Dr. Florence Rena Sabin

http://denvergov.org/aboutdenver/history_char_sabin.asp
http://www.cogreatwomen.org/sabin.htm
Background Information for Teachers

Dr. Florence Rena Sabin

When: 1871-1953
Where: Central City and Denver
Why Important: Dr. Sabin was the first female medical professor at Johns Hopkins as well as a major medical reformer in Colorado. She also was the first female member of the National Academy of Sciences and first female physician-scientist at Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research.

Her Story:
Florence Rena Sabin was born November 9, 1871 in Central City; her father was a mining engineer, her mother a school teacher. The Colorado native graduated from Smith College and although her first interest was a career as a pianist, she went on to attend Johns Hopkins University Medical School. The school had just begun to allow women to attend and Florence was one of only fourteen women in her class.

In 1902, Sabin taught anatomy at Johns Hopkins and was appointed professor of histology in 1917. This made her the first woman to become a full professor at any medical college in the country. Just a few years later, in 1924, Sabin was elected the first woman president of the American Association of Anatomists and first lifetime woman member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Although a talented teacher, Dr. Sabin turned more and more to research. She did important work on the lymphatic system and investigated the origins of blood vessels and cells, perfecting the technique of supravital straining to do so. In 1925, she accepted the positions of Head of the Department of Cellular Studies at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, the first woman to be appointed a full time member at the Institute. Sabin’s work focused on the pathology of tuberculosis; her team was part of the national consortium of researchers working with the Medical Research Committee of the National Tuberculosis Association.

In 1938, Rabin retired to Colorado to live with her sister. However, retirement was short-lived, as Governor John Vivian insisted that she become in charge of the state health committee in 1946. This proud Coloradan had thought the State was clean with supposedly excellent health resorts. It turned out that Colorado had one of the highest infant death rates in the country as well as the third-highest scarlet fever rates and the fifth-highest diphtheria total. Sabin immediately began reforming healthcare in Colorado. Her eight health bills passed in 1947 and Mayor Quigg Newton declared Sabin the new Denver Manager of Health and Charities. Dr. Sabin soon began a city-wide x-ray and public education program that reduced the Denver tuberculosis rate by fifty percent.

Florence died in Denver in 1953. She was chosen for Statuary Hall at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. for her great works. Coloradans remember her dedication to improving the medical system and to public health.