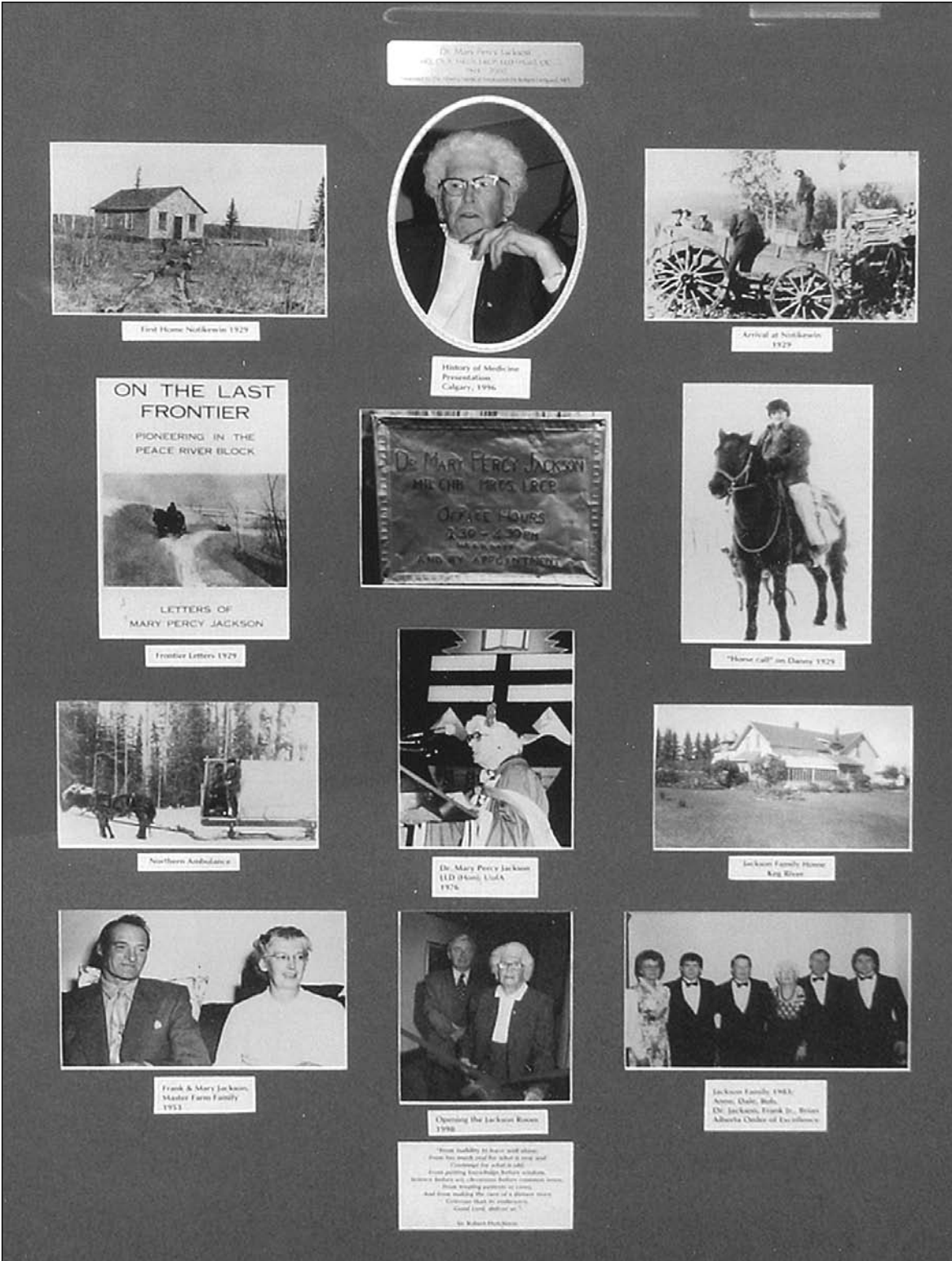




28-1

**MARY PERCY JACKSON, MB, MRCS
1904-2000**



The Dr. Mary Percy Jackson Room
CMA Alberta House
Collage Presented, 2001

MARY PERCY JACKSON, MB, MRCS 1904-2000

*"I've got the whole valley to myself. There's not a light to be seen.
There's something overpowering about the size of Canada".⁽¹⁾*

Introduction

Dr. Mary Evangeline Percy along with Drs. Helen O'Brien and Elizabeth Rogers came to northern Alberta in 1929, as the first three provincial physicians. They were recruited from the British Isles and were joined by a fourth physician, who came from the University of Western Ontario, Dr. Margaret Strang. A fifth physician, Dr. Margaret Owens, joined them later that year.⁽²⁾ She stayed for six years before moving to Winnipeg. All five participated in the extension of medical services to the sparsely-populated Peace River and northern Alberta communities that could not afford them.⁽³⁾

The program was similar to the Municipal Doctors program in Saskatchewan, with a difference. The doctors were paid by the provincial government not the municipality.⁽⁴⁾ The leaders behind the initiative were Health Minister George Hoadley and Deputy Minister Dr. Malcolm Bow. They were endeavouring to extend the 1919 District Nurse and 1924 summer-time Traveling Medical Clinic programs to provide services to the aboriginal, métis and sparsely-settled rural regions of Alberta.

The recruitment program was materially assisted by the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf Society (Anglican Church), which paid for the passage of the three British physicians.⁽⁵⁾ Drs. Percy (Jackson) and Strang

(Savage) later married and remained active practitioners in Northern Alberta for the remainder of their medical careers.

Dr. Percy was assigned to the most northerly district – Notikewan – which was seventy miles north of the town of Peace River. Her closest colleagues were Drs. L.J. O'Brien and Carlisle in Peace River and Dr. H. Hamman in Fort Vermilion. Dr. Percy's home was fifteen miles west of the Peace River and four miles north of the future town of Manning. Her July 1929 arrival came just four months before the stock market crash in October and the onset of the Great Depression.

When Dr. Percy signed the Alberta contract she had planned to stay only until an obstetrical opportunity came available in Calcutta, India. By the fall of 1929 she had fallen in love with the Peace River country. She was attracted by the adventurousness, spirit, excitement, and novelty of the area. As she later noted, "People here succeed or fail entirely on their own abilities, and though their life is hard, there is something clean and honest about it".⁽⁶⁾ The medical isolation that was part of her choice never crossed her mind.⁽⁷⁾

As Dr. Percy's attachment to the Peace River country grew, so did the homesteaders' affection and respect for her. The attachment became permanent, when

1. Jackson, Mary P. *On the Last Frontier. Pioneering in the Peace River Block. The Letters of Mary Percy Jackson*, page 53. Letter #29, November 11, 1929, Sheldon Press, London, 1933.
2. Hellstedt, Leone G. "Margaret Owens," pages 79-84, in *Women Physicians of the World*. Hemisphere Publishing 1978. Apparently Premier Aberhart didn't like female doctors so Dr. Owens moved to Winnipeg in 1936. Dr. Owens' Xmas 1938 letter from Irene Parlbay entitled "We miss you in Alberta" was reprinted in *The Country Doctors* by H. Chatenay on pages 59-60. Dr. Owens was President of the Medical Women's International Association, as was Dr. Leone Hellstedt, the gold medalist in the first UofA MD class of 1925. A life story of Dr. Margaret (Strang) Savage, *The Indomitable Savage* (40 pages), was written by Isobel McFadden, and published by the United Church, circa 1965.
3. Johnstone, Eugene M. "Medical Care of Settlers in Outlying Districts," *AMB* 3(4):17-19, October 1938.
4. Bow, Malcolm R. "Health and the State," presented at the Third Conference on the Medical Services in Canada pages 23-27, November 21, 22, 1929, Kings Printer Ottawa, 1930. In the fall of 1929, there were eleven doctors in Alberta on part time or full time health officer contracts, as well as the four provincial doctors paid by the province. Further references to municipal doctors in Alberta appear in the introduction by J.D. McGinnis' to "Suitable for the Wilds" on page 16 (Dr. M.P. Jackson); H.C. Jamieson's *Early Medicine in Alberta*, pages 138-140 (female doctors); the Government Report of the (White/Pattinson) "Inquiry into State Medicine" tabled in February 1929; Dr. G.M. McDougall and F.C. Harris' *Medical Clinics and Physicians in Southern Alberta*, pages 3-12. and R. Lampards "The Roots of Medicare in Canada are in Alberta" in Part 2.
5. McGinnis, Janice D. Introduction to *Suitable for the Wilds. Letters from Northern Alberta 1929-1931*, pages 17-19, 32-33, University of Toronto Press, 1995.
6. Jackson, Mary P. Obituary. *Peace River Record – Gazette*, pages B-1, C-2, May 16, 2000.
7. Hacker, Carlotta *The Indomitable Lady Doctors*, pages 215-218, Clarke Irwin, 1974.

Frank Jackson a British born widower twelve years her senior, proposed to Dr. Percy in early 1931. He had been in the Peace country since taking up a homestead at Keg River in 1919. The marriage moved Dr. Jackson another eighty miles north to Keg River, an area with few Treaty Indians and fewer settlers. It also deprived her of the 1931 provincial doctor income of \$2400 per year plus a drug allowance. A petition for funding from the Keg River community only led to a government gift of one gallon of cough mixture, one gallon of cod liver oil, one gallon of Lysol and one gallon of white liniment.⁽⁸⁾

Dr. Jackson provided medical care to a 1,000 square mile area, by horseback, dogsled and later by car, to the frontier settlers who were determined to survive and succeed. Her reputation spread, as she organized evacuations of acutely ill patients to Edmonton by weather-dependent aircraft. Her judgment gained her the respect of the Keg River community and her medical colleagues six hundred miles to the south in Edmonton.⁽⁹⁾ With her husband Frank, the two hardy pioneers became a medical/surgical team on call twenty-four hours a day for decades.

From Youth to MD 1904-1929

Mary Percy was born in Dudley near Malvern, Worcestershire, England, on December 27, 1904. She had two brothers Leslie and Geoffrey and one sister, Lena. By the time Mary was eleven, she had decided to become a doctor. Accepted into the Birmingham Medical School she graduated in 1927, receiving the Queen's prize for the highest marks in Medicine, Surgery and Midwifery. As an intern in the Birmingham General Maternity Hospital and Children's Hospital, she gave over one thousand anesthetics and performed over thirteen hundred antenatal assessments and deliveries.⁽¹⁰⁾

An advertisement in the British Medical Journal on February 23, 1929 caught her eye. "Strong, energetic medical woman with post-graduate experience in midwifery, wanted for country work in Western



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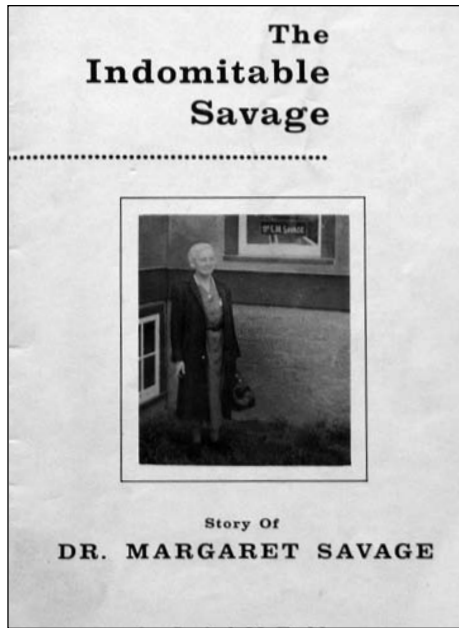
Four Municipal Doctors with the Traveling Clinic, 1929 (L-R) Drs. M. Owens, E. Rogers, M. Percy, H. O'Brien

Canada".⁽¹¹⁾ In the cable correspondence that followed, Dr. Percy was told riding a horse would be an advantage because there were no roads, telephones or hospitals. Since she was "all bum and bosom" and "it was near the Rocky Mountains" on the map and "Rocky Mountain spotted fever sounded exotic",⁽¹²⁾ she decided to give it a try, but not before spending a week gaining experience pulling teeth in the dental hospital. Two other female physicians responded to the British advertisement and came with her to Alberta: Drs. Elizabeth Rogers and Helen O'Brien. They joined shortly by Dr. Margaret Owens and later by Dr. Margaret Strang of London, Ontario. The initial pay was \$160/month. Health Minister Hoadley noted "women were cheaper than men."⁽¹³⁾

To Edmonton and Notikewan in 1929

The cross-Canada rail trip was an eye opener. Dr. Jackson recalled that she could sleep all night and wake up the next morning without seeing any change in the scenery. Arriving in Edmonton, the

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8. Douglass, Sheila *Jam in the Bed Roll*, page 10, Shires Books, 1979. It was the second autobiographical book by Frank Jackson, following *A Candle in the Grub Box*, Shires Books, 1977.
9. Lampard, Robert Personal Communication with Dr. D.R. Wilson, former UofA Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine, at an AMF board meeting, 1991.
10. Jamieson, Heber C. Notes on Dr. Mary Evangeline Percy in the H.C. Jamieson Papers, University of Alberta Archives, Accession No. 104/81.
11. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate, the story of a pioneer doctor in Northern Alberta*, page 11, Cedar-Cott Enterprises 1988. Also see J.D. McGinnis' *Suitable for the Wilds*, pages 20-21.
12. Lampard, Robert Personal Communication with Dr. Jackson, January 30, 1996.
13. Trywhitt, T.J. The medical angel of the Peace country, in *Alberta in the 20th Century*, Volume 6, pages 220-221, United Western Communications, 1998.



28-4

United Church, circa 1965

group met Health Minister George Hoadley on Friday, June 21, 1929. He recommended that all four doctors spend July 5-13 with the traveling clinic which was headed for Clyde and Jarvie sixty miles away, before returning to Edmonton.⁽¹⁴⁾

The traveling clinic contained a mobile hospital tent which included an instrument equipped operating room. It had ancillary amenities like an ice chest, a gramophone and electric lights. Shortly after a rain-storm at Clyde the team headed for Jarvie thirty miles away. It took fourteen hours to make the trip. Seven horses and eight men were unable to haul one car out of a mud and bog. A tractor was required. After the team returned to Edmonton Dr. Percy toured the sixty-bed UAH Children's Hospital for polio patients built in 1928 and the new thirty-bed, Junior Red Cross Children's Hospital on the UAH site constructed in 1929.

The next week Dr. Percy went back to Jarvie with District Nurse Mary Conlin. While at Jarvie she was called to make a forty-mile visit to a patient whose breast had been torn away from the chest wall, when the horn of a cow threw her over the fence. Along the way she thought "my God and no hospital, x-rays or a lab". Dr. Percy operated on the kitchen table cleaning the wound and reattaching the breast, using

pure Chloroform as the anesthetic. Ether was precluded because of open fires, wood stoves, lanterns and candles. The patient awoke so quickly a surprised Dr. Percy was not allowed to leave, until the appreciative patient had made her coffee and given her enough shortbreads for her colleagues.⁽¹⁵⁾

Dr. Percy began her "provincial doctor" assignment by taking the Northern Alberta railway to Notikewan on July 16, 1929. It was "off the map". The trip took twenty-four hours by rail, eighteen hours by river-boat, eleven hours by wagon cart to Battle River (now Manning), and another four mile trek north to reach the little wooden shack near the Notikewan River in a valley she would "call her own". It was two miles from the end of the telegraph, two miles from the nearest neighbour and two weeks between mail deliveries.

Her house was on the main (dirt) road north, made accessible by a new bridge across the Notikewan River. The bridge was officially opened by Premier Brownlee one month after her arrival. The nearest doctors were Drs. Sutherland and L.J. O'Brien, seventy miles up river in Peace River, and Dr. H.A. Hamman 160 miles down the Peace River at Fort Vermilion. The nearest hospital was the eight-bed Irene Cottage Hospital in Peace River. Just reaching the river was a fifteen-mile journey. Fortunately the government had shipped twenty-two boxes of surgical instruments, equipment and supplies with her. Surreptitiously, Dr. Percy included seven medical textbooks and a few curtains.⁽¹⁶⁾

Ms. Kate Brighty, RN and Director of the District Nurse program, accompanied Dr. Percy to her northern post. Accustomed to the ways of the north, Nurse Bright passed the hat amongst the townspeople who came to greet her and collected thirty-one dollars. It was used to pay for Dr. Percy's horse, Dan. Ms. Brighty organized four bachelors to look after her firewood, food and essentials.⁽¹⁷⁾ A carpenter arrived and built her an examining table and neighbours plowed a furrow around the house to retard any grass fires.

"By the end of a month's time when I could have gotten out, wild horses couldn't have dragged me

14. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 18-21.

15. Lehn, Cornelia

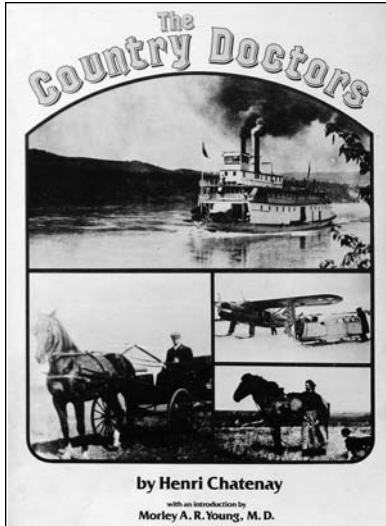
The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 22-23.

16. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 25-28, 34.

17. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, page 34. For more examples see J.D. McGinnis' *Suitable for the Wilds*, page 22.



28-5

The Country Doctors, Chatenay, 1980

away". In September 1929 she wrote to her parents, "I wouldn't come back to England for a thousand dollars just now ... I know I'm doing the right job. The women out here are so awfully glad to have a doctor".⁽¹⁸⁾ By the end of a year she observed "I've gained a reputation that I might never have in a lifetime in England and above all, the work is worth it".⁽¹⁹⁾

Medical Practice at Notikewan 1929-1931

Life in the north was different as she related in her "Letters".⁽²⁰⁾ Food was bought in season and in "grub stake" amounts. Meat for the winter was killed when it was cold enough. Then it was hung on a nail outside the house until it froze so hard one could not cut it. "You have to chop it with an axe."⁽²¹⁾

Medical practice was different as well. "I discovered that I needed the strength of an Amazon on my job. Five fractures in five weeks could be very demanding, when one of them lived eleven miles in one direction and another seven miles in the opposite direction".⁽²²⁾

The natives and the settlers were just as hardy. Early the first winter Dr. Percy was brought a serious head injury by tractor from an accident eight miles away. A tree had fallen on the man and fractured his skull. She suspected an intracranial hemorrhage. The

patient needed an anesthetic and debridement, so Dr. Percy accompanied him another ninety miles to Peace River in a heated caboose pulled by a team of horses. The trip took nineteen hours.⁽²³⁾

In letters dated April 11 and 16, 1930, Dr. Percy described one of her most strenuous weeks.⁽²⁴⁾ It started with two straight days and nights of work and included seventy-eight miles on horseback. Home in the cold by midnight, she was met by a husband waiting to take her twenty miles by horse to attend to his wife. Much of the countryside was underwater. A couple of creeks had to be swum. Two miles from their destination another man met them imploring them to hurry, which they did at a dead gallop. On her arrival Dr. Percy found the woman pulseless, cold and clammy from loss of blood. She stayed and treated her for the next fourteen hours before returning home. No sooner was she back home, than at 1:00 a.m. a man's voice outside her window asked if she would go and see his wife. He thought she had appendicitis. That would be her diagnosis too. The only way there was by horse. After seeing the patient, Dr. Percy immediately referred her one hundred miles to the Peace River hospital. Then another man arrived asking if she would see his wife. That entailed another nine-mile trip, plus a vigil lasting all day and most of the night. Then she rode the forty miles to see the patient who had hemorrhaged before accom-



On a sleigh ride home from Peace River, 1930 28-6

18. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, page 48 and J.D. McGinnis' *Suitable for the Wilds*, pages 22-23, 81.

19. McGinnis, Janice D. *Suitable for the Wilds*, page 226.

20. McGinnis, Janice D. *Suitable for the Wilds*, pages 51-264.

21. McGinnis, Janice D. *Suitable for the Wilds*, page 120 and C. Lehn's *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 61-62.

22. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, page 51.

23. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 75-76.

24. McGinnis, Janice D. *Suitable for the Wilds*, pages 194-196; H.C. Jamieson's *Early Medicine in Alberta*, pages 138-140 and C. Lehn's *The Homemade Brass Plate*, page 51.



28-7

More than a 135 kilometres behind a caterpillar, 1930
panying a second patient down to Peace River by sleigh and Caterpillar with another acute appendicitis. It was a bad case. She had to stay and give the anesthetic.

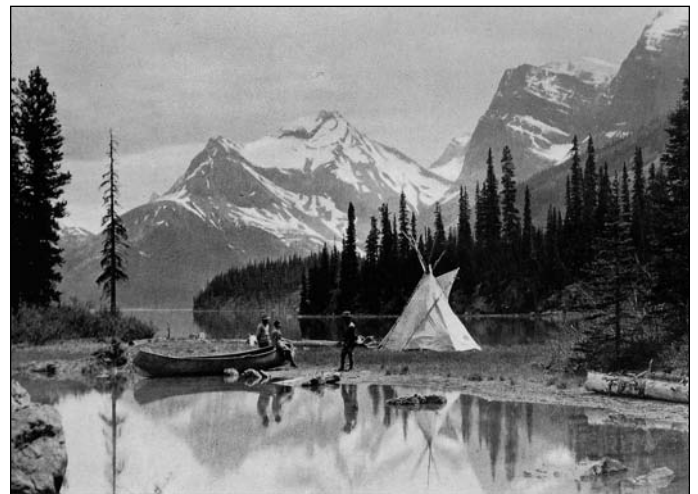
During the eight days Dr. Percy had one and a half nights in bed and rode one hundred and eighty miles on horseback. Those hours did not include getting lost, nearly drowning during one river crossing, returning home in a snowstorm or surmounting the communication problems, only partially solved by the extension of the telegraph line the previous October. Previous to that time, calls north of Notikewan were only possible by making a telegraph call to Peace River and a telephone call to Edmonton, requesting a message be relayed by an Edmonton broadcast station, in the hope that it would be heard by one of the three radios in the Notikewan district.⁽²⁵⁾

The first break in her practice came in July-August 1930 when she took the train and a boat to the Queen Charlotte Islands. In 1927, she had taken a mountain climbing holiday in Switzerland with her parents. So she booked two weeks enroute with the Canadian Alpine Club, at their summer camp at Maligne Lake fifty miles southeast of Jasper. While at the camp she joined a climbing party that made the second ascent of the nearby 9200' "Thumb". Glissading down a slippery slope she took the bottom out of her pants. It required several hours of suturing to repair them.

Enthused by her inauguration into the Canadian Rockies, Dr. Percy made her "graduating" climb, a fourteen hour ascent of Mount Charlton (10,200'). On the ascent, she was left hanging by her fingers when her foothold gave way. The released rocks missed the man underneath her by six inches. On the way down a gentleman posed for her to take a photo. While waiting he broke through the snow bridge he was standing on and fell into a crevasse. Not dissuaded, she climbed Mount Llysyfran and then Mount Mary Vaux. The latter was a first ascent led by Mr. C.G. Crawford, an expert climber from a recent British expedition to Mount Everest. Dr. Percy commented that the famous British climber Noel Odell, who was the last man to see George Mallory on Everest, was due in camp later that week. No conversation with him was recorded. She did not make her ACC "badge" climb.⁽²⁶⁾

Meeting and Marrying Frank Jackson 1930/31

Dr. Percy first met Frank Jackson of Keg River in the fall of 1930. It was shortly after his first wife had died from a retained placenta and postpartum manic depression, one month after their third son was born.⁽²⁷⁾ Suddenly he was a bachelor with three boys. Life became more complicated when he developed a badly infected hand. The nearest doctor was Dr. Percy. Frank traveled seventy miles south in -40°F temperature to see Dr. Percy. By then he was suffering from blood poisoning. Dr. Percy lanced it and he



Maligne Lake and Mt. Llysyfran (center), 1930 28-8

25. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, page 63.

26. Crawford, C.G.

The Maligne Lake Group, pages 56-62, 153-154, Canadian Alpine Journal 1930 and Janice D. McGinnis' *Suitable for the Wilds*, pages 226-231, 243-244. The story of a lady glissading down a glacier slope is recorded in both books. Noel Odell, did make it to the camp and then climbed Mt. Robson.

27. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, page 88. Mrs. Louise Jackson's condition and air evacuation by Wop May and Dr. Harold Hamman was described in Dr. Hamman's letter to Wop May's son Denny May on January 20, 1979.

began to recover. Frank returned to her office/home in Notikewan as frequently as he could find an excuse. Most trips were to transport accident cases to her, during the completion of the Dominion Government telegraph line to Fort Vermillion.⁽²⁸⁾ Since the road north ended at Notikewan, Jackson parked his 1927 Chevrolet car at her home, an inventive reason for more house calls.

During the winter of 1930/31 the Jackson's became engaged. On their wedding day they drove to Peace River with a friend to purchase the only wedding ring in town. Both developed mild cases of carbon monoxide poisoning from a hole in the floorboards. After buying the diamond, the couple covered the seventy miles back to Notikewan, arriving three hours late for their own wedding. By then her English clothes would not fit and her wardrobe had changed. "All my really interesting clothes – beaded moccasins and gloves, leather chaps, moose hide coat, etc., are only suitable for the wilds."⁽²⁹⁾

The Jacksons were married on March 10, 1931 eighteen months after Dr. Mary Percy arrived in the Peace River country. Her provincial government contract stopped when Dr. Helen O'Brien arrived to take over her practice.⁽³⁰⁾ After the move, Dr. Jackson continued



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Dr. Jackson with Ann and Robert, 1934

her medical practice part-time. The Jackson's had two more children, Anne and John Robert, joining Frank's three boys Frank Jr., Louis and Arthur. Anne was born in England in 1932. Dr. Jackson was preparing to leave for Grande Prairie for John Robert's delivery in January 1934, when she self-diagnosed her own breech presentation, which she could not rotate. Her water broke. Labor and delivery followed that night. With Frank as her obstetrical student, a seven-week premature baby was born in -72°F weather. Everyone survived, albeit exhausted.⁽³¹⁾

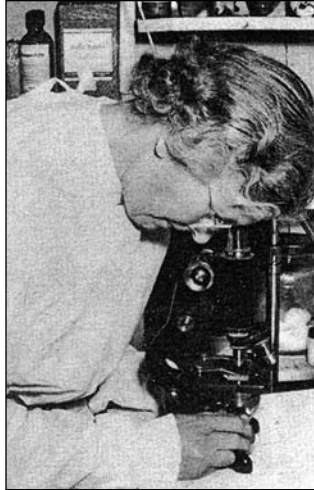
Family Practice in Keg River 1931-1974

In the early 1930's the Peace River country covered 70,000 square miles and had less than seven thousand settlers. Ninety-five percent of the population were Metis and aboriginals. The Keg River District covered more than a thousand square miles. Its population was less than four hundred, most of whom were Metis.

Dr. Jackson was particularly attracted by the character and strength of the Metis, whom she came to love and respect as patients and people. She was impressed by the self-taught competence of Metis midwives and mothers. She noted dryly that her gown, mask, and gloves were accepted as harmless eccentricities. "They know that all that is really required is a pair of scissors and a piece of string out of the flour sack".⁽³²⁾ The Crees gave her the title "Moskeke Wenou", Cree for Medicine Man in 1929. Not knowing the Cree language did not deter her. Frank knew the language.

Providing care in an isolated setting was the theme of her presentation to the Medical Woman's Federation in Toronto in June 1955.⁽³³⁾ Dr. Jackson gave several examples of the fortitude of the Metis. She described an insane eighty-year-old Metis man who she treated using intramuscular Hyoscine as the sedative. He completely depleted her stock. The nearest drugstore was almost two hundred miles away and the mental hospital was six hundred miles away in Edmonton. Fortunately the Indian Medicine Man arrived and

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28. Lampard, Robert "75th Anniversary of Mercy Flight," Alberta Doctors Digest 29(1): 6-9, Jan/Feb 2004, reprinted in Part 2. The House of Commons unanimously approved the construction of the telegraph line, after it took eleven days to send a message from Fort Vermilion to Peace River requesting Diphtheria antitoxin to be flown north from Edmonton. Bush pilot Wop May flew the vaccine to Fort Vermilion for Dr. H. Hamman, Jan 2-6, 1929.
29. McGinnis, Janice D. *Suitable for the Wilds*, pages 257-259.
30. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 93-94.
31. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 110-112.
32. Jackson, Mary P. "Midwifery Among the Metis," AMB 14: 11, July 1949.
33. Jackson, Mary P. "My Life at Keg River," in the Journal of the Medical Woman's Federation 38(1): 40-56, 1956.



28-10

Dr. Jackson in her home office/lab, circa 1953

took over the patient's care.⁽³⁴⁾ Whatever his treatment, she said it completely cured him.

Another Metis had freighted between Fort Garry and Calgary before the CPR arrived in 1883. He had slipped and fractured his spine. His friends left him lying on the riverbank, within reach of food and water. They propped a boat over him for shelter and continued on to their destination. He recovered completely. Years later he became a patient of Dr. Jackson's. So did a second Metis man who had a similar spinal fracture and a compound fracture of his ankle. The spinal fracture discharged for eleven years before he removed a piece of dead bone from it with a jackknife. It healed too.⁽³⁵⁾

Distance was another problem. Did one move the patient to the doctor, or did the doctor go to the patient? Travel depended upon the season, the ability to communicate, and whether Dr. Jackson was home. When she was away in England on holidays, or on a continuing medical education trip her husband Frank replaced her as the "doctor/nurse". He was experienced, resourceful, practical, and was never phased by the calls for medical services.⁽³⁶⁾

In an emergency, time was always of the essence. One messenger covered forty-five miles in eight hours using a dog team and toboggan to deliver Dr.

Jackson to her patient. Another patient walked seventeen miles after he had accidentally shot himself through the muscle of his upper arm, first to his own home and then another twenty-five miles to see Dr. Jackson. A novel visit came from a pilot who was flying a post-thyroidectomy patient from Edmonton to Fort Vermillion. During the flight he knew his patient was deteriorating, so he landed the plane on a road near Keg River. He had spotted a truck on it. The truck driver agreed to take the patient and pilot to Dr. Jackson. She diagnosed the problem immediately as one caused by the removal of the parathyroid gland during the thyroid surgery. She started an IV and added calcium to it. It was the same preparation she used to treat milk fever in cows.⁽³⁷⁾ Within an instant the patient was better. The pilot was astounded.

Another emergency arose when no plane was available to land at Keg River. They had pontoons on, instead of wheels. A six-month-old baby that Dr. Jackson thought had an intussusception could not be evacuated. Deputy Minister Dr. Bow said on the telephone, "Do the best you can". She did. With her husband as the anesthetist, Dr. Jackson operated on her Singer sewing machine table and reduced the intussusception. During the surgery she discovered the appendix was wrapped into the overlapping bowel and was ominously red. She removed it as well. The patient survived. In 1947 Dr. Jackson submitted two more cases with intussusceptions she reduced by anal insufflation, to the "British Medical Journal".⁽³⁸⁾

One elderly lady had a rodent ulcer on her eyelid. At ninety-three she did not want to go to Edmonton for treatment. That patient and one with prostate cancer were the only cancer cases Dr. Jackson recalled seeing. Another unusual case was a patient with Leishmaniasis. It took her twenty years to discover that the patient had contact with relatives in Winnipeg who had been to Brazil. In the meantime the patient was radiated, biopsied, but never correctly treated until she made the diagnosis.⁽³⁹⁾ Before WWII Dr. Jackson recalled that she saw no cases of

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34. Chatenay, Henri Dr. Mary Percy Jackson in *The Country Doctors*, page 65, Matrix Press 1980. Also described in J.D. McGinnis' "My Life in Keg River," pages 173-174, CBMH, 1995.
35. McGinnis, Janice D. "My Life in Keg River," in the *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 12: 169-186, 1995. Dr. Jackson's original 1956 article was reprinted with a new introduction by J.D. McGinnis.
36. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, page 99. Also see S. Douglass' *Jam in the Bed Roll*, pages 39-41, 96.
37. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 166-167.
38. Jackson, Mary P. "Acute Intussusception," *BMJ* 2: 224-5, July 24, 1948. Discussed further in *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 162-164. Dr. Jackson also described a case of "Varicella Herpetiform" in the *BMJ* 2: 138, July 27, 1946.
39. Jackson, Mary P. *Peace River Record – Gazette*, pages B-1, C-2, May 16, 2000.

SIR,—I was very interested in the article on acute intussusception in childhood by Dr. Brenda Morrison and Dr. Donald Court (April 24, p. 776), but it was disappointing that they gave so little attention to non-operative treatment in early cases. From force of circumstances I was obliged to try the old-fashioned method of inflation with air on the only two cases I have seen in this remote settlement in northern Canada. with results so dramatically successful that it seems a pity that it should not be tried in all early cases even when facilities for operation are at hand. Since the reduction can be attempted under the anaesthetic given to confirm the presence of the tumour and requires no elaborate equipment or skilled assistance, the loss of time in trying it is very small, and in case of failure no harm has been done. Where the baby lives far from a hospital the method can be life-saving, as I think the histories of my two cases prove.

Dr. Jackson's article on Acute Intussusception, BMJ, July 1948

arthritic deformities, diabetes, gallstones or chronic nephritis, but there were many rheumatic hearts and heart failure.⁽⁴⁰⁾ One local problem was adolescent goiters, especially among the girls. She treated the problem by iodizing chocolates and requiring all the salt coming into the north to be iodized as well. Resolving difficult cases or making a tricky diagnosis gave Dr. Jackson her the greatest satisfaction.⁽⁴¹⁾

In 1936 the Jacksons secured a vacant Revillon Freres fur trading store, from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). They used the good offices of the Anglican Bishop to buy the building, because Frank was still a competitor with the HBC. Both were in the fur trading business.⁽⁴²⁾ The Jackson's had the store hauled to their homestead. After renovations, it became a temporary school and then a short-stay hospital from 1937-1951. Her first admissions were mostly midwifery cases, which she highlighted in an article to her Alberta medical colleagues in the Alberta Medical Bulletin in 1949.⁽⁴³⁾

Shortly after WWII Dr. Jackson was referred a patient with pneumonia. She used her first supply of Penicillin to treat it. The Penicillin had been donated to her in 1946.⁽⁴⁴⁾ She was so impressed with the results she ordered more. The cost of Penicillin was \$25.00 for three million units. Early purchases quite drained the Jackson bank account.

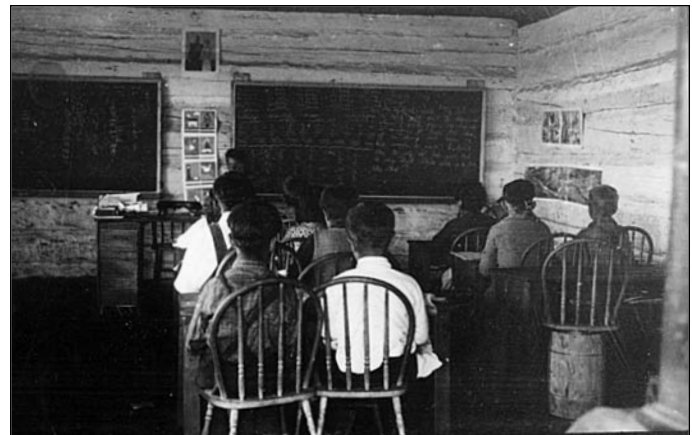
The Jacksons always put the patient first. They bought many of their own drugs, bandages and instruments. Fees were charged on an ability-to-pay basis. For most patients care was gratis. Rewards were through "thank you's", words of appreciation or sometimes gifts in kind. It was an expensive hobby.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Between raising children and baking loaves of bread for harvest crews Dr. Jackson kept medically current by reading the "British Medical Journal", a practice she continued well into her nineties. Occasionally she found time for continuing medical education courses.

Communicable Disease Problems 1930-1950

Dr. Jackson's most notable medical successes came from treating serious communicable diseases.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Tuberculosis was the major problem in the 1930's, particularly amongst the aboriginals and Metis. They could not be admitted to the Central Alberta (later Baker) Sanatorium in Calgary. It was too costly and too far away. Free tuberculosis care was introduced in Alberta in 1936. Three years later it became free for aboriginals. The rate of TB in the native population was 600 per 100,000 or roughly ten times the Canadian average. The mortality rate from tubercular meningitis was close to 95%.

The only treatment for TB at the time was isolation and rest. Dr. Jackson tried introducing BCG, but



Class in the first Jackson School, circa 1936 28-11

40. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 166-167.

41. Jackson, Mary P.

"My Life at Keg River," pages 46-47. Emphasized in S. Brownell's "Dr. Mary Percy Jackson – Pioneer Physician in Northern Alberta," *Proceedings of the 12th Annual History of Medicine Days*, pages 66-71, March 21-22, 2003, UofC, 2003.

42. Douglass, Sheila

Jam in the Bed Roll, pages 67-68, 94 and *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 124-128.

43. Jackson, Mary P.

"Midwifery Among the Metis," pages 11-13.

44. Lehn, Cornelia

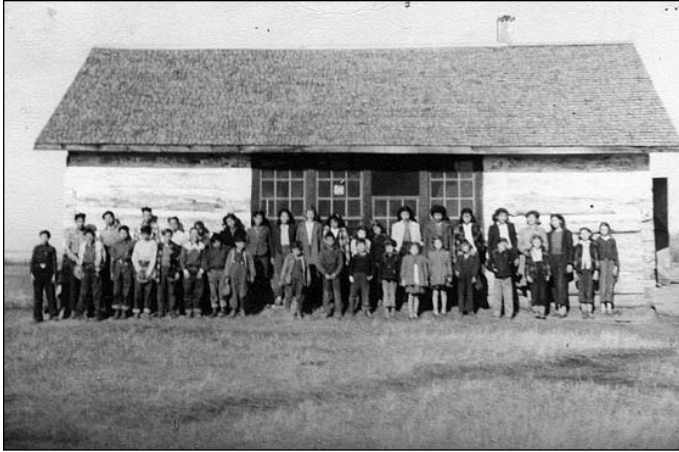
The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 125-127 and "Suitable for the Wilds", pages 32-33.

45. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 169-179.

46. Keywan, Zonia

"Mary Percy Jackson: Pioneer Doctor," *The Beaver*, Outfit 308, pages 41-47, Winter 1977.



Keg River School used from 1937-1951 28-12

obtaining the vaccine was a problem because of its short shelf life. Cod Liver Oil was only a nutritional substitute and “Wampoles Extract” contained large amounts of alcohol.

Streptomycin arrived in 1947 in Alberta and Isoniazid in 1950. They were most effective when given together. That brought the death rate to almost zero. Through her efforts, there were no cases of tuberculous meningitis after 1943 and virtually no deaths after 1948. Control finally came when freeze dried BCG became available and was given to all school children for a decade starting about 1955.⁽⁴⁷⁾

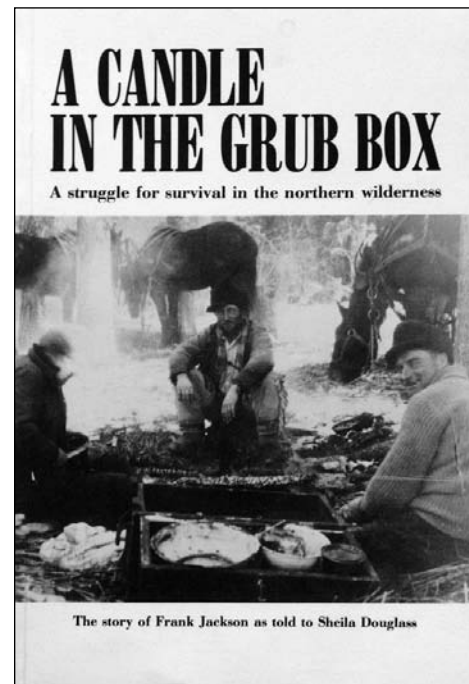
The first major polio outbreak in Alberta occurred in 1927 and resulted in 354 cases and fifty-three deaths.⁽⁴⁸⁾ It was not a problem in the north. A small outbreak at Fort Vermillion in 1960 consisted of twelve to fifteen cases with five to six deaths. Dr. Jackson recalled seeing just two polio cases in Keg River.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The reason for the infrequent cases was speculative but it became academic with the introduction of the Salk and Sabin vaccines in the mid-50s.

In 1952 rabies swept through the Peace River block.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Rabies had come south from Fort Fitzgerald, NWT (June), to Fort Vermillion (August), Keg River (September), Manning (November), Peace River (December) and to Athabasca (January 1953). Dr. Jackson remembered a man informing her they had “heard the foxes talking”, the telltale signs of rabies. She called for vaccine assistance. The Government

responded, but limited rabies vaccinations to actual cases only. The Jacksons vaccinated hundreds of domestic animals including those that had saliva contact with a rabid animal. She vaccinated her son-in-law after he came in contact with a cow that had stopped eating due to “dumb rabies”. The vaccination regime required fourteen injections over fourteen days. The mortality rate from the vaccine was 1:1000, which mandated its judicious use.⁽⁵¹⁾ A 1954 article by Dr. Jackson in the Edmonton Journal on the seriousness of the disease helped marshal more support. The spread of rabies was finally halted when the Government approved extermination payments to farmers who lost their herds.

Much changed in northwestern Alberta in 1942/43. That winter the MacKenzie highway was opened for travel to the NWT oil fields and uranium deposits at Great Bear Lake. The highway became an all weather gravel road after WWII.

The Jacksons closed their cottage hospital in 1951, when Frank sold the trading post in Keg River. They moved one and a half miles away to Frank's 1929 homestead and took up farming full-time. The



28-13

The story of Frank Jackson, 1977

47. McGinnis, Janice D. *Suitable for the Wilds*, pages 31-33. Further elaborated upon in Cornelia Lehn's *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 99-100, 125-126.

48. Vant, J. Ross, Cashman, Tony *More than a Hospital*. University of Alberta Hospitals, pages 78-81, UAH 1986.

49. Lampard, Robert Personal Communication, June 1999.

50. Lehn, Cornelia *The Homemade Brass Plate*, pages 169-179.

51. Jackson, Mary P. “Rabies in Northern Alberta,” *AMB* 18: 24-25, May 1953.

Department of Agriculture named the Jacksons one of Alberta's five master farm families in 1953.⁽⁵²⁾

Education and Retirement; Writing and Rewards

Dr. Jackson's lifelong interest and focus on education was never dormant. After her trip to England to deliver Anne in 1931/32, she brought back a friend and teacher to Keg River, Marion "Mae" Crossen. Through correspondence courses Mae taught Louis and Arthur the four grades they were missing. There were enough students by 1937 for the Jacksons to start the first Keg River School. Frank was the Chairman of the School Division. They used the Jackson's "Hospital" for the first year of classes. In 1963 a consolidated four-room school was built at Keg River, on land donated by Louis Jackson. The school was named the Dr. Mary Jackson School.⁽⁵³⁾

In 1956 the community held a special 25th Anniversary party for the Jacksons. It included another "pass the hat" feature, which collected \$60.00, a small contribution for all the drugs and medical sup-

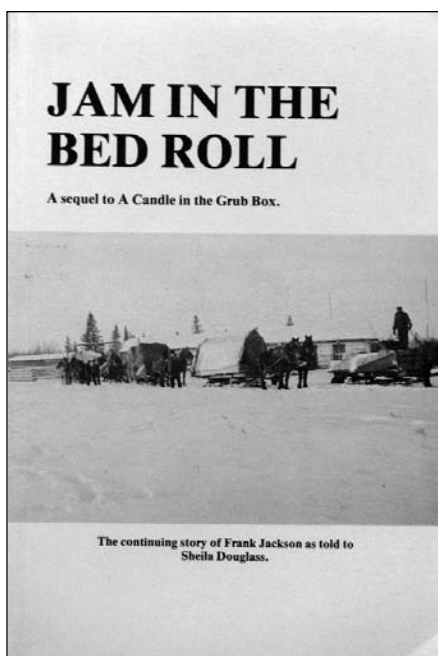
plies the Jacksons had provided so generously over the years.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Dr. Jackson estimated her medical work averaged five hours per day. Her on-call weekends she tried to limit to every second one. She continued to practice until 1974, when she retired to spend more time with Frank who was suffering from asthma. She helped him complete his two manuscripts written in longhand on his northern life. They were published as "A Candle in the Grub Box" (1977) and "Jam in My Bed Roll" (1979). Frank Jackson died September 1, 1979 at the age of eighty-seven.

In 1975 the Voice of the Native Women nominated Dr. Jackson as their Woman of the Year.

One wrote:⁽⁵⁵⁾

*She has saved many a life,
without any grumbling nor strife.
Also delivered numerous babies,
and even helped to prevent rabies...
Dear God, Please abundantly bless her!*



28-14

The continuing story of Frank Jackson, 1979

Her acknowledgements were numerous.⁽⁵⁶⁾ In 1967 she received the Centennial Medal of Canada. In 1974 she was made a life member of the College of Family Practice. The UofA gave her an Honorary Doctorate of Laws in 1976. Mary and Frank both received Alberta Achievement Awards that year. In 1983 Dr. Jackson was awarded the Alberta Order of Excellence. In her acceptance speech she acknowledged "I have always been a doctor with passion". Entry into the Order of Canada followed in 1990.

The NFB made a one-hour film of her life in 1994. On February 29, 1996 Dr. Jackson attended a University of Calgary History of Medicine Class presentation. The topic was appropriately titled "Dr. Mary Percy Jackson". The UofC History of Medicine program again featured her life in the north on February 1, 2003, three years after she passed away.⁽⁵⁷⁾

A delighted Dr. Jackson returned to CMA Alberta House on June 2, 1999 to cut the ribbon opening the Conference Room named the Jackson Room in her

52. Trywhitt, T.J.

The Medical Angel of the Peace Country, page 221.

53. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 130-143.

54. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, page 195.

55. Lehn, Cornelia

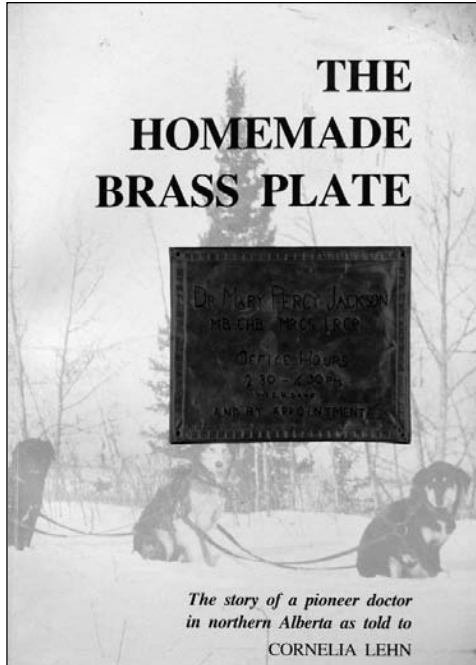
The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 207-208.

56. Lehn, Cornelia

The Homemade Brass Plate, pages 205-212.

57. Eisner, James,
Hughes, S.,
Brownell, Susan

Dr. Mary Percy Jackson was presented at the UofC course in the History of Medicine (as 1) "Moskeke Wenou" (Cree for Medicine Man), by J. Eisner, S. Hughes on February 29, 1996. Their sixteen page manuscript was published in the History of Medicine *Days Proceedings* edited by Dr. P. Cruse, UofC, 1996; and 2) by Susan Brownell on February 3, 2003, published in the *Proceedings of the 12th Annual History of Medicine Days*, pages 66-72, edited by Dr. W. Whitelaw, UofC, 2003.



28-15

Autobiography of Dr. Mary Jackson in Northern Alberta, 1988

honor in 1997.⁽⁵⁸⁾ She appreciated the recognition and asked that her favorite epitaph from Sir Robert

Hutchinson's Medical Litany be added to the photographic collage in the Jackson Room:

*“From inability to leave well alone;
From too much zeal for what is new and
Contempt for what is old;
From putting knowledge before wisdom,
Science before art, cleverness before common sense;
From treating patients as cases;
And from making the cure of a disease more
Grievous than its endurance,
Good Lord, deliver us”.*

Dr. Jackson died on May 6, 2000 at the age of ninety-five.⁽⁵⁹⁾ In 2005 she was named one of Alberta's 100 Physicians of the Century.

Related Profiles: Bow, Baker, D.R. Wilson

Related Perspectives: Hoadley, Parlby, Cross and UFA Healthcare, Medicare, The Mercy Flight and Harold Hamman, Alberta is the Root of Medicare in Canada

Key Words: Northern Alberta Physician, Woman physician, Traveling Medical Clinics, Municipal Doctors, Communicable Diseases, AMA's Jackson Room



28-16

*Dr. Percy's Keg River House/Office, 1929
The sign reads Provincial Medical Officer*



28-17

The Dr. Mary Jackson School, opened circa 1960

58. Jackson, Mary P.
59. (Jackson, M.P.)

“AMA Salutes living legend Dr. Mary Percy Jackson,” Alberta Doctors Digest 24(4): 6-8, July/August 1999. Obituary. Peace River Record – Gazette, pages B-1, C-2, May 16, 2000.