

WOMAN DOCTOR TACKLED PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEMS

By Ellen Knight¹

Women's History Month has afforded the opportunity and challenge to bring to light women whose contributions have been overlooked while those of their male contemporaries have not. In Winchester, one of these women is Fredrika Moore, M.D.

When writing his *History of Winchester*, Henry Chapman devoted some pages to the doctors of the town. For those practicing during the early 20th century, he began with Dr. Benjamin Church, noting that Dr. Church's wife was also a physician who taught for many years at B.U. "She was an extremely handsome and brilliant woman."² He then wrote, at varying length, about 24 other male doctors. Nowhere does the name of Dr. Moore appear, although her achievements had been lauded elsewhere for her contributions to public and school health during her years in Winchester.



A teacher's daughter born in 1875, Moore was a graduate of Wellesley College (1898) and of the B.U. Medical School (1910). She was on the staff of the Massachusetts Homoeopathic Hospital in the Children's Department and lectured at the Boston University Medical School on *Materia Medica*.

She moved to Winchester in 1911 and immediately became involved in the community. "During her stay in Winchester," it was reported ten years later, "Dr. Moore has endeared herself to all who knew her, and the quiet tactfulness and common sense which she combines with her professional ability has enabled her to promote many progressive ideas in connection with public health work in the community."³

Moore joined The Fortnightly, a women's club which championed many social causes in town. Moore was on the club's Civics and Conservation Committee, which she chaired for two years, and was able to rally club support for several health causes, particularly after her appointment in 1913 as Associate School Physician, a step taken initially to avoid any objections to school examinations of female students.⁴

Moore practiced medicine at a time when scarlet fever, measles, diphtheria, typhoid fever, and other communicable diseases were annual problems. Tuberculosis was still a common affliction leading to several deaths in Winchester every year. Good principles of nutrition were not universally known, and a number of school children were undernourished and thus susceptible to contracting illnesses.

Moore addressed children's health problems in several ways. She introduced health classes and health plays for elementary school children. Also, with financial assistance from The Fortnightly, she instituted the supplementary feeding of milk to children in school.

OPEN AIR CLASSES

Another of Moore's initiatives was to bring the open-air class into Winchester. This class was begun in Boston in 1908 and was copied by other cities and towns. While keeping children in open air throughout the school year would not find favor today, it was then an approach to building the strength and resistance of children who were under par but not sickly, and it worked.

The experiment began in Winchester in 1914 with seventh-grade pupils in the Prince School building where one room was made open by opening both window sashes. Admission was at their parents' request. The Fortnightly provided special clothing—coats and bloomers made from heavy blankets and a pair of lined canvas boots—to be worn over ordinary clothing.

When height, weight, and hemoglobin of the open-air students were compared with those of another seventh-grade class, the open-air students excelled. Also, parents reported that the children's general health was better.

Parents were so impressed that the class had to be expanded the next year, and in the third year an 8th-grade open-air room had to be provided. While the School Committee could not say the pupils did better school work, it was evident that "they attack the school tasks with greater zest and end the day as fresh as when they come to school." The Committee concluded that greater care should be taken to provide an ample supply of fresh air in all school rooms. (With the construction of better ventilated schools and the decline in tuberculosis, the open-air class was discontinued.)

After leaving Winchester, Moore was able to use data gained in the Winchester schools to co-author a paper published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in 1928 as part of a three-part series titled "A Sickness Survey in Winchester, Mass."

At the beginning of her paper, she reported that "Winchester, through an interested school committee and an unusually well-informed superintendent, was one of the first towns in the state to initiate a broad school health program."

PUBLIC HEALTH

In 1915, Moore became Director of Tuberculosis for the Board of Health. "She has entire charge of the clinic and does all of the house-to-house work for patients who are not under the direct care of another physician," the Board reported.

She also had occasion to speak publicly on issues of public health, for example, giving a lecture on diet to the Special Aid Society in 1917. As her career progressed, she gave lectures in other communities.

Throughout her time in Winchester, Moore was a member and supporter of the Visiting Nurse Association, which opened the Winchester Hospital in 1912. From 1914 through 1918 she served on the Nursing Committee and chaired it for two years. She was Hospital Chairman 1918-19 and a vice-president of the Association for two years. The only other woman doctor to be a member of the Board of Directors during the hospital's first years was Adaline Church, an honorary member.

In the fall of 1921, Moore resigned her Winchester posts to accept a position as Pediatrician with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. School Physician Ralph Putnam expressed "the greatest regret" at losing her services. "For several years Dr. Moore has served the schools with diligence, and by her persuasive manner and convincing exposition of the situation confronting the department has aroused interest in civic bodies in Winchester which resulted in their hearty co-operation."

"In taking up her new duties, which have to do with child welfare," the newspaper stated, "Dr. Moore has chosen the work that has always been uppermost in her heart, and for which she has unusual fitness. We feel that the Board of Public Health has made a most fortunate selection. Dr. Moore's genuine spirit of helpfulness in every good cause will be long remembered in Winchester, and many good wishes will follow her to her new field."⁵

Dr. Moore, a member of the AMA and a senior fellow of the Massachusetts Medical Society, retired in 1945 and moved with her sister Mary (a sculptor) to Hancock, N.H., where she died on July 9, 1962 at age 87.

¹ This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Mar 17, 2011. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

² Henry Chapman, *History of Winchester*, p. 305.

³ *The Winchester Star*, Oct. 21, 1921.

⁴ *The Winchester Star*, Oct. 23, 1913.

⁵ *The Winchester Star*, Oct. 21, 1921.