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Women and Children First

The
Trailblazing
Life of
Susan
Dimock,
M.D.

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\$39.95 softcover (6 x 9) 2023
Ca. 45 photos, notes, bibliography, index
ISBN 978-1-4766-9248-7 Ebook 978-1-4766-5046-3

In 19th-century America, it was assumed that woman patients would be treated by male doctors. The idea of a “woman doctor” was deemed by many to lie somewhere between unfathomable and repugnant. Then along came Susan Dimock. A young North Carolinian who dreamed of becoming a physician, and grew up to practice medicine in Boston, Dimock was not the first American woman to battle the patriarchal medical establishment. But in the 1870s, she was arguably the best-educated, most-skilled woman surgeon in the nation as well as living proof that a woman could be competent, smart, lovely, and kind—all in the same package.

Dimock’s life reads like an adventure story, from recoiling at slave auctions and witnessing Civil War battles to escaping her fire-engulfed Southern hometown, then finding her place among Boston’s most enterprising women. She studied medicine in Zurich and Vienna, hiked the Swiss Alps, executed complex surgeries, and trained America’s first professional nurses, ultimately inspiring a new generation of female surgeons. It’s no surprise that a prestigious Viennese medical professor, when asked for advice to aspiring young doctors, replied simply, “Make yourself to be like Miss Dimock.” This biography is the first to give Susan Dimock her rightful place in medical, women’s, and world history.

Susan Wilson is the official House Historian of the Omni Parker House in Boston, an Affiliate Scholar at the Women’s Studies Research Center of Brandeis University, and an Honorary Fellow of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

“Impeccable scholarship and graceful prose...With love and literary panache, Wilson has brought the brilliant young Boston surgeon up out of the waves to life again”—Diana Rowan Rockefeller, trustee, Authors Guild Foundation

“Reading Susan Wilson’s biography of Susan Dimock is like taking a master class in writing a compelling biography. Dr. Dimock managed to pack so much into her 28 years of life that one longs for a different conclusion and more years of productivity. I loved this book. And at the end, I wept.”—Jane A Petro, MD, FACS, FAACS

“Offers a fresh perspective on post-Civil War Boston, and the ambitions of women in medical learning and practice.”—Kathy Kottaridis, executive director, Historic Boston Incorporated

“A wonderfully readable account of one of the first women surgeons in the United States....As a physician who has worked for several decades at the Dimock Center, it was wonderful to learn the stories behind the old plaques and buildings of this campus and be reminded of its amazing history.”—Nandini Sengupta, MD, MPH Chief Medical Officer, The Dimock Center

“At last, a biography of Dr. Susan Dimock!...Thanks to Wilson, Dimock now takes her proper place among the pantheon of pioneer women doctors in America.”—Virginia G. Drachman, Ph. D., author, *Hospital with a Heart: The Paradox of Separatism at the New England Hospital for Women and Children, 1862-1969*;

“A must read for anyone seeking to become victorious over the challenges to their dreams and destiny”
—Leesa Jones, co-founder and curator, Washington Waterfront Underground Railroad Museum.

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