermore) A local newspaper described her politics as "radical." (Pearce)

She died in 1892, at which time there were twenty-six physicians in Crawfordsville—three of them, including Dr. Wilhite, were women.

Pearce, Emily Kennedy, *Montgomery County Journal-Review*, April 27, 1977, clipping file, Indiana Historical Society.

Willard, Frances E. and Livermore, Mary A., eds. American Women; Fifteen Hundred Biographies. vol. II, p. 774, New York: Mast, Crowell & Kirkpatrick, <http://books.google.com/books>

<u>Name</u>	<u>age in 1897</u>	<u>town/city</u>	<u>practice</u>	<u>school</u>	<u>grad. yr.</u>
Jane Abbott	52	Whitcomb	eclectic	Eclectic Med. Inst., Cinti	1872
Harriett C. Bacon	51	Indpls	homeop.	no diploma	
Linda Bailey				Woman's Med Coll (?Chi)	1884
Mrs. Addie M. Barnes	61		homeop.	Hahnemann Med. Coll., Chi	1881
Almira C. Wood Bever			regular	Eclectic Med. Inst., Cinti	1881
Amanda J. Blackledge	47	Pennville	(reg? eclec?)	Univ. of Penna.	1874
Mary C. Bland	64	Muncie	phys-med	Phila U. Med + Surg	1878
Mrs. Mary Bruner	41	Greenfield	regular	Northwestern Wmns. Med Coll.	1888
Rachel A. Bryson	45	Indpls	regular	Physio-Medical Coll. IN	1889
Mary M. Buchtel				Fort Wayne Coll. Med.	
Katherine Busse	33	Evansville	regular	U. Michigan	1888
Annie Campbell	55	Rockville	homeop	Eclectic Med Coll Cinti	1874
Emma Carey	41	Carmel	regular	Phys-Med Coll Indpls	1883
Mary Cartwright	48	Marion	phys-med	Curtis Phys-Med Inst, Marion	1884
Sarah Caulfield	60	Logansport	eclectic	no diploma	
Laura B. Cloud	42	Indpls	regular	Phys-Med Coll. Indpls	1883
Emma E. Coleman			eclectic	Eclec. Med. Inst. Cinti	1884
Mrs. Esmerelda A. Daniels	45	Indpls	regular	Med Coll Ind, Indpls	1876
Luella Derbyshire	33	Ft. Wayne		Ft. Wayne Med Coll	1888
Rebecca Dewey	70	Knightstown		no diploma	
Mary Ellis			eclectic	Bellevue Hosp. Med. Coll.	1857
Martha J. French	46	Indpls	regular	Coll. Phys + Surg. Indpls	1882

<u>Name</u>	<u>age in 1897</u>	<u>town/city</u>	<u>practice</u>	<u>school</u>	<u>grad. yr.</u>
Lucy Gosset		Kempton	eclectic	Eclectic Med Inst. Cinti	1886
Anna M. L. Griffin	40	Muncie	regular	Wmns. Med. Coll. Chi	1888
Clara L. Habermel	40	Bradford	homeop.	no diploma	
Mrs. C. A. Harden	34	Hartford City	phys-med	Curtis Phys-Med Inst, Marion	1888
Marietta Haslep	42	Indpls	regular	U. Michigan	1883
Mrs. Joyce F Hobson	(lic.IL)		regular	Eclectic Med. Inst. Cinti	1878
Lizzie E. Holloway	60	Spiceland	homeop.	Hahnemann Med. Coll. Chi	1887
Marie L. Holloway	61	Decatur	regular	Med. Coll. IN Indpls	1887
Mary Hoover	67		eclectic	Penn Med. Coll. Phila	1864
Delia E. Howe	39	Ft. Wayne	regular	Wmns Hosp Med Coll Chi	1884
Mary E. Jackson	39	Hammond	regular	Phys-Med Coll Indpls	1887
Laura B. Jennings	(lic IL)		regular	Phys-Med Coll Indpls	1885
Mrs. M. E. Keller	52	Indpls	homeop.	Hahnemann Med. Coll. Chi	1884
Lorenia Kimball	47	S. Bend		no diploma	
Mrs. Alice J. H. Koch	63	Indpls	regular	Phys-Med Coll. Cinti	1865
Evelyn A. C. Kollock	52	Laporte	regular	U. Michigan	1882
Lida Leasure	46	Angola	regular	U. Michigan	1888
Jennie C. Lader	48	Hortonsville		no diploma	
Allison Maxwell	48	Indpls	regular	Miami U. Cinti	1876
Anna Milice	54	Warsaw	eclectic	Curtis Phys-Med Inst. Marion	1887
Naomi C. Moffett			eclectic	Beach Med Coll Indpls	1886
Sarah Morrow	50	Richmond	regular	attended Northwestern Med Coll	1881

Name	age in 1897	town/city	practice	school	grad. yr.
Lola Munsee	37	Marion	phys-med	Curtis Phys-Med Inst. Marion	1889
Margaret A. Osborn	70	S. Bend	regular	no diploma	
Ella P. White Owens			eclectic	Eclectic Med. Inst. Cinti	1889
Mary Eva Peck	44	Goshen	homeop.	Hahnemann Med. Coll. Chi	1889
Laura M. Pratt				Columbus Med. Coll.	1882
Sarah Purcell	54	Randolph Station		no diploma	
Margaret Jackson Reynolds			regular	Boston U. Schl. of Med.	1884
Phebe Richards	63	New Carlisle	eclectic	no diploma	
Anna E. Roads	55	Tipton		no diploma	
Elizabeth Roberts	64	Connersville	regular	Phys-Med. Coll. Indpls	1884
Mrs. Eleanor Rolshausen	63	Logansport	regular	Northwestern Wmns Med. (1870s?)	
Anna E. Rusk	45	Richmond	regular	Phys-Med Coll. Indpls	1878
Elizabeth Samm	54	Ft. Wayne	regular	U. Michigan	1886
Mrs. Elizabeth Schriver				Ft. Wayne Coll Phys + Surg	
Louisa F. Jessup Smith	45	Wabash	regular	Northwestern Wmns Med Coll	1882
Mary Smith	40	Indpls	regular	U. Michigan	1884
Maud Smolley				Wmns Med Coll Cinti	1888
Mary J. Snodgrass	50	Marion	Literary + Scientific	Phys-Med Coll Cinti	1878
Nancy E. Snodgrass	45	Commock	phys-med	Curtis Phys-Med Coll Marion	1884
Wilhelmina Suiter	67	Evansville	homeop.	no diploma	
Vesta M. W. Swarts	56	Auburn	regular	Ft. Wayne Med Coll	1882
Caroline Taylor			eclectic	Ft. Wayne Coll Phys + Surg	

<u>Name</u>	<u>age in 1897</u>	<u>town/city</u>	<u>practice</u>	<u>school</u>	<u>grad. yr.</u>
Claire Taylor	50	Peru	regular	Academic De Paris (?)	1868
Elizabeth P. Taylor	60	Sullivan	eclectic	Eclectic Coll. Phys. + Surg. Indpls	1887
Mary J. Taylor	72	Greencastle	homeop	Pulte Med. Coll. Cinti	1880
Iris J. Vaughn	35	Topeka	regular	U. Michigan	1884
Mrs. R. A. Votaw	53	Marion	phys-med	Curtis Phys-Med Coll Marion	1886
Elizabeth J. Weeks	43	Mechanicsburgh		Phys-Med Inst Indpls	1886
Sarah Wellins	49	Martinsville	eclectic	Ind. Eclec. Med. Coll. Indpls	1887
Catherine J. Wells	70	Laporte	homeop.	Hahnemann Med Coll Chi	1883
Mavinda M. Wheeler	49	Noblesville	eclectic	Beach Med. Coll. Indpls	1885
Mary A. Wherry	48	Ft. Wayne		Ft. Wayne Med Coll	1888
Mrs. Emma A. Whitney	42	Muncie	homeop.	Cleveland U. Med. + Surg.	1886
Elsie B. Willan	63		regular	Coll. Phys. + Surg. Indpls	1881A. L. M.
Wilson		Wabash	regular	Med Coll IN Indpls	1887
Wood	43	Terre Haute	regular	Wmns Med Coll Chi	1889
Clare Clara Wood				Eclectic Coll. Ind Indpls	1885

Total Women Graduates Identified

1850s – 4

1860s – 3

1870s – 13

1880s – 60

no diploma – 11

unknown date - 3