

Dr. Charlotte Fairbanks

Charlotte Fairbanks was born in St. Johnsbury on December 11, 1871, the daughter of Rev. Henry Fairbanks and Ann Noyes Fairbanks. Charlotte was a student at the Union School and at St. Johnsbury Academy, and she went on to Smith College where she graduated with high honors and earned her A.B. and A.M. degrees. At that point, her special interest was in chemistry, and she took a course at Yale University which earned her a Ph.D.; she was the first St. Johnsbury lady to receive such a degree. She also received a scholarship to Bryn Mawr where she studied further in chemistry and qualified herself for a position as instructor in chemistry at Wellesley College. In 1899, she entered the Pennsylvania Women's Medical School, from which she received her degree in 1902.

By 1910, Dr. Charlotte Fairbanks was practicing in St. Johnsbury and advertising her office hours in the *Caledonian*. She continued to serve the people of St. Johnsbury as a physician for nearly twenty years from her office in the building just south of the Athenaeum. Her only lengthy absence from town was a one-year period near the end of World War I when she joined a team of women doctors who went to France to minister to the desperate needs of the French civilians, a mercy errand which earned for her a gold medal and honorary French citizenship bestowed by a grateful people. Dr. Charlotte returned in September, 1919, to resume her busy life, dashing about the countryside in her automobile and attending to patients until her health failed around 1930. She died February 15, 1932, in Framingham, Massachusetts.

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Graham remembers her first ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ care of his mother through typhoid fever - this was before Graham was born - probably 1911 or 12 - and she drove to the Center each day to call. She attended Graham's birth, I believe the first at Brightlook Hospital? He had to go to her office occasionally, as a boy, and didn't enjoy it, but one small compensation was the bowl of gumdrops which she kept on the top shelf in her office, which he was permitted to dip into as a reward when he was a good boy.

The people I have talked to who recall her speak of her mannish appearance, long black skirts and even a man's hat at times. Apparently she was quite an alarming driver - she had one of the early cars in St. Johnsbury and drove with great abandon. Howard Reed says someone told him of ~~her~~ a high, strong hedge having been put in, back of her office building on Main St. just south of the Athenaeum, because she went down over the hill to Pinehurst a few times - also that a small garage building was built for her car and she went right through it! Graham recalls her getting a new car when she came back from her stay in France, and how she came roaring up Green St. to attend him when he had some childhood disease.

Harold Penniman said he was quite sure she had office hours in one of the nearby N.H. towns at least a day or two of each week. He also recalled her appearing as a witness in a trial involving statutory rape of a 12 or 13-year old girl, and her very emphatic testimony that the girl was pregnant - "No doubt about it." Harold said she built a house down over from Belvidere St. that you had to go down some steps to reach - should be off Barker Ave. now. He didn't think she lived there - maybe rented it.

Graham says Elmwoode was impossible to heat in the winter - the family used to move over into the tenement in the back part of the Caledonia Home Health building - that is why Charlotte's address is sometimes shown as 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ Western Ave. - others, as 24 Western, which was Elmwoode.

From Caledonian, April 30, 1919:

DR. FAIRBANKS MADE CITIZEN OF FRANCE FOR WORK

Hospital Unit of Women Rewarded for Faithful and Efficient Services

The honor of being made a citizen of France as well as receiving a gold medal from the municipality of Luzancy has recently come to one of St. Johnsbury's well-known physicians and surgeons, Dr. Charlotte Fairbanks. Since November 1, she has been at Luzancy as the surgeon in the medical unit at American Woman's Hospital. Work has been largely among the civilian population, of all ages and both sexes. Margaret Sangster recently wrote, "... The doctors in their neat khaki uniforms are strictly American. There are eight of them -- efficient, capable, clever women who have given up their practices in various states to answer the call of France." Dr. Louise Hurrell, Chief of Staff, is from Rochester, N.Y.; Dr. Charlotte Fairbanks, the surgeon, is from Vermont; and Dr. Doherty, the dentist, is from Milwaukee. Of the remaining doctors and technicians, two are from Connecticut, one from Oregon, one from Denver, and the superintendent is from New York City.

The medaille militaire, premier classe, was specially struck for the American unit by Henri Dubois, noted French artist. The medal is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and the designs are intended to show the gratitude of the French people to the American ladies who have sacrificed so much. A translation of the words would be, "In witness of the appreciation of the suffering people."

The honorary citizenship was conferred at a special meeting of the municipal council. After the medals were conferred, a painting was unveiled and presented to the unit. This will be loaned to the various communities and then be placed in the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York. It is by M. Masse, a distinguished painter who was paid 1200 francs for his work.

Dr. Fairbanks is now in London visiting her brother Robert. She expects to return next month, and will then be at Blarencourt, where a 75-bed barracks has been erected by the labor of German prisoners. She expects to be there until September and then return to St. Johnsbury to resume her practice.