



Maude Abbott MD

An unwavering trailblazer with a devotion to science, Dr. Maude Abbott paved the path for future generations of women in medicine, bravely overcoming adversity. Determined to have a career in medicine at a time when the profession was only beginning to soften its views on women becoming doctors, Dr. Abbott became an international authority on cardiac disease and steadily broke down barriers many women faced when entering medicine.

A brilliant student, Dr. Abbott was one of the first women to obtain a BA from McGill University in 1890. Despite this, she was refused admission into McGill University's medical school because of her gender. However, Dr. Abbott persevered and, as the only woman in her cohort, graduated four years later with an MD from Bishop's University at the top of her class.

Upon the completion of her medical degree, Dr. Abbott was hired by McGill University in the Pathology Department. Here, she became a prolific writer, publishing numerous works on the history of medicine and nursing, and cardiology. In particular, her research focused on congenital heart disease – an interest which stemmed from the early days as a medical practitioner in Montreal. Her work was groundbreaking and, although women in medicine was still a contentious issue at the time, her research was well-received by the medical community.

In 1898, Dr. Abbott was appointed Assistant Curator, later promoted to Curator, of McGill University's Medical Museum. Dr. Abbott took on the task of preparing and cataloguing the entire medical specimen collection in the Museum, with some specimens dating as far back as sixty-five years. The results established an international reputation for the museum as it made the institution a first-rate teaching tool for medical students and a resource base for practitioners.

McGill University awarded Dr. Abbott an honorary degree in medicine in 1910 – eight years before the university would formally allow women to be accepted into their medical school.

Dr. Abbott's skills in pathology caught the interest of medical luminary Sir William Osler, who asked her to write the chapter on congenital heart disease in his classic text, "Modern Medicine". This contribution inspired Dr. Abbott's 1936 publication, "Atlas of Congenital Heart Disease", in which she outlined a new classification system for congenital heart diseases. Her text significantly improved the understanding of the heart's anatomy and laid the foundation for modern heart surgery. She became a world authority on the subject, demonstrating to the world that women could contribute to the advancement of science and medicine.

Dr. Abbott was also instrumental in forming the Federation of Medical Women of Canada and the International Association of Medical Museums. Since her death in 1940, she has been revered as a pioneer in cardiology and for her role in laying the foundation for many more women to enter into successful careers in medicine.