

"EVERLASTINGLY STICKING AT IT"



A Country Doctor Helps to Change the Face of Medicine

MARY PHYLINDA DOLE (1862-1947)

By Sasha Mullally, Guest Curator and CRC Post-doctoral Fellow in Atlantic Canada Studies, Department of History, University of New Brunswick

Mary Phylinda Dole was part of the “second generation” of women doctors, who would follow in the wake of high-profile pioneers such as Elizabeth Blackwell. Nonetheless, women like Dole had to continue to push for equal recognition in a profession that still offered only tepid acceptance of “doctresses” in the ranks. Even in Dole’s time, women country doctors were not common in New England. Although she credits one open-minded male physician with facilitating her entry, the general practice that the young woman physician formed in Franklin County was built on kinship ties, knowledge of the area and a willingness to travel. Years later, she recalled a man, grateful that she had agreed to come out and tend his young daughter, noting her exceptional dedication to the country people: ‘When the night is so bad that the men won’t go, we know we can get you.’

Dole relied upon and lived her life as part of a vibrant homo-social community of women, which provided her with social support in the professional sphere as well. Over 1894-1895, she went abroad to study at the Pasteur Institute in France with her friend and medical school colleague, Dr. Maud Sperry. The two women lived together on the left bank in Paris, attended clinics, and studied pathology. Leaving Paris in 1896, Dole and Sperry toured clinics in Berlin and Dresden, meeting up with Dole’s mentor Cornelia Clapp *en route*. When she returned to the Greenfield area, Mary Dole cultivated a wide circle of friends based on her Mount Holyoke affiliation, serving as President of the Franklin County Mount Holyoke Club. By 1906, as she was tiring of the onerous travel required of a medical life in western Massachusetts, her Mount Holyoke connections helped her to get settled into a new social scene and new practice in New Haven, Connecticut.

Women physicians such as Mary Dole helped change the face of medicine by “everlastingly sticking at it” until they achieved success. But they also appreciated the concrete benefits of mentoring, patronage, and community support. After Dole retired in 1927 and took up a successful second career as an artisanal weaver, she became strongly motivated to leave a legacy to assist the rising generation of women medical students. In her own life, Mary Dole had to make do with secondary facilities in her science training, and struggled with the prohibitive cost of post-graduate work on the European continent, where clinics were more open to women than in North America. At the outset of the Depression, in 1931, she decided to set up a scholarship to support Mount Holyoke alumnae pursuing medical research and clinical training. A stunning fundraising success, created from the sales of her weaving and her autobiography, the scholarship would support generations of Mount Holyoke alumnae and help them achieve excellence in the medical field.

Biography:

Mary Phylinda Dole (1862-1947) was born in Shelburne, Massachusetts in 1862 and graduated from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1886. She came back to take courses two years later after the Seminary received its College charter, and thus was the first Mount Holyoke College graduate to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in 1889. In the meantime, Mary Dole studied medicine from the Women's Medical College of Baltimore from 1886-1888. After earning her M.D. degree in an accelerated two years, she interned at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston from 1889-1890. She opened a private practice in Greenfield for a brief time before continuing post-graduate studies in Europe, where she worked at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, France and toured various clinics in Germany. She returned to Greenfield a year and a half later. Mary Dole successfully built and maintained a traveling, rural-based general practice at a time when "country doctors" in the north east saw few women in their ranks. A tireless supporter of the Mount Holyoke community, she served as a trustee of the College from 1901-1907. It was based on alumna support that she was able to make the move to a town practice in 1906, when she moved to New Haven, Connecticut. In 1919 she returned to western Massachusetts, retired in 1927 and began hand weaving. She became an accomplished weaver, achieving both recognition as an artisan and financial success from the craft. In her later years, Mary Dole founded a scholarship to support graduates of Mount Holyoke pursue post-graduate medical work. The scholarship was funded from proceeds derived from her weaving, and from the sale of her autobiography, "A Doctor in Homespun," which was privately published in 1941. She died at her home in Shelburne, Massachusetts, on February 23, 1947, at the age of eighty-four.

For more information, please visit the Mary Phylinda Dole Papers 1885-1947 housed in Archives and Special Collections. Further information is available in the online finding aid at http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/mountholyoke/mshm145_main.html.

Dr. Mary P. Dole Medical Fellowship Recipients:

Danielle Anne Bessett '96 to support her dissertation on the construction of "normality" in pregnancy.

Annemarie Tyrell '05 Internship for Master's Thesis at NYS Department of Health

Kelly N. Huggins '04 Investigation of Peptide Hairpin Structure and Stability in Order to Understand and Improve Protein Function

Marija Chouinard '99 Studies of a Novel Diabetes -Susceptibility Gene and its Use in the Treatment of Type 2 Diabetes

Suzanna Schott '97 works in the field of genetic counseling and is studying for a master's degree at Johns Hopkins' National Human Genome Institute.

Sophia T. Ghebremicael '01 to study in osteopathic medicine at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, California.

Robyn Thomsen Calisti '84 toward attaining her master's degree in music therapy.

For more information about the Dole scholarship, contact the Mount Holyoke College Alumnae Association <http://www.alumnae.mtholyoke.edu/programs/lifelong/fellow/index.php>

“EVERLASTINGLY STICKING AT IT -- A Country Doctor Helps to Change the Face of Medicine” and “CHANGING THE FACE OF MEDICINE: CELEBRATING AMERICA’S WOMEN PHYSICIANS” exhibits are on display on Level 6, Williston Memorial Library, Mount Holyoke College, September 1-30.

For more information <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/> and <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/library/changingthefaceofmedicine/>