

Special Issue

SEPTEMBER 17, 2018



The Summer of 1918

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- Anna Kugler, 1918

Towards the end of the First World War, on 12 August 1918, a British military doctor of the Madras Presidency was going to speak at the inauguration of a medical school in South India. Suspecting correctly that the little school in rented buildings did not possess a skeleton for anatomy classes, Col. Reginal Bryson decided to take one with him. The skeleton, decorously boxed, travelled by train from Madras to Vellore, where it became the teacher of anatomy for fourteen girls. The school's professor of anatomy was also its principal, Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder. The school had only two medical teachers.

Four years later, when the girls graduated, the professor of anatomy had become the professor of gynaecology. The beautifully planned graduation ceremony was held under a tent, since the school had little in the way of buildings. Present at the ceremony was Dr. Anna Kugler, the first woman medical missionary in South India. She wrote a little booklet to commemorate the occasion. Self-effacing, Dr. Kugler did not include her full name in the booklet. The final lines read :

Epilogue

We look forward to the time when all young women of the Madras Presidency preparing for the profession of medicine will seek enrolment in the Medical School at Vellore. This little booklet is written that the students of the future will be able to know something of the ambitions and aspirations of the First Class of Students and be stimulated thereby to such noble efforts that women of India will bless the day that saw the establishment of the Vellore School of Medicine for Women

- ASK

Why did Dr. Kugler have such aspirations for a fledgling institution? What happened to the school in the four decades that followed? We will seek answers in the lives and voices of those who enabled the birth of that medical college.

*Excerpt from 'One Step at a Time' by Dr. Reena George.
The book is an illustrated history of the origins of medical education
at the Christian Medical College, Vellore.*