

Dr. Margaret MacGillivray (1845-1892)

Dr. Margaret MacGillivray was born in Dunfermline, Scotland on October 21, 1845. She was a very intelligent and cultured woman and became one of the first female physicians in Bloomington. Before coming to America, Margaret traveled extensively throughout all of Europe and the Middle East and even resided for a period of time in New Zealand. Not much is known about her life in general. Margaret most likely came to the US through the ports of New York City. She would have arrived at least a few years before she graduated from Hahnemann Medical College in Chicago in 1883. It was at this college that she received training in homeopathic medicine. The Hahnemann Medical College of Chicago was incorporated on February 15, 1855 by a group of physicians who wished to establish a college for the teaching of homeopathic medicine in Chicago.¹ After graduating from the college, she remained in Chicago for one year while practicing medicine and then moved to Bloomington to continue her practice in about 1884. When Dr. MacGillivray first arrived, she was one of the first female homeopathic physicians in Bloomington.

Homeopathic medicine was invented by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, a traditionally-educated German physician who had become “disillusioned” with traditional medical practices of the time. Those medical practices of the time were based on the ancient Greek theory of humoral pathology which taught that illness was caused by an imbalance of the four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. In order to cure these imbalances, the excess humor had to be removed. This was usually achieved through induced vomiting, sweating, laxatives, raising the patient’s temperature to “cook” the humor, or most notoriously, “bloodletting.”² Homeopathic medicine on the other hand was based two the principles: The Law of Similars and the Law of Infinitesimals. The Law of Similars, or “like cures like,” was the idea that an illness could be cured by giving the patient remedies which produced similar symptoms as the disease they were inflicted with.³ The Law of Infinitesimals stated that medicines were more effective in smaller doses as opposed to large doses because a larger dose can overwhelm a person’s system or lessen the positive effects of the medicine given.⁴ Homeopathic doctors also examined everything happening in a patient’s life, not just the symptoms. This is because homeopaths believed that it is important to treat the root cause instead of suppressing it with treatments. The actual treatments that homeopathic doctors employed were made from plants, minerals, and other natural substances and only administered once in order to allow the body to strengthen itself with as little intervention as possible.⁵

By the late 1800s there was only one other female homeopathic physician in Bloomington, Dr. Annie E. Kelso. Dr. Kelso came to Bloomington in the fall of 1888 and opened a practice with her husband, Dr. George Kelso. Dr. MacGillivray’s office was in different locations throughout the time she lived and worked in Bloomington. However,

¹ Dr. Howard R. Chislett. “Hahnemann Medical College of Chicago” in *History of Homeopathy and its Institutions in America*, by Dr. William H. King. <http://www.homeoint.org/history/king/2-12.htm> 1

² Lusinda McCray Beier. *A Matter of Life and Death, Health, Illness and Medicine in McLean County, 1830-1995*. (Bloomington, IL: McLean County Historical Society, 1996) 2-3

³ Beier, *A Matter of Life and Death*, 28-29

⁴ Marlin Ray Ingalls. *The Espy Pharmacy Records*. (Normal, IL. Illinois State University, 1986) 51-52

⁵ Steve and Aviva Waldstein. ‘Homeopathy- What is Homeopathy?’ <http://www.homeopathy-cures.com/hom.htm>

during the last few years of her life she and Dr. Annie Kelso shared a practice and their office was located at 402 Mason Street.⁶

Dr. MacGillivray never married and lived most of her life in Bloomington at 204 Seminary Avenue with a friend, Mrs. W.W. Whittier. Dr. MacGillivray passed away on January 10, 1892 after suffering from a lengthy illness. She was a member of First Baptist Church and the pastor of that church, Reverend W.B. Riley, presided over her funeral services.⁷ She was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

By: Laurie Peterson 2008

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⁶ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1891*

⁷ "Dr. Margaret M. Macgillivray," *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 11, 1892