

Dr. Anna Littlefield

Dr. Anna Littlefield was a great woman of art, science, and determination. She was born December 1, 1859 and passed away in 1952 at 92 years old after practicing medicine for 50 years. Dr. Anna had an incredible love for the fauna and flora around her. She founded the New London Garden Club in 1928, and served as its president.

As she bloomed from a curious young girl to a bright and intelligent woman in the 1880s and 90s, she became an accomplished painter of intricate images of flowers and plants. Her brother, Ira, then a teenager, would go with her to pick flowers for her to draw. Her artistic skills were not limited to flora, she completed a book on birds and painted many self-portraits and portraits of relatives.

Anna taught at Colby Academy (now Colby-Sawyer College) during the 1880s. She taught art to young students in the main building (what we know today as Colgate) until it caught fire and burned to the ground. Because it was Mountain Day, a day where everyone takes off from the campus to hike Mt. Kearsarge, no one was hurt, but many of her paintings were lost in the fire. Luckily much of her artwork was at her grandson's home, just down the road from the college.

After the building burned, Anna decided that this was God's way of telling her to follow her childhood dreams of being a physician. At the time, there were no woman physician role-models, but two of her uncles had been physicians. Anna tried to enroll in Dartmouth where one of her uncles had studied, but was turned away because she was a woman, and Dartmouth was a college for men only. She explained that she knew it was for men only, but she wanted the same opportunity as the men. The dean advised her to apply to the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia. So, from 1892 to 1895 she studied in Philadelphia, and after receiving her MD, went to The Philadelphia Polyclinic and College, where she had interned earlier, for graduate studies in medicine.

A year later, on May 1, 1896, Dr. Anna began her practice in New London. She was officially the first woman doctor in the New London area, and possibly the first woman doctor of New Hampshire. She kept her office in the house in which she was raised. Her grandson and great-great-grandchildren are still living in this house.

When she began her practice, most of her patients were woman and children. Her medical skills included surgery. She repaired a cleft palate of a child who grew up and became a speech therapist, personally crediting Dr. Anna for her skill.

Dr. Anna was instrumental in creating the first New London Hospital in 1919 with two other doctors, Dr. Griffon and Dr. Lamson. She continued to be a valuable asset to the community making house calls in winter when she would trudge through snow on snow shoes that her brother had made her. She would also travel by sleigh if possible, and slog through mud roads since paved roads hadn't come to New London. Stan Spiller, a writer for *The Speaker* in 1939 remarked that "There are still families in town and in the vicinity who can recall the days when Dr. Anna came trudging over waist-high snow drifts or through knee-deep mud to make her calls." Truly, Dr. Anna was a woman who cared deeply about her patients.