

DR. CAROLINE M. MCGILL (1879–1959)

“A REMARKABLE LIFE”

“Dr. Caroline McGill represented a harmonious union of healing, humanism, and science... She loved the West, she loved her community, and she loved her profession. Her life has symmetry and beauty.”

—Pierce C. Mullen, Ph.D., Montana State University

At a time when American women received only grudging recognition, Caroline McGill set high her professional goals and then exceeded them. She combined a lifelong commitment to medicine with her interests in the arts and the environment, and she developed into a person of wisdom and charm.

Caroline McGill was born in Ohio in 1879—one of five children. Her family moved to a hardscrabble farm in the Missouri Ozarks when she was five, and she excelled in school. In 1901 Caroline graduated from the Lebanon Normal School with a lifetime teaching certificate.

From the University of Missouri she received a B.A. in science (1904), and M.A. in zoology (1905), and a Ph.D. in anatomy and physiology (1908). She graduated Phi Beta Kappa and was the first woman to receive a doctorate from that institution. Caroline taught at the University of Missouri Medical School and then studied on the Sarah Beliner Scholarship (1910).

In 1911 Caroline accepted a position at the Murray Hospital in Butte as Montana’s first trained pathologist. She received her M.D. in internal medicine from Johns Hopkins University in 1916 and opened her Butte office as an internist in the same year. Quickly she became known statewide for her diagnostic skills, her willingness to make house calls, and her expertise in immunology.

During the course of a forty-year career as a physician in Butte, Dr. McGill never married. Rather, she devoted her time to her patients, to the study of Montana history, and to the collection of antiques and collectibles. Her love of hunting drew her to the Gallatin Canyon, where she purchased the 320 Ranch in 1936. Dr. McGill subsequently accumulated more than four thousand acres of land to protect access corridors to Yellowstone National Park. In 1959 she was named a Lifetime Member of the Montana Wilderness Association, honoring her commitment to regional conservation.

“Doctor” retired from her Butte practice in 1956 and launched a new campaign. Her antique collection became

the core of a museum on the campus of Montana State University—and that project developed into the Museum of the Rockies.

Upon her death in 1959, eulogizers called Dr. McGill a compassionate scholar, a working humanist, and a dedicated scientist. She had mixed a lifetime of Irish wit with a commitment to the people of Montana. Undaunted, Caroline McGill enjoyed a remarkable career in an age still awakening to the capabilities of women.

