

Dr. Jennie McCowen was among the first women to enroll in and graduate from the University of Iowa Medical Department as it was known in the 1870s. Originally from Ohio and the daughter of a physician, she taught in the public schools after graduating from a teacher-training institution, at that time one of the few career options open to single women. She then moved to Iowa, going to medical school at a time when many medical schools did not accept women, and she received her M.D. in 1876.

Upon graduation, Dr. McCowen served Iowans as the director of the Hospital for the Insane in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, and as a private practitioner in Davenport, Iowa. She worked to dissuade people from believing the prevailing theories of the time linking insanity in women to disorders of the female organs. She was a widely respected and active leader in state and national professional organizations and was a founder of the Iowa State Society of Medical Women. In addition she promoted numerous projects supporting women, children and institutionalized persons.

Dr. McCowen was ahead of her time in encouraging children's interest in science. As a member of the Davenport Academy of Sciences with a particular interest in geology, she worked to strengthen connections between her organization and the local public schools. She founded and supported the "Lend-A-Hand Club" in Davenport, a group dedicated to the assistance of working-class girls and young women. She became a member of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, a group concerned with the humane treatment of persons committed to state hospitals, homes, and correctional institutions. She also developed an interest in the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis and attended international tuberculosis conferences and was a founding member of the Iowa Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis.

Dr. Jennie McCowen more than ably represented the first generation of women graduates of the University of Iowa College of Medicine, earning the respect of all of her colleagues. She epitomizes the spirit of community service and should serve as an inspiration to us as we develop the McCowen Community.

As a quintessential role model for both current and aspiring physicians, the work and passion of Jennie McCowen is continued in the medical learning community that bears her name. Through its dedication to the betterment of the Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine, greater Coralville/Iowa City area, and the state of Iowa, the Jennie McCowen Learning Community strives to affect the lives of Iowans just as its namesake has done. By forging relationships with local programs such as the Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP), Adopt a Family, DOC Dash, and many more, the members of the McCowen Community hope to inspire future generations in the same manner that we have been inspired by Jennie McCowen.