

Women's History Month: Julia Dyer Merrill, MD

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In honor of [Women's History Month](#), throughout March we will be taking a closer look at pioneering women physicians who attended Northwestern University Woman's Medical School (1870-1902), spotlighting a few who worked in Chicago after their studies.

Background:

The Woman's Hospital Medical College of Chicago was founded 150 years ago, in 1870, to provide equal education opportunities for female medical students in the Chicago area. In 1879, the name of the medical school was changed to the Woman's Medical College of Chicago. In 1892, it became part of Northwestern University and was renamed the Northwestern University Woman's Medical School. When the medical school was closed in 1902, a number of students who had not yet graduated transferred to other medical schools, largely in Chicago. Northwestern University Medical School opened its doors to women in 1926 upon moving to the new campus on Chicago Avenue.

Julia Dyer Merrill, MD (1861-1914)



*Image courtesy of
Dr. Merrill's family*

Julia Dyer Merrill, MD devoted her life to making the lives of children better. She was born in Saco, Maine, on March 11, 1861 and was educated in Saco public schools. For two years she taught school before entering a training school for nurses at New Haven, CT. Upon completion, she enrolled in a post-graduate course at the New York Lying-in Hospital. During the next two years, she served as the superintendent of the North Adams Training School for Nurses (MA). She studied medicine at Wooster University in Ohio, then moved to Chicago, transferring to Northwestern University Woman's Medical School, from which she graduated in 1895.

Merrill served as Assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Rush Medical College from 1897 to 1913. She was a member of the pediatric staff at various Chicago hospitals: Presbyterian, Tabitha (later called Norwegian-American), the Chicago Maternity, Mary Thompson, and the Maimonides (later called Mt. Sinai). She devoted her time to the Lincoln Park Sanitarium for Babies, the Jackson Park Sanitarium, and the Marks Nathan Jewish Orphanage. She was a fellow of the American Medical Association, the Illinois Medical Society, the Chicago Medical Society, the Women's Club, the Pediatric Association, and the Association of American Teachers of Diseases of Children. Her reputation was that of a devoted physician, and as a patient, thoughtful instructor, who impressed her students with her thoroughness and conviction.

Merrill partnered with Alfred C. Cotton, MD and assisted him in the compilation of his works on the diseases of children. She was deeply committed to making milk available to children and ensuring that milk in Chicago was safe to drink

and free of disease. In her role on the Chicago Milk Commission Association of the Chicago Medical Society, it was widely recognized that much of the program's success was due to her commitment. Two different accolades in volume 26 of the *Illinois Medical Journal* credit her work on medical inspection of employees and making the milk industry safer:

- "Dr. Merrill deserves credit for medical inspection enforcing of employees on farms. Every employee who came into contact with cow, milk or utensils had to be examined monthly to ensure food safety."
- "Dr. Merrill was an incessant worker and did much to place our commission on the high plane it occupies today."

Julia Dyer Merrill, MD died at her home in Chicago on May 18, 1914 from endocarditis, complicated by pneumonia. She was just 53 years old and her death was widely mourned. She was beloved as a "loyal and sympathetic friend, a woman of the highest refinement and nobility of purpose." The memorial service, held by the Medical Women's Club and Chicago Medical Society, was attended by hundreds of mourners.

This is part of a series of articles in March 2020 honoring women physicians from Northwestern University Woman's Medical School. See these other articles:

- [Isabella C. Herb, MD](#)

Selected References

- "Deaths. Julia Dyer Merrill, M.D." 1914. *Chicago Medical Recorder* 36: 370; Corwin, Arthur M. In Memoriam: Julia Dyer Merrill, M.D. [poem, p. 371].
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Credits and Acknowledgements

Thank you to Connie Guerin, relative of Julia Dyer Merrill, MD, for providing a photograph from the family's collection.

To learn more about the history of medicine or to further explore the history of Northwestern's health professional schools, please contact Galter Health Sciences Library & Learning Center's [Special Collections Department](#).

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