



# Heartland Science

Ohio's Legacy of Discovery & Innovation



## Medicine, Health & Science

From the Heimlich Maneuver  
to the Speed of Light

### First Female MD

Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell (1821 - 1910) was born in England, and grew up in Cincinnati where she moved in 1937. She graduated from the Geneva Medical College in western New York in 1849, becoming the first woman doctor in the United States.



As a child, Blackwell was educated by tutors. After her father died, she and her family operated a private school, where Blackwell found herself more and more interested in medicine. At the time, it was unheard of for a woman to consider a medical career, but that didn't stop Blackwell. She felt strongly that women deserved to have the option of seeing a woman doctor, who might best be able to understand a woman's unique makeup.

In 1847, Blackwell started on a quest to earn a medical degree. It was difficult to find a school willing to accept her, however. She was rejected by 29 medical schools. Some schools thought her application was a joke. Others were shocked that a woman would consider applying. Her persistence won out though, when she was finally accepted into Geneva Medical College in western New York in 1847. A fellow classmate described the scene as Blackwell arrived at her first class in medical school: "A hush fell over the class as if each member had been stricken with paralysis...A death-like stillness prevailed during the lecture." Blackwell graduated first in her class.

During her career which spanned several countries, Elizabeth Blackwell published many books. Among them:

- The Religion of Health (1871)
- Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Their Children (1878)
- The Human Element in Sex (1884)
- Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women (1895)
- Essays in Medical Sociology (1902)

Blackwell also founded a hospital in New York entirely staffed by women in 1857. It ran for over thirty years, but she was drawn to England, and returned there in 1869, where she helped organize the National Health Society and founded the London School of Medicine for Women. In 1875, Blackwell was appointed professor of gynecology at the London School of Medicine for Children. While in England, Blackwell lectured extensively and was the first woman to have her name entered in the British Medical Register. One of Blackwell's best-known quotes sums up her determination, "If society will not admit of woman's free development, then society must be remodeled."

Photos, copies of her letters of admission to medical school, and more information about Elizabeth Blackwell are available at the National Institutes of Health website at [www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/blackwell](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/blackwell).