The Legacy of
Mary McMillan

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In this first Mary McMillan lecture which is my great privilege and honor to give, it seems fitting to recall some highlights of Mary McMillan's life which reflect her life-long dedication to her profession and the warmth and vitality she gave to it. It also seems fitting to ask ourselves whether we have been worthy of her legacy to us, our profession and our Association, given in loving trust, and to examine with minds and hearts our responsibilities for their future.

Little did Miss McMillan realize as she began her studies in Liverpool, England, sixty-four years ago that she was destined to be the founder of physical therapy in the United States, her native land. Following the death of her mother, she had gone to England as a small child to live with her aunt. How she happened to become interested in physical culture and corrective exercises, as the course of study was then called, is not known. Possibly her decision was influenced by the motto of the Clan McMillan: "I learn to succor."

She herself said, "After two years in college in which I was working toward a Bachelor's degree, I decided to break away, against my family's wishes, to do that which I had wished to do more than anything else in the world for over a year." After completing another two years of study she, characteristically, believed it was not enough and went to London for special courses in neuroanatomy, neurology, and psychology. She then accepted a position in a children's hospital whose chief orthopedic surgeon was the great Sir Robert Jones. Later Sir Robert and the equally eminent Dr. Robert Lovett, of Boston, co-authored the treatise Orthopedic Surgery which was the "bible" of all physical therapists in the 1920's and early 1930's.

When England was facing the early days of World War I, Miss McMillan recalled, "There was..."
a V.A.D. unit [volunteers] to which I belonged being formed to go overseas. . . . I was heartbroken that my physical examination prevented me from joining the group.” Fate or destiny had intervened, although she did not realize it, to return her to the United States of America for a new challenge and a greater service than she would have experienced in England.

In the U.S.A. during this same period orthopedic surgeons were training physical education graduates in their offices, particularly for work with crippled children. All schools of physical education taught massage and corrective exercises, and later some of the graduates specialized in these areas. The stage was set, therefore, for the transition of some 800 graduates in physical education to become Reconstruction Aides in World War I, and for 275 of them to become the charter members of the American Women's Physical Therapeutic Association.

Soon after her return to the U.S.A. and her home near Boston, Miss McMillan accepted a position at Children's Hospital in Portland, Maine. By this time the United States was already at war, and wounded American soldiers were being returned to this country for reconstructive surgery and aftercare. Even though Miss McMillan had not qualified physically for overseas duty with the British Army while in England, she had served with her unit in a base hospital near Liverpool. She knew from personal experience the type and extent of the injuries incurred in combat and the treatment required for rehabilitation. Therefore, when the clarion call for service in her native land came, she was ready. So much so, that her bag was packed and off she went to Washington without waiting for travel orders.

Marguerite Sanderson, who had been giving corrective exercises in Dr. Joel Goldthwait's office (and who later was to become the Director of the Boston School of Physical Education), was already in Washington in the Surgeon General's office. Miss Sanderson, Miss McMillan said simply and matter of factly, took me to Walter Reed Hospital and that was the beginning of physical therapy in the U.S. Army. It was, of course, not that simple or easy.

**RECONSTRUCTION AIDES**

Picture a physical therapist in a large Army hospital with no room provided for work, with no knowledge of Army protocol and channels, and with no one who had knowledge or even wished to have knowledge about physical therapy. Miss McMillan was to say later with her engaging humor and twinkle in her eyes, “I tried to sell physical therapy and to sell myself . . . . it was a hard job, they had little time for the likes of me.” But the mark of greatness which was to grow in succeeding years was emerging. Her bubbling good humor, innate perceptiveness, faith, and good manners masked a stubbornness which would carry her through even greater trials in the years to come than she encountered in selling herself at Walter Reed. Another great personal character trait which was to strengthen everything she did was her expressed sincere deep appreciation to each and every one who worked for or with her. It was never “me,” but always “we.”

Another clarion call came to her at Walter Reed—a telegram from the president of Reed College, Portland, Oregon, saying that 200 women were waiting for instruction. Release from duty at Walter Reed was not easy and appeared impossible. But Miss McMillan believed the need for additional Reconstruction Aides was so critical that she was prepared to resign. This was not necessary, for at that point at the urgent request of Dr. Frank Granger a leave of absence was granted. The next two years were busy ones in Portland, Oregon, where she taught two classes of Reconstruction Aides, and in Pittsburgh, in 1919, where she organized a newly established physical therapy department in an Army hospital. Miss McMillan never went overseas in person with any of the units, but much of her spirit went with “her girls,” those whom she had taught at Walter Reed Hospital and at Reed College.

In April 1919 she was promoted to the position of Chief Head, Reconstruction Aide. In this capacity she made several trips to other Army hospitals inspecting physical therapy departments and conversing with hospital commanders concerning the programs. In October 1919 she was again promoted, with the title of Supervisor of Reconstruction Aides, and spent half of her duty time in the office of the Surgeon General of the Army to assist in the deactivation of physical therapy departments and in the discharge of the Aides. In 1920, believing that her mission was accomplished, she resigned her position with the Army.

How fortunate for us that Mary McMillan’s physical condition prevented her from being accepted for overseas duty with the British Army and that her great untapped resources and talents were to be ours! It was during her final year in the Army that the idea of an association was born. Many who had joined the Reconstruction Corps found the work so rewarding that they wished to continue in it. Many others, the majority, in fact, were to return to teaching physical education or to leave the service for marriage.

It is easy to see in retrospect why Mary McMillan was the focal point around which a national organization of physical therapists was to emerge. She thought in terms of the whole country, foresaw its great civilian need for physical therapy, just as later she was to broaden that vision to encompass the world.

In those last months in Washington over 300
letters were sent to Reconstruction Aides being discharged from the Army over the signatures of Dr. Frank Granger, Marguerite Sanderson, and Mary McMillan to determine the interest in a proposed national association of Reconstruction Aides. Letters were also sent to orthopedic surgeons, since it was they, at this period, who would be utilizing physical therapists in their offices and hospital clinics.

THE ASSOCIATION EMERGES

One response from Janet Merrill, who was to be the first Secretary of the Association, expressed deep interest in the forming of the new group and in raising the standards of physical therapy. Miss Merrill herself was an illustrious pioneer, having been trained in the office of Dr. Robert Lovett, and was the first physical therapist to serve in a poliomyelitis epidemic area, Vermont, which had experienced poliomyelitis since 1894. She, too, was also a pioneer teacher, having trained personnel for emergency service in the catastrophic 1916 poliomyelitis epidemic in New York and environs and later as an instructor of Reconstruction Aides at Base Hospital No. 5 near Boston.

Miss Merrill and Miss McMillan were also in charge of two of the first post-World War I training courses at the Harvard Medical School Courses for Graduates, known as Course 441 and Course 442. Thus the future of the new association to which both contributed so much was assured through the education of recruits for civilian service. In a letter to Miss Merrill, Mary McMillan said, “What we need is one unanimous effort in order to establish a high standard for our profession and enthusiasm that knows no bounds.” She asked for any suggestion, no matter how trivial.

Meanwhile, there was a groundswell of interest in a national association among the Aides at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, and Portland. Also, Dr. Frank Granger, of Boston, and Dr. Harold Corbusier, of Plainfield, New Jersey, were actively urging that an association be formed. Therefore, when the prospectus of the new association, as developed by Miss McMillan based on the suggestions of many, was received, support for a national association was immediate and enthusiastic.

The first prospectus included the purposes:
1. To form a national organization.
2. To standardize and to place physical therapy on a scientific basis in civilian life.
3. To offer the medical profession efficiently trained women.
4. To raise standards in clinics and general hospitals.

Qualifications for membership included:
1. Graduation from colleges or normal schools in physical education.
2. Training and experience in massage, therapeutic exercise, and some knowledge of electrotherapy and hydrotherapy.

All of this preliminary work was done prior to the historic organizational meeting at Keen’s Chop House in New York City on January 15, 1921. In a letter to a colleague in early January 1921, Miss McMillan wrote that she was spending a good part of each day and night on this “old” physical therapy association and if it ever got started she was looking for a letdown. To another, “I knew your poetic nature would resent a businesslike epistle . . . think, my dear, of the number of letters that my poor incompetent head has had to plan and then judge me harshly if you dare!” Also, she noted that she had been working alone since Miss Sanderson was busy with school work.

Even though “these many hours” were being spent on the physical therapy association, her enormous capacity for work and devotion to her profession was further evident by the writing, during this period, of the first textbook on physical therapy by an American. Her classic *Massage and Therapeutic Exercise* was published by W. B. Saunders Company in 1921. The third and last edition appeared in 1932.

ELECTED FIRST PRESIDENT

The letdown which Miss McMillan anticipated did not materialize, for on March 24, 1921, a mail ballot revealed that she had been elected the first President of the American Women’s Physical Therapeutic Association. Her first message to the members of the Association as its President was published in the June 1921 issue of the *P. T. Review*. In this message, in addition to outlining the functions of the new Association, she said, there was no cause nearer to her heart than the Association. This she was to repeat many times during her life. Significantly, she also said, “Now that we are a national association it is up to you and me to see to it that our foundation is laid on sound principles that will endure.” In her Presidential Address at the first convention in 1922 she added another dimension to her first message saying, “The easy path in the lowland has nothing grand or new, but a toilsome ascent leads to a glorious view.”

It would not be consistent with the character of Mary McMillan if great tribute was not paid and recognition given to her colleagues, the charter members, and the many physicians who gave wise counsel and encouragement to the birth of a new profession and its association.

Later at one of the Annual Conferences of the American Physical Therapy Association Miss McMillan recalled these days and said, “Early members at the first convention did not join and say, ‘What can I get out of it?’ they said, ‘I intend to join to see what I can make of my profession and to see what I can do to create and maintain stand-
ards.’” How well they succeeded is a matter of history. The dedication and leadership of the charter members were to guide the Association successfully through many crises.

TAKING PHYSICAL THERAPY TO CHINA

During the next ten years Miss McMillan was to practice her profession in Boston in Dr. Brackett’s office, continue her teaching, and participate in the growth of the Association as chairman and member of the Massachusetts Chapter. Strength and energy were being built up for her next challenge, China. In 1932 she went to China under the auspices of the China Medical Board of the Rockefeller Foundation to be in charge of the Department of Physical Therapy at Union Medical College in Peking. There, Miss McMillan, as the first international physical therapist, added another chapter of success and rewarding service, but the chapter was destined to end ten years later in sorrow.

Her great wisdom, perceptiveness, and gentleness as she embarked on this new venture, are a lesson in international relationships to all. She studied the Chinese language and culture; she observed that China had existed centuries before she arrived in Peking and that it was her responsibility to adjust to China. She must wait, she told herself, until the Oriental became accustomed to the Occidental, and, in turn, she must become accustomed to them before she could expect to win their confidence. Miss McMillan came to love the Chinese and China very deeply, and they her. Once more she started as she did at Walter Reed—treating patients, teaching, and “selling physical therapy and herself to the staff of the hospital.” It was not easy, but as she so frequently said, “Who wants an easy job?” Students were selected for training in physical therapy from the nursing staff at the hospital, many of whom were sent to the United States for a basic course of study, for she was preparing her students and colleagues for assuming responsibility for an enduring profession in China.

That a global war and later the Bamboo Curtain destroyed that dream was one of her greatest sorrows. She, by a twist of fate, became a personal victim of that war. She had been on home leave and returned to China just ten months prior to Pearl Harbor to release a physical therapist for war work. The warning signals were up, however, and she regretfully packed her household belongings, including all her Chinese treasures for shipment home. Some were to arrive, others never left the dock in Shanghai. She with other Americans left for Shanghai, but too late for passage home from that port. She later sailed from Hong Kong and arrived in Manila on December 2, 1941. No ship was scheduled to leave Manila for the States for almost two weeks, so she went to the mountains for a brief rest, the last such comfort she was to know for many months. It was here she learned of Pearl Harbor and returned immediately to Manila to volunteer her services in the Army hospital.

THE WORLD WAR II YEARS

The incredible and harrowing events of the next years have been told with both humor and anguish by Miss McMillan. Those privileged to hear her in 1944 at the Annual Conference in New York, soon after her repatriation, will never forget that night. She who had endured so much, still pain-racked from the effects of beriberi and peripheral neuritis, described the events of those long months as a prisoner of war with a voice not quite strong but still with a bell in it, and an occasional chuckle in recalling how she had outwitted her captors on occasion. Her unquenchable spirit, deep religious faith with its accompanying inner strengths shone through her every word. She did not cry, her listeners did, almost with a shame that they had done so little and she so much. That night she was awarded Honorary Membership in the Association, the first to be given to a physical therapist.

Two years later, at the first postwar Annual Conference [Blue Ridge] in 1946 at Black Mountain, North Carolina, when the Association was celebrating its Silver Anniversary, Miss McMillan spoke to the members on “Physical Therapy from the Embryo to Three Continents.” This was reprinted in the Physical Therapy Review in February 1960, which was dedicated to her memory. Again the magic of her personality and the depth of her character shone like the guiding light it had been on three continents. In the two years since her return from prison camp her health and her bounce had returned. These years had not been idle ones, for the plight of her Chinese friends and colleagues was of greater concern to her than her own well-being. She held weekly teas in her apartment in Boston, which was furnished with some of the Chinese treasures from her Chinese home. Guests at the teas contributed “silver” to buy vitamins for her former colleagues and dear friends. Not to be outdone, the APTA members at the 1946 Annual Conference spontaneously took a silver collection for their first President’s life-saving project.

The Black Mountain Conference was a happy one. Many of the charter members were present, and it provided an opportunity for happy reminiscing. Also present were many uniformed members of Physical Therapy Corps of World War II. One of these, a student in the first course given at Reed College and an assistant instructor in the second, was Col. Emma Vogel, Director of Physical Therapists in the Army, and later to be named Chief, Women’s Medical Specialist Corps.
until her retirement. Colonel Vogel at the time of Miss McMillan's death spoke of her warmly as the "Mother" of physical therapy and attributed whatever success she may have had in the Army Physical Therapy Program to the inspiration of Miss McMillan. Another poignant reunion was with Lt. B. Kuehlthau, now Major Gillet (Ret.), a fellow prisoner of war at Santa Tomas, who, too, felt and expressed the inspiration of Miss McMillan during this tragic period.

Those long months of incredible hardships, which, now, two years later, she could describe with humor were made bearable because there were others who needed her help. And help she gave them. Mrs. Martha Hill, a fellow prisoner and former anesthetist at Sternberg Army Hospital in Manila, in a personal communication recalls those months at Santa Tomas:

"Molly was a rock in a weary land and, with that humorous sparkle in her eye and good common sense, was usually able to pour a little oil on the troubled waters. Everyone liked and respected her. She was an example to all of us. Nothing upset her, not even the interminable waiting in long lines for everything: to get into the bathroom early in the morning, later to take a shower with two others (to conserve water), to get food, and so on. Her keen mind found some word of jest or witticism that relieved the tension at just the right moment. Molly read her Bible every morning before she got up; she said the day always seemed to go better for her when she started it that way. The Psalms were special favorites of hers.

"A science building was taken over for a camp hospital. Molly set up shop in a small room next to the space reserved for the daily clinic. Here with her knowledge and clever hands she performed miracles with hot water, a few pails, basins, and bath towels. As her fame spread, she became swamped and asked me to help. Robert Slathe, a bright high school boy, trained in first aid and was her right-hand man. It was a privilege to work with Molly. We had fun along with our work, and people from the clinic would stick their heads in to see what we were laughing at. Aching backs and arthritis from sleeping on cold cement, pulled muscles, painful feet, infected bedbug bites and rashes—all manner of aches and pains were brought in. Every day people went away feeling better after a half hour with Molly.

"All kinds of people came—English seamen and officers from the ships blown up under them in Manila Bay, socialites, missionaries, and prostitutes. We soaked and massaged one woman's feet and legs who later became famous for having 'contracted leprosy in camp.' As she had lived in Guam as a child she had undoubtedly been infected there, and the poor food and living conditions in camp had allowed it to develop."

Miss McMillan said among other words of wis-
tegrity of all people, and her vision to help us meet and solve perplexing problems with wisdom and understanding! With these attributes, the unity, purpose, and strength of our Association would never be threatened from within or without.

Were she here today she would say firmly and convincingly that those qualities are present in abundance, and that her trust in us is complete. She might add, we must be ever climbing the mountain and no matter how steep the ascent, we must be prepared for hard knocks. For, how else can we grow strong? She would remind us to listen with minds and hearts to one another and to be concerned for the needs of patients wherever they may be, here, in China, or anywhere in the world.

President John F. Kennedy once said, "It is our task in our time and in our generation to hand down undiminished to those who come after us what was handed down to us by those who went before. . . . To do this requires constant attention and vigilance, sustained vigor and imagination." May we who have received the precious legacy of Mary McMillan, our profession and our Association, cherish and nurture it, that we in turn may hand it down, as glowing and vital as the spirit of our beloved founder, the immortal Molly McMillan.

Symposium To Be Repeated in February

The Symposium on the Child with Central Nervous System Deficit, first given in October by the Division of Physical Therapy, University of Pennsylvania, and the JOURNAL, with funds from the Children's Bureau, will be repeated February 8-12, 1965.

Those physical therapists who applied but could not be accepted for the October session may indicate their interest in attending the February symposium by writing to:
Dorothy Baethke, Director
Division of Physical Therapy
School of Allied Medical Professions
University of Pennsylvania
3901 Pine Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104

Those who did not apply earlier may also write to Miss Baethke and indicate their interest. Only those physical therapists working with children with central nervous system disorders or teaching in schools of physical therapy will be considered.

The symposium will cover the fundamental physiologic, anatomic, and pathologic aspects of Central Nervous System deficit.

The symposium will be held at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.