

Dr. Margaret MacGillivray (1845-1892)

Dr. Margaret MacGillivray was born in Dunfermline, Scotland, on October 21, 1845. She was a smart and cultured woman and became one of the first female doctors in Bloomington. Before coming to the U.S., Margaret traveled all around Europe and the Middle East, and even lived in New Zealand for a while. Not much is known about her life, but she probably arrived in the U.S. through New York City. She graduated from Hahnemann Medical College in Chicago in 1883, where she studied homeopathic medicine. The college was founded in 1855 by doctors who wanted to teach homeopathy in Chicago. After graduating, Margaret stayed in Chicago for a year, practicing medicine, before moving to Bloomington in about 1884 to continue her work. She was one of the first female homeopathic doctors in the city.

Homeopathy is a type of medicine created by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, a German doctor who became frustrated with traditional medical practices of the time. These older practices believed that illness was caused by an imbalance in the body's four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. To fix this imbalance, doctors would use methods like vomiting, sweating, laxatives, or even bloodletting. Homeopathy was based on two main ideas: the "Law of Similars" (the idea that a disease can be cured by taking remedies that produce similar symptoms) and the "Law of Infinitesimals" (the idea that smaller doses of medicine are more effective than larger ones). Homeopathic doctors looked at the whole life of a patient, not just their symptoms, because they believed it was important to treat the root cause of the problem rather than just covering up the symptoms. They used natural substances like plants and minerals to create remedies that would help the body heal on its own.

By the late 1800s, there was only one other female homeopathic doctor in Bloomington, Dr. Annie E. Kelso. Dr. Kelso came to the city in 1888 and opened a practice with her husband, Dr. George Kelso. Toward the end of her life, Dr. MacGillivray and Dr. Kelso shared a practice, which was located at 402 Mason Street.

Dr. MacGillivray never married and spent most of her life in Bloomington at 204 Seminary Avenue, where she lived with her friend, Mrs. W.W. Whittier. Dr. MacGillivray passed away on January 10, 1892, after a long illness. Her funeral was led by Reverend W.B. Riley from the First Baptist Church, and she was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.