A review of “The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine” (*New England Journal of Medicine*, March 20, 1997) erroneously stated that cardiologist Helen Taussig (Fig. 1) was the first female full Professor at the Johns Hopkins Medical School (JHMS). In fact, Florence Sabin (Fig. 2) in 1917 was the first (1). Underlying this seeming trivial mistake, however, lies an enlightening historical footnote relevant to both lymphology and the struggle of women in medicine in the United States.

Although Johns Hopkins was the first major university in the United States to open its doors to female medical students, this trail-blazing event took place over vigorous objections from the all male faculty and only when the monies needed to open the hospital and medical school were authorized by a group of well-to-do women of Baltimore with the quid pro quo that women be admitted to JHMS on an equal footing with men (2). That prejudice persisted sub rosa, however, is illustrated by the experiences of an early female graduate, Dorothy Reed (Fig. 3) (descriptor of the Reed-Sternberg cell in Hodgkin disease). Reed, later Mendenhall, became so disillusioned by her treatment from male colleagues and teachers at JHMS that she eventually abandoned academia and returned to practice in the midwestern United States (3,4). Ultimately, she received worldwide acclaim for her work on behalf of child welfare and maternal health care (5).

The career of Sabin is also instructive. Under the tutelage of her mentor Franklin Mall (Fig. 4) (first Professor of Anatomy at JHMS), she made major contributions to understanding the development of the brain and the embryology of the lymphatic system. In a series of meticulous dissections of piglet embryos after careful needle injection of Prussian blue and India ink into selective anatomic sites, Sabin brilliantly documented that lymphatic vessels derive from central
Fig. 2. Florence Sabin—before Taussig the first women full Professor at Johns Hopkins Medical School. Her delineation of the embryology of the brain and lymphatic system brought her international acclaim.

Fig. 3. Dorothy Reed (Mendenhall). Like Sabin an early graduate of Johns Hopkins Medical School and a describer of the Reed-Sternberg cell as a key marker of Hodgkin disease. Before Reed, Hodgkin disease was thought to be a form of tuberculosis.

Fig. 4. Franklin Mall—chief mentor of Florence Sabin. The latter’s biography of Mall (11) reflects the development of scientific medicine in the United States and in particular Mall’s far-reaching insight into medical education including the full-time medical school system of physician-scientists in the clinical departments.

vein blind sacs by sprouting of the endothelial lining and thereafter spreading peripherally (6-9). Before then, lymphatics were thought to arise from celomic cavities (i.e., peripherally) and then coalesce centrally to form endothelial lined channels. By 1905 she was promoted to Associate Professor of Anatomy (1) and by 1917 her worldwide acclaim earned her a full Professorship. Nonetheless, JHMS refused to designate a woman as full Professor of Anatomy on a par with men, and instead carved out a special title, namely Professor of Histology. After Mall’s premature death (at 55 years from cholecystitis), Sabin, despite her international recognition as an established physician-scientist, was bypassed for the Chairmanship of the Department of Anatomy. Nonetheless, she ultimately became the first woman inductee into the National Academy of Sciences.
(1925), and her statue decorates Statuary Hall in the Capitol in Washington, D.C. as one of the two honored native Colorado "sons". Parenthetically, even the appointment of Helen Taussig as Professor (in Pediatrics) at JHMS was long overdue, an award made many years after her international preeminence was well established as a cardiologist and, in conjunction with surgeon Alfred Blalock, the originator of the “blue baby operation” (subclavian artery to pulmonary artery shunt) for tetratology of Fallot (10).

REFERENCES


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