

Baldwin, Jane North -- 1876-1975

Attachment #1;

At a Meeting of the Faculty of Vassar College held
December seventeenth, nineteen hundred
and seventy-five, the following
Memorial

was unanimously adopted:

Dr. Jane North Baldwin lived for ninety-nine full and intense years before she died in Poughkeepsie, New York on May 15th, 1975. She was born in Keeseville, New York on February 10, 1876, the daughter of George W. Baldwin, who was a professional photographer, and Margaret Hargraves Baldwin. She was one of the early women enrollees and graduates of Cornell University Medical School, taking her M.D. degree in 1900. She interned at the New York Infirmary for Women and Children in 1901-02 and came to Vassar College as Assistant in Physiology and Assistant Physician in 1905-06. From 1905 to 1930 she served the college as physician in the department of Health and Hygiene, and in 1930 she was promoted to Professor of Hygiene and College Physician, a position she held until her retirement in 1946 after 41 years of service to the college. She is permanently honored by the college infirmary, Baldwin House, which was completed in 1940 and named for her. Dr. Baldwin auspiciously started life in two counties. One day when she was a little girl--so the story goes--her mother took her to New York City from Albany on the dayliner to visit a sick friend in a hospital. Jane Baldwin determined there and then to become a doctor. Although not very much is on record about her preparation for her career in medicine, one presumes that the struggle to get ahead and establish herself in a man's world was no easier for her than for the other women struggling shoulder to shoulder at the beginning of the twentieth century. In accordance with the custom of the time, she entered medical school without attending college but was, however, retroactively adopted as an honorary member of the class of 1921 at Vassar.

At various times Dr. Baldwin did graduate work--in physiology at the Harvard Medical School in the summer of 1905, in internal medicine at Johns Hopkins in 1916, and at the New York Post Graduate Medical School in 1922. She was associated with MIT as a research intern in Public Health in the summer of 1935.

During her career Dr. Baldwin was on the staff of the Vanderbilt Clinic of Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City, where she was an assistant attending physician in endocrinology; and she was also on the courtesy staffs of Vassar Hospital and St. Francis Hospital in Poughkeepsie, many times presiding over the emergencies of Vassar students. She played an active role beyond the college in the medical affairs of Dutchess County. A member of the Dutchess County Medical Association and the American Medical Association, she was at various times a vice-president of the then American Student Health Association and president of the then New York State Student Health Association.

She was an honorary member of the Women's Medical Association of New York City and of the Visiting Nurses Association of Poughkeepsie. In 1950 she was honored by the Medical Society of the State of New York, and in 1951 by the Dutchess County Medical Society, in recognition of her fifty years of the practice of medicine in New York State.

Dr. Baldwin did not limit her activities to Vassar College in any narrow sense although she served Vassar long and well. She -- was a pioneer in local social service work. She was president of the board of directors of Lincoln Center for a time and was active in her retirement in senior citizens groups. She was a director of the Dutchess County Association for Senior Citizens and a member of the Gay 90's Club, -- one of the few members whose age marked the distinction of the name.

Throughout her career, Dr. Baldwin had a very strong feeling for her vocation. Her efforts to improve the health education and the health service at Vassar resulted in the modern facilities and in the enlightened attitudes characteristic of her administration. The Vassar Alumnae Magazine of July 1, 1936 quoted Dr. Baldwin, when asked for the story of her life, as replying that Vassar needed a new infirmary. A new infirmary was finally built at the time of Vassar's 75th Anniversary and named in her honor. In 1933 the doctors' offices, previously crowded into the front Southwest wing of Main Building, had moved to the old gym space in Ely which was made vacant by the opening of Kenyon Hall. In the new quarters in Ely there were fourteen consulting and waiting rooms--including a separate one for colds in the head. There were four physicians (including one psychiatrist and one pediatrician) and nine nurses. But Dr. Baldwin was not content with the total situation since she persisted in thinking that the infirmary, a beautiful New England reproduction built in 1901 with funds donated by the family of Charles Swift, was badly adapted for desired improvements in infirmary care. As the saying was "Swift Infirmary, quick recovery." She pushed, therefore, for the modern facility which was designed by Faulkner and Kingsbury and built and dedicated in 1940.

Dr. Baldwin was friendly, outgoing, concerned, intense, serious and humorous. She was a woman of high moral standards and of great humaneness. She put herself out for others. In 1945, (for example) she spent her summer vacation on the staff of Vassar Brothers Hospital in order that a regular staff doctor might be released for rest. A typical Baldwinian act!

The Class of 1921, her adopted Alma Mater, officially celebrated her 90th birthday with a banquet. At that dinner the story was told that Henry Noble MacCracken cited Dr. Baldwin for bravery. Dr. Baldwin, he recalled, was the younger assistant in her first years of Dr. Elizabeth Thelberg, her rather more formidable female predecessor, known as Dr. T. One fall year the two of them -- Dr. T. and Dr. B. -- were, as usual, examining freshmen in the annual initial medical examination lineup. Recording a student's family history, --Dr. Thelberg asked the frightened freshman -- "And what was the cause

of your grandfather's death? '

– Freshman: He was assassinated.

Dr. T.: Good Heavens, child, what did he do?

Freshman; He was president--President Garfield.

Dr. T.: (turning to Dr. B.) Did you know this?

Dr. B.: Of course.

Dr. T.: Then why didn't you tell me?

Dr (quietly): You didn't give me a chance."

Dr. Baldwin's driving became part of the folklore of College Avenue in her later years. All the affectionate residents knew enough to drive to the side of the road and stop when Dr. Baldwin honking her horn as she came, pulled out of her driveway. She was still driving her car with gusto, pleasure, and indiscretion in her nineties.

For all generations, Dr. Baldwin has been immortalized in certain Vassar class songs, among them three sung by two members of this Memorial Committee. The first: "Where Oh Where are the Verdant Freshmen?"

Where oh where are the verdant freshmen?

Where oh where are the verdant freshmen?

Where oh where are the verdant freshmen?

Safe now in their trundle beds.

They've gone out from Baldwin's hygiene,

They've gone out from Lockwood's English,

They've gone out from Dicky's music

Safe now in their trundle beds.

The second: "The Hygiene Song", arranged by Martha Alter '25 from words and tune originally composed by the Class of 1919.

Oh we never used to bathe – Till we heard the Doctor rave

In the lectures that she gave – How to behave

Now we take our daily bath – Even tho we miss our Math.

How in the world do you know that? She told us so!

In this case, as in many others, the song was reworked by the ingenious ad-lib inventions of subsequent generations of students, but it did not take too much ingenuity occasionally to substitute Dr. B. for Dr. T. as the song sank deeply into the college's musical folklore. In 1927, then, the song could include:

When we heard from Dr. B.

Of our ancient pedigree

Traced back to the Cambrian Sea

Much impressed were we,

Though they say man and baboon

are but a minute in a long afternoon

How in the world do you know that?

She told us so.

The post-Darwinian Doctor of hygiene has now become Dr. B. rather than Dr. T.

And finally in the song "Matthew Vassar's Generous Heart" composed by the Class of 1935 to the tune of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More," we have Dr. B. coming into her own as the

original dedicatee of the lines in the second verse:

Matthew Vassar's generous heart

Found a brain in every lass,

So he made his beer and college here

For the good of the Freshman class.

"Hygiene, hygiene, hy," said the Freshmen,

"Thank you, Dr. B.

I know all about the scurvy and the sanitary
survey

and the inside parts of me."

Ida Treat Bergeret

Velma Gooding

Jean K. Stevenson

Elizabeth Daniels