
Eleanor Campbell

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Written sources about Eleanor Campbell are scant. Much of the information in this chapter comes from Robert E. Harvey, great-grandson of Dr. Campbell's, who lent us many family documents. _____

Eleanor Anderson Campbell was a woman larger than life. She came from a wealthy New York family. She went to medical school for the specific purpose of being able to help the poor. She founded the Judson Health Center and ran it for thirty-three years, setting standards in preventive medicine at a time when preventive care had not yet made it to the agenda of public health. She was beautiful.

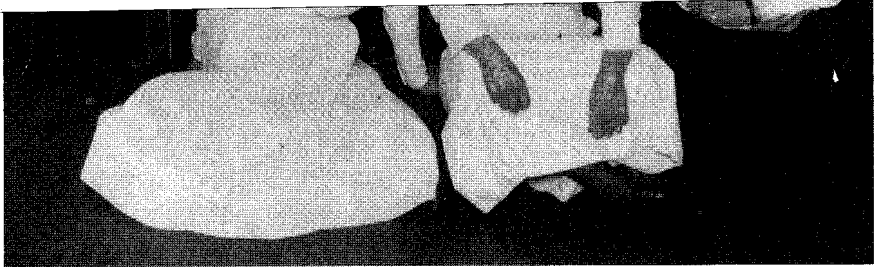
Why is so little known about this amazing woman? The only public sources available for a glimpse into her personal life are her obituary in the *New York Times* of December 30, 1959; an entry in the 1975 edition of the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (and even that article spends more space on the clinic than on Eleanor); and *The Milbank Memorial Fund: Its Leaders and Its Work*, a 1975 work written by Clyde Vernon Kiser for the Milbank Memorial Fund.

Eleanor was born on March 2, 1878, to Abram Archibald Anderson, an artist, and Elizabeth Milbank Anderson. Her mother was a noted philanthropist with an early interest in public health and in women's education—she donated more than \$1,000,000 to Barnard College, and that college's Milbank Hall was named after her. Large sums of money also went to the Children's Aid Society and the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor.

Eleanor's father, Colonel Anderson, was an artist of some note. His portrait of Thomas Alva Edison hangs in the National Gallery in Washington, DC. He was also an all-round bon vivant, spending



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The staff of the Judson Health Center in 1921. Dr. Campbell is seated in the center.

about ten years in Paris pursuing his art while his family stayed in New York. When he was not in Paris, he oversaw Palette Ranch in Wyoming, a large development where he tried his hand at raising cattle and horses. All this was made possible by his wife's money. Anderson was instrumental in creating the Yellowstone Forest Reserve in 1902, and President Roosevelt named him superintendent. In 1933 Anderson published *Experiences and Impressions: An Autobiography of Colonel A. A. Anderson*. In this curious little book, Anderson talks about his life as an artist and as a rancher. He devotes three chapters to various bear hunts but none to his family life. Only at the end does he describe Mrs. Anderson, after she has died, as a



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Dr. Campbell examines one of several boys while the mother looks on, 1925.

woman who “naturally encountered differences of opinion” but whose “every act was inspired by unselfish and noble motives.” There is a chapter each for Eleanor, of whose accomplishments as the director of Judson Health Center he was very proud, and his granddaughter, who died at age twenty-five. He never mentions that he also had a son, Jeremiah Milbank Anderson, who died at age seven of diphtheria.

Elizabeth Milbank Anderson ascribed the death of her son to the unsanitary conditions of New York City. She began donating money to have bathhouses built in the area of New York City where she and Eleanor lived. The death of her brother and her mother’s reaction to it must have made a deep impression on Eleanor, who was eight years old at the time.

As a girl of thirteen or fourteen, Eleanor accompanied an older cousin on a tour of tenements on the Lower East Side (this was called “slumming”). Even at this age Eleanor understood how demeaning and condescending the visit was to the women they saw.

The *New York Times* notes that she was “shocked by the sights and by the futility of her cousin’s gifts and well-meant advice.” The memory of that trip stayed with her.

Eleanor attended the Brearly School and Miss Spence’s School for Girls in New York, graduating in 1896. She attended Bryn Mawr College from 1896 to 1898. Practically nothing is known about the next fourteen years, except that she enjoyed the social life and the pastimes afforded to the rich in New York. On April 7, 1904, Eleanor married John Stewart (Jack) Tanner, a medical doctor from Kentucky. As a wedding gift, Mrs. Anderson bought her son-in-law a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, and Jack Tanner became a stockbroker. In 1905 Eleanor and Jack had a daughter whom they christened Elizabeth Milbank Tanner, followed two years later by a boy, Milbank Tanner, who died at birth.

In 1910, Eleanor divorced her husband. He had made a trip to Paris alone, and word came back—through a private detective hired by her mother—that he had engaged in a relationship unbecoming a married man. Eleanor was willing to forgive him, but her mother, not wanting her daughter to have the same lonely marriage as she, insisted on a divorce. Eleanor’s relationship with her mother became strained at this point.

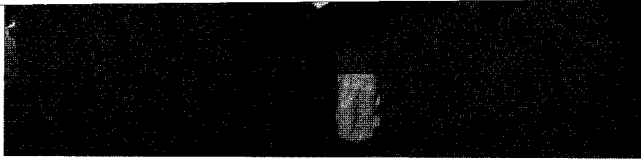
In 1912, when she was thirty-four years old, Eleanor entered Boston University Medical School. Her daughter, who was seven at the time, lived with her maternal grandmother, who legally adopted the girl and renamed her Elizabeth Milbank Anderson, II. Eleanor received her M.D. in 1916 and spent two years as an interne in hospitals in New York City and Boston.

On January 1, 1918, Eleanor married Frederick Barber Campbell, a lawyer. What happened to that marriage cannot be found in public records, but by 1921 Eleanor was again divorced.

In 1920 Dr. Campbell began discussions with A. Ray Petty, senior minister of Judson Memorial Church, about a health center for the large Italian immigrant population just south of the church. The Judson Health Center opened its doors in January 1921. During the first eighteen months, the clinic used the basement of the church, but soon the program outgrew the space. In July 1922 the clinic moved next door into Judson House, where it occupied most of the building until 1950.



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Mayor Vincent Impellitteri of New York City presents a testimonial scroll to Dr. Campbell, March 15, 1951.

From 1921 to 1954 Dr Campbell ran the clinic and was its senior medical doctor. It was mostly her own money that kept it going, especially at the beginning. In later years, the Health Department of New York City paid for immunizations and for some of the salaries. The clinic also received financial help from the Greater New York Fund and was the beneficiary of various fundraising events.

One such event stands out. In 1936, friends of Dr. Campbell's among the very rich of New York organized a show of paintings as a fundraiser. The exhibit, held at the Schaeffer Galleries on 57th Street, was called The Great Dutch Masters and included paintings by Frans Hals, Meindert Hobbema, Pieter de Hooch, Jacob van Ruisdael, and Rembrandt!

Alongside her work as the director of the Judson Health Center, Dr. Campbell also was heavily involved in the well-being of Deering, New Hampshire, a small town that she had begun to visit annually in the 1920s. In 1925 she bought an old farm there. Ray Petty, Judson's minister, also bought property, as did several other prominent Protestant families. This was the beginning of a growing colony of summer houses around Deering Lake. Not content with one property, Dr. Campbell kept adding farms and lots to her holdings; fifteen years later she owned 2,000 acres in and around Deering.

Spending summers in this rural community, Dr. Campbell realized that unfavorable health conditions and lack of proper medical care were not restricted to city slums. The Deering Health Center, financed by Dr. Campbell, opened its doors in 1927. In 1930 she created the Deering Community Center. Every summer the center held a camp for religious instruction, where entire families could come to enjoy the country and listen to good preaching. Ministers associated with this program were A. Ray Petty and Daniel A. Poling, a prominent clergyman who later, during World War II, preached at many active fronts at the invitation of General Eisenhower.

Through the Deering Foundation, Eleanor Campbell also paid for the college education of many young people who could not otherwise have attended.

Dr. Campbell's daughter, Elizabeth, was married to Henry Adams Ashforth. They had two children: Eleanor and Henry. Elizabeth died in 1930 of a streptococcal infection (this was before penicillin), and the Deering Center became a monument to her memory.

In 1951 Mayor Vincent R. Impellitteri of New York gave Dr. Campbell a testimonial scroll for "her fine efforts and accomplishments" on the occasion of the Center's thirtieth anniversary.

In 1954 Dr. Campbell retired. She was seventy-six years old. For another two years she was the clinic's president, and in 1956 she was made honorary general director. In 1957, the government of Italy awarded her its Star of Italian Solidarity for her help to Italian-Americans.

Eleanor Campbell died in Scarsdale, New York, on December 29, 1959, at age eighty-one.

We know that Eleanor Campbell was a lifelong Baptist and that she was a Republican. We know very little else about her as a person. She was a strong-willed woman, and especially toward the end

of her career she became autocratic, used to having her way. Even friends described her as “difficult.” There are no records of how her daughter’s death affected her. If anything, it seemed to have propelled her to work even harder for better health conditions.

One thing is clear, though: Eleanor Campbell was an exceptional woman who made a difference in the lives of thousands of families.