

Dr Palmer: Chiropractor, World Traveller, Author, Lecturer, Civic Leader, Mother and Wife.

The story of Mabel Heath Palmer.

Author: Alana Callender; Reviewer: Phillip Ebrall

Book: Callender A. Dr Palmer: Chiropractor, World Traveller, Author, Lecturer, Civic Leader, Mother and Wife. Ordering information can be found at <https://www.historyofchiropractic.org/store/> US\$34.95 +p&h, payable through PayPal.

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Review

Dr. Alana Callender began assembling materials on Mabel Heath Palmer in 1983 and over the intervening years has added interviews, news clippings, unpublished speeches by Dr. Palmer, and handwritten notes found in the Palmer archival collection to an ever-growing knowledge base. Self-quarantine during the Great Pandemic of 2020 was just the impetus needed for the completion of this complete biography.

Dr. Mabel, or Sweet Mabel, or The First Lady of Chiropractic, or Mrs. B.J. Palmer was a pioneer in chiropractic education who created her own textbook to be used in the anatomy classroom. She became especially well-known in the profession as a motivational speaker; notes for her speeches are appended to the biography.

Mabel was a dynamo in civic leadership. She was the President of Quota International and as such, founded the original chapters of that organisation in Australia and Canada. She was the hostess for WOC Radio personalities from all walks of life; including statesmen, princesses, and circus performers. During her world travels, she was a keen observer and reporter of different cultures, immersing herself in them as much as possible. Her story is one of a remarkable life during the early 20th century.

Palmer (MH) led a most interesting life and to her great credit Callender seems to have left no stone unturned. The allusion to 'stones' is deliberate as MH named her 1942 memoir '*Stepping Stones*'. This review is not a shortened version of MH's life and achievements, rather it points to the diligence of Callender to build a formidable amount of data over time, and to present it in a logical, connected manner. Her first paper on MH was published in 1985 (1) and her inquiry has been relentless leading to this landmark historical record of importance to our profession. Some of the newly found material was reported in 1996 (2) and while this book is the culmination we should not be surprised to see even more information emerge over the next few years.

Quick Tap or Scan:



Mabel Heath Palmer. Image from 'Anatomy 4e' digitised by Google and held by Palmer University.
URL <https://centerforinquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/quackwatch/anatomy.pdf>



Waters observed (3) that there was more to MH than *'the familiar observations that Mabel Heath Palmer was wife to B.J. Palmer, the developer of Chiropractic and instructed anatomy at the P.S.C.'* and Gromala notes her role as a pioneering woman in chiropractic. (4)

Callender provides a rich historical context for MH as a woman at a time when apron-strings were more suited to a woman's 'place' that being in front of a class lecturing anatomy. To qualify to teach MH completed a special one-year course in anatomy and dissection at the Rush Medical College in Chicago. (5)

Perhaps as an expression of her independence MH wrote in the colophon of her textbook '*I dedicate to my loving companion, Dr. B.J. Palmer ...*', (not 'husband') and this at a time when they had been married for 18 years and more. She took an enlightened approach to writing this anatomy text for students by focussing on the need of the student, not the anatomist. As an educator myself I understand and celebrate her approach which makes a complex topic accessible with relevant meaning to students of our profession. MH held the view that '*knowledge is the birthright of every being, and knowledge of no other subject is more useful than that of the human organization - the brain guided by the universal Intelligence which governs it.*' (6)

MH accompanied BJ on his travels. He wrote of a '*Round the World*' trip to Japan, China and Korea in the Winter of 1921-21, and a second of 8 months duration in Winter and Spring of 1924-25. (7) Whereas BJ's diary notes reveal he was somewhat unimpressed with the standards of health and hygiene in the countries he visited, his observation on societal structures led him to observe that '*American expects to give little to hold all he once thought he owned.*' Callender shows that MH was similarly philosophical but perhaps more compassionate toward her fellows.

Throughout her life the behaviours of MH lead to her being remembered fondly as the '*sweetheart of the PSC*', (8, 9) an intelligent, capable woman who brought balance to the energies and eccentricities of her husband, and deservedly an empowering figure within the 'First Family' of chiropractic.

Callender has captured a delightful portrait of a remarkable person who gave a lot to the profession of chiropractic. This book is highly recommended.



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