

LANARK COUNTY'S PIONEER WOMAN DOCTOR

Dr. Agnes Douglas Craine (1861-1937)

In 1880 the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons at Kingston, Ontario, forerunner to the Queen's University Faculty of Medicine, was one of the first university level institutions in Canada to admit women. Three years later however, the handful of women it had enrolled were forced out of the program.

Encouraged by Professor Kenneth N. Fenwick (1852-1896), who charged that his classes were disrupted because the pitch of the female voice was that of an ape, and that "*women only went into medicine because they were not attractive enough to catch a man,*" male students threatened to transfer to the University of Toronto unless women were barred from the school. Lectures at Queen's, they claimed, were 'garbled' to suit the over-refined sensibilities of women.



Dr. Agnes Douglas Craine 1861-1937

To placate Fenwick and his male students, 'Kingston Women's Medical College' was established in 1883. Although staffed by many of the same Professors as the Queen's Medical School, setting the same examinations, and awarding the same Queen's University medical degree, the new school lasted less than a decade as female students chose to attend un-segregated schools in Toronto and Montreal. It would be 50 years, however, before women were readmitted to medical studies at Queen's, and when they were readmitted, it had much to do with the generosity and influence of a Women's Medical College graduate who had been denied access to Queen's, Dr. Agnes Douglas Craine of Smiths Falls, Ontario.

Agnes Craine was born at Smiths Falls on October 9, 1861, to John Joseph Craine (1827-1908) and Agnes Muir (1835-1914). Her father was a native of Ballaugh on the Isle of Man who arrived in Canada with his parents in the 1840s¹. Her mother was a native of Ayrshire, Scotland². When his daughter was born, J. J. Craine was a house painter with a shop on Main Street in Smiths Falls.

¹ John Craine (1801-1881) and Catharine Craine (1803-1873) who came to Canada with their children John Joseph (1827-1908), Thomas Jefferson (1834-1886), Ester Anne (1835-1863) and Jemetta (1836-1857).

² Probably the daughter of John and Agnes Muir of Stevenson, Ayrshire, and sister of William Muir (1821-1909) of Port Dalhousie, Ontario.

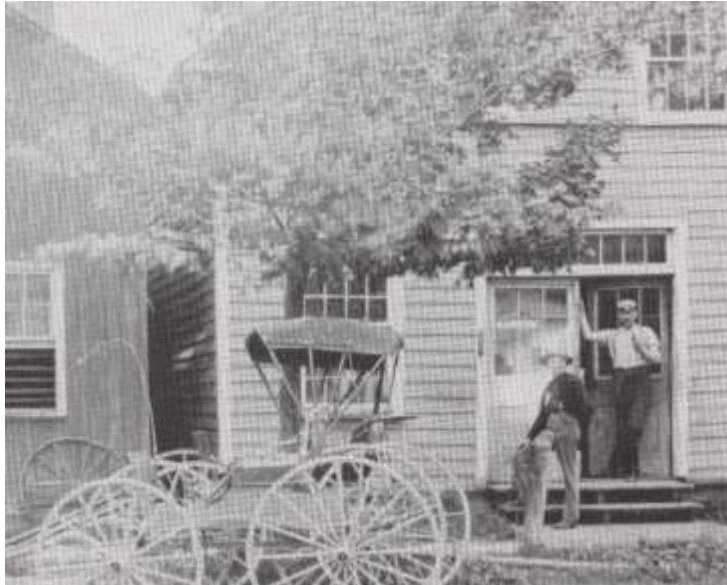
Agnes was educated at Smiths Falls public and high schools and then taught elementary school for a few years before enrolling at Kingston Women's Medical College in 1885, the first woman from Smiths Falls to attend university. When she graduated as an M.D. in 1888, she did so with first class honors in every examination.

The following year, accompanied by her mother in the role of chaperone, Dr. Craine travelled to Europe. In Scotland she sat examinations and was admitted to the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons, Edinburgh and the Faculty of Physicians & Surgeons, Glasgow. From the United Kingdom she travelled

to the continent, visiting college hospitals in Paris and Berlin and then completing a year's post graduate work under Dr. Christian Albert Theodor Billroth (1829-1894)³ at the University of Vienna. She later qualified as a Member of the College of Physicians & Surgeons, New York. Dr. Agnes Crain was *"the most highly educated woman in Eastern Ontario at the time, better [educated] than any of her male counterparts in Smiths Falls."*⁴

Returning to her hometown, Dr. Craine established a general practice with her surgery located in the family home at #2 Bay Street North. In doing so she joined a crowded field of no less than nine doctors then serving Smiths Falls and area.⁵ For the next seven years she worked as a family physician, while frequently contending with *"chauvinistic jealousies"*⁶ from her all-male cohort. Then, in 1897, circumstances for the Craine family changed significantly. That spring the *Smiths Falls Record*⁷ reported that,

Mr. John Craine, and daughter, Dr. Agnes Craine, will leave next month for a trip to the Old Land to take steps to secure a handsome legacy which has been left the former by a relative in the Isle of Man. They will be away a couple of months and expect to be in London during the Jubilee festivities⁸.



*John Craine Sr. and John Craine Jr. outside the Craine paint shop, Main Street, Smiths Falls, c1895
(Photo Courtesy of Helen McBratney Collection)*

³ Dr. Billroth was an Austrian surgeon considered the founding father of modern abdominal surgery who taught at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, 1860-1867 and then at the University of Vienna, Austria.

⁴ Town of Smiths Falls Municipal Heritage Plaque, Craine House, 2 Bay Street North.

⁵ The 1908 edition of *Polk's Medical Register & Directory of the United States and Canada* listed the following medical practitioners with offices at Smiths Falls with their dates of qualification: Dr. James A. Anderson (1903), Dr. James M. Conerty (1886), Dr. Agnes Craine (1888), Dr. Charles L. Easton (1887), Dr. William A. Gray (1890), Dr. Fred C. Hagan (1895), Dr. John S. McCallum (1872), Dr. Edward McKenzie (1860), Dr. Charles L. B. Stammers (1895).

⁶ Town of Smiths Falls Municipal Heritage Plaque, Craine House, 2 Bay Street North.

⁷ Report re-printed in *Perth Courier*, April 30, 1897.

⁸ Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, marking 60 years on the throne, was celebrated June 22, 1897.

On their return, while she continued to maintain a medical practice at Smiths Falls for more than three decades, Agnes Craine “*did not devote her entire time to the practice of her profession, as independent means allowed her to participate in art and to travel*”⁹. Those travels took her back to Europe at least three more times, on several journeys across Canada and on visits to the United States. Canadian women having secured the vote in 1918, she was active at home in Conservative politics.¹⁰

In 1936, despite the fact that in the 1880s she had been forced to attend segregated lectures in the west wing of Kingston City Hall among the exiles of Women’s Medical College, Agnes Craine gave Queen’s University \$350,000. She established the endowment in memory of her parents and her only sibling, John Craine Jr. (1859-1935)¹¹, recognizing, no doubt, that much of the money had come to her from her father’s Isle of Man inheritance of 1897. However, the endowment terms also paid tribute to Reverend George Monro Grant (1835-1902), Principal of the University 1877-1902. It was Grant who, in 1878, had first admitted women to regular classes at Queen’s, who, in 1880, had admitted women to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and who had helped establish the Kingston Women’s Medical College in 1883 in an effort to prevent the complete exclusion of women from medical studies.



Craine Building, Queen's University, Kingston

The 1936 donation, representing more than \$6,350,000 in early 21st century dollars¹², established the Craine Chair in Biochemistry¹³ and funded construction of the Craine Building, the only building constructed on the Queen’s Campus during the depths of the 1930s depression. Completed in 1938, her building at 56 Arch Street housed the Departments of Biochemistry, Pharmacology and Obstetrics into the 1970s and today houses offices of the Department of Psychology.

⁹ *Perth Courier*, March 5, 1937.

¹⁰ At the Federal election of 1921 Dr. Agnes Craine’s name is among those signing nomination papers for Progressive Party candidate Robert Matheson Anderson, who ran against Conservative John A. Stewart and Liberal William George Ferguson.

¹¹ Neither Agnes nor her brother John ever married.

¹² See Canada Inflation Calculator <https://www.in2013dollars.com/canada/inflation/1935?amount=350000>

¹³ Occupied in 2020 by Glenville Jones PhD, Crain Professor and Head, Department of Biochemistry, Professor of Medicine.



Craine House, Smiths Falls, Ontario

Dr. Craine's generous contribution to Queen's Medical School sent a message the University governors could not ignore. When a Dean's committee was appointed in 1943 to consider the issue of women's admissions, its report pointedly noted *"that Agnes Craine's generosity had never been matched by any of Queen's much more numerous male medical graduates"*¹⁴. Later that year the long-standing notice that read *"men only admitted"* was finally removed from the medical school calendar.

The 1850s stone house where Agnes Craine lived and practiced medicine was designated in 1983 by the Town of Smiths Falls as a heritage property for its historic and architectural value, and a pedestal marking it as the site of Dr. Craine's surgery was placed there in 2020¹⁵.

Dr. Agnes Douglas Craine, M.D.C.M. (Medicinæ Doctorem et Chirurgiæ Magistrum) and M.C.P. & S. (Member of College of Physicians & Surgeons) – Ontario; L.R.C.P. (Licence of the Royal College of Physicians) and L.R.C.S. (Licentiate Diploma of the Royal College of Surgeons) – Edinburgh; L.F.P. & S.G. (Licentiate Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons) and M.C.P. & S. (Member of College of Physicians & Surgeons) – New York, died, aged 75 years at Chamber's Memorial Hospital, Smiths Falls, on February 26, 1937. Her ashes were buried in Mount Royale Cemetery, Montreal.

- Ron W. Shaw (2020)

¹⁴ *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, September 7, 1999.

¹⁵ The property is now divided into apartments.