

## { ONCE UPON A TIME IN QUINCY }

# Daughter followed mom as valedictorian, physician

By ARLIS DITTMER

When Hildegarde Germann decided to become a doctor, she was following in her mother's footsteps.

Dr. Melinda Germann had practiced medicine in Quincy since 1888. Hildegarde was born in 1892, the only daughter of Dr. Melinda and Henry Germann. She graduated from Quincy High School at 16 in 1909 and was valedictorian, again following in her mother's footsteps. Her class of 67 students was the largest class to graduate from the high school to date.

Hildegarde entered Vassar College that fall and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1913. She was the youngest member of her class. During the summer between her junior and senior year she was among a group of 18 young women from Vassar who spent six weeks traveling in the West. She joined the train trip in Burlington, Iowa, and traveled to Yellowstone National Park. The rest of the trip was by horseback, with camping throughout the park. The chaperones were teachers from the college and Julia Emerson, the daughter of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

After her graduation in June from Vassar, she and her family traveled around the eastern United States and then sailed from Montreal to Liverpool, England. After splitting up during their travels in Europe so that Melinda Germann could visit hospitals, see friends and take postgraduate courses, the family eventually met in Zurich, where they attended the international Sunday school convention. Travels in Germany



**Dr. Melinda and Henry Germann lived in this house at 1231 Maine. The house later became her medical office, and still later the office for the practices of Dr. Melinda, Dr. Hildegarde and Dr. Aldo Germann.** | Illustration courtesy of the Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County

included the Germann ancestral home in Darmstadt. Hildegarde and her brother Aldo climbed mountains in Switzerland and traveled through Italy, eventually sailing from Naples to Boston.

Aldo returned to Northwestern for the school term, and Hildegarde stayed on in the East to visit Vassar friends. She returned home after almost five months away and chose to remain in Quincy for the year, deferring entering Johns Hopkins Medical School until 1914.

To help pass her time in Quincy, she entered Gem City Business College with her friend Julia Sinnock. She left for Baltimore in fall 1914 to attend Johns Hopkins, only returning home to Quincy during breaks while in medical

school. In 1918, she graduated sixth in her class of 100 and first among the female students. The Quincy Daily Journal reported on the ceremony and said that she was "appointed to an internship in the Johns Hopkins Hospital, the highest honor given a graduate." Her specialties were internal medicine, pediatrics and cardiology. She took the Maryland state examination for her medical license, which had a reciprocal agreement with Illinois.

Unfortunately, none of her family was able to attend the ceremony. Her brother Aldo was serving an internship in Chicago during the summer while he was a medical student at Northwestern University. Her mother was attending the American Medical

Association meeting, also in Chicago, which she "motored to," returning to Quincy in her car, reporting the "roads were fine." The Germanns owned one of the first cars in Quincy.

Hildegarde Germann began her internship in August 1918 in Baltimore. That fall the Spanish influenza epidemic became serious, and the hospital had 200 cases. The hospital staff also became ill. Hildegarde wrote to her mother about the ward of 58 cases under her care with only two senior students to help. She was the only staff physician who did not become ill. The Quincy Daily Herald reported the severity of the epidemic in the East. Fortunately, the flu epidemic in Quincy was not as severe. Later in one of her

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many letters to her parents while serving in Baltimore, she mentions meeting the queen of Belgium, who was touring the hospital.

Hildegarde's engagement to Dr. Lawrence Getz of Baltimore was announced in May 1919. Because students in classes at Johns Hopkins were assigned alphabetically, the couple were classmates and competitors for medical school honors. Dr. Getz had joined the Army as a medical officer, leaving for France in 1917 before completing his course work. According to the Quincy Daily Whig, "His education was finished near the trenches of the battlefields and he was graduated on the field in 1918." Upon returning to the United States, he took a position as surgeon at Bay View Hospital in Baltimore. Their engagement lasted approximately two years. He came to Quincy for various holidays and for the funeral of Henry Germann in 1920. In June 1921, Hildegarde gave a paper on the 50th anniversary of Vassar College and on her way home from that presentation, she visited Dr. Getz in Baltimore, after which all mention of him ended.

Hildegarde and her brother Aldo took postgraduate courses after medical school and went abroad in 1920 to study at the University of Vienna, as had their mother. In July 1922 they again re-

turned to Europe for more clinics in gynecology and children's diseases. They intended to stay for a year or more but returned to Quincy after only a few months. They both decided to remain in Quincy and practice medicine with their mother in her office at 1231 Maine.

Hildegarde married Frank B. Sinnock in November 1924. He was from Quincy and studied civil engineering at Stanford University. After graduation he worked on a harbor project in Hawaii for three years. Later he spent time working on railroads in the West. He returned to Quincy in summer 1924 and was associated with J.W. Sinnock and Sons wholesale furnishings on Third Street.

Hildegarde Germann Sinnock continued to practice medicine after her marriage and the births of her two sons. She had a long career in medicine with membership in the Adams County Medical Society for over 50 years and served on the medical staff of Blessing Hospital. There are many stories about Hildegarde, and she is remembered by patients and their families in Quincy.

**Arlis Dittmer is a retired medical librarian. During her 26 years with Blessing Health System, she became interested in medical and nursing history — both topics frequently overlooked in history.**