

Letter to the Editor

A. E. C. Lathrop (1868-1918): Mouse Woman of Granby

In the *Index to the Literature of Experimental Cancer Research* (2) are listed eight papers by A. E. C. Lathrop and L. Loeb (5-12) and two more with Loeb as the senior author (14, 15). These reports established that the occurrence of mammary tumors in female mice varied in different families, that the hybrids between high- and low-tumor families usually resembled the high strain, that pregnancies increased the frequency of breast cancer, and that ovariectomy reduced the frequency.

These basic contributions were published between 1913 and 1919. The place of Leo Loeb in cancer research is prominent. But who was A. E. C. Lathrop?

Loeb, in his autobiography (13), states that during his association with the University of Pennsylvania, 1904 to 1910, he initiated studies with Miss Lathrop of Granby, Mass., who had a large commercial mouse colony there. "Miss Lathrop was a good helpmate in this work and I hold her memory in high esteem," wrote Loeb. She is also mentioned in the *Biology of the Laboratory Mouse* (3) as the source of some of the strains continued at The Jackson Laboratory by C. C. Little.

The road to more information on A. E. C. Lathrop led from Mrs. William C. Petty (*nee* Lathrop) of Stonington, Conn.; to Mrs. Lynette C. Young, librarian of the Granby Public Library; to Mr. Erol W. Bowie of Williamsburg; to Mr. Kenneth B. Graves, a retired accountant; and to Mrs. Raymond S. Dickinson of Granby. An account of A. E. C. Lathrop was unearthed in the *Holyoke Transcript* at the time of her death in 1918, which was reprinted 50 years later. She is mentioned in a paragraph of a book on the Connecticut Valley (4). In the July 1968 issue of the *New England Homestead Magazine* is an article about her by the late Mrs. Edith C. Bowie (1). Unfortunately, no portrait of Miss Lathrop was located.

Abbie E. C. Lathrop was born in 1868, in Illinois. Her parents, both teachers, came from near Granby. They directed their daughter's education, but at 17 she went for 2 years to an unidentified educational institution. At 19 Abbie passed the Illinois teacher's examination and taught school for a time. She came to Granby in 1900 and started a business with poultry. The returns were unsatisfactory and she changed to pet animals, including mice and rats for which she visualized educational uses. In 1908 she found tumors on some of the mice and had them verified as cancers. The mice now became valuable for experimental purposes and were sold to many institutions. The mouse stock gradually increased to 10,000, and some guinea pigs, rabbits, and ferrets were also raised.

About 1908 she formed an association with Leo Loeb, who seemed to have designed the experiments that were then conducted by Miss Lathrop at Granby. During the war,

according to the *Holyoke Transcript*, "The United States government has made an appeal to Miss Lathrop for mice and guinea pigs to be used in research laboratories, in the trenches where they are used to detect gas and in army camps where they serve for scientific study in pneumonia epidemics."

Kenneth Graves in a letter wrote that Miss Abbie's was a popular place to work for the neighbor's children and that her crackers bought by the barrel were so fresh. On cage-shifting days, each mouse family, carefully segregated and identified, was moved to a clean box, and the previously occupied boxes were scrubbed and disinfected.

The animal business was conducted with the help of her two close friends, Mrs. Ada Warner Gray and Miss Edith Chapin. Miss Lathrop died of pernicious anemia in 1918, in her 50th year. The business did not survive long without her at the helm. She is buried in West Cemetery, Granby, where she was joined by her friend, Mrs. Gray.

"Granby's 'Mouse Woman' may have been frail in health, diminutive in size, scientifically unsung in her time (which would have been her preference, modest soul that she was), but afraid neither of mice nor of hard work, her contributions were great, her place in female pioneer circles of Yankeedom worthy of note." (1).

The cancer research circle should be included.

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