

## **Dr. Caroline M. McGill**

Caroline McGill was born near Mansfield, Ohio in 1879, but grew up on a farm in the Ozarks after her family moved to Missouri when she was just five.

The young girl loved school, and did very well. Eventually, she graduated from the Lebanon Normal School with a teaching certificate in 1901 when she was only 15. From there she went on to the University of Missouri where she earned her Bachelor's degree in science and a Master's degree in zoology. She continued on to earn a PhD in anatomy and physiology in 1908, the first woman to earn a PhD at that university. In 1909, she received a fellowship that funded a year of further study in Europe, and she used that to study at the in Germany and Italy.



Caroline began her career by teaching at the university's medical school. Students remembered McGill as an excellent instructor, and the university offered her a full professorship. Instead, in 1911, she accepted an offer to come to the Murray Hospital in Butte as a pathologist, the first such specialist within the state. She wasn't certain her decision was the right one, but she was determined to go. Working with miners battling tuberculosis led her to become an advocate for community health proposals that could help prevent the spread of the disease.

After starting work in Butte, she decided to complete her medical education. For the next several years, she lived part of the time in Butte and partly in Baltimore, earning her MD from Johns Hopkins University in 1914. She graduated with the highest scholastic ranking in her class. Though offered a residency there, she returned to Butte, where she opened an office as an internist.

Dr. McGill treated everyone from all walks of life, and did so respectfully. She quickly gained a reputation as a gifted diagnostician, an expert in immunology, and was appreciated for her willingness to make house calls. She also educated women about the then unmentionable topic of birth control. She remained in private practice in Butte for some forty years.

McGill found a pastime she loved in studying Montana history, and collecting artifacts related to that history. Some of those artifacts came to her through her patients who could not afford to pay her, so they would barter with her instead. Other objects were found in Butte's secondhand stores, or purchased out of the barns and attics of her rural patients.

McGill also loved hunting, and while hunting, she discovered and purchased the 320 Ranch in the Gallatin canyon, not far from the northwest corner of Yellowstone National

Park. Eventually, McGill purchased a total of some four thousand acres around the park, to protect access areas from development. She was later honored with a lifetime membership to the Montana Wilderness Association for her actions supporting conservation.

Dr. McGill retired from her active practice in Butte in 1956. Her passion for Montana's history now came to the fore. She partnered with historian Merrill G. Burlingame to found a museum on the campus of Montana State University. She encouraged friends to donate objects as well, but her own collection of thousands of documents, artifacts and antiques became the nucleus of the museum that became the Museum of the Rockies. When the museum was first being established in some old Quonset huts on the campus, McGill lived in one of the buildings as she organized and cataloged the collection.

Caroline McGill passed away in 1959 at the age of 79, shortly before the museum's official opening.

#### Sources:

*Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, "A True Pioneer: Caroline McGill", by Rob Chaney, March 11, 1997

*Great Falls Tribune*, "'Woman of Distinction' Describes Dr. Caroline McGill", by Mary Redfield Lindsey, December 28, 1958

Montana Historical Society, "Dr. Caroline M. McGill (1879-1959) 'A Remarkable Life'", retrieved 10/18/19 from <https://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/education/bios/mcgill.pdf>

Women's History Matters, "A 'Compassionate Heart' and 'Keen Mind': The Life of Doctor Caroline McGill", posted March 27, 2014, retrieved 10/18/19 from <http://montanawomenshistory.org/a-compassionate-heart-and-keen-mind-the-life-of-doctor-caroline-mcgill/>

Wikipedia, "Caroline M. McGill", retrieved 10/18/19 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caroline\\_M.McGill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caroline_M.McGill)

#### Photo Credit:

Dr. Caroline McGill, public domain, retrieved 10/18/19 from <https://medicine.missouri.edu/news/women-pioneers-set-example-school-medicine>