



NEWSLETTER

Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society
Summer / Fall 2021

DR. ELEANOR ROBINSON



(November 26, 1900 – December 31, 1994)

Dr. Eleanor McArthur Robinson was a wonderful person. She was a true friend and sister and an outstanding example of Christian womanhood. Although I recognized her and knew about her I was not privileged to have known her personally. Those who did were richly blessed. The information, observations and insights contained in the article you are about to read barely scrape the surface of the personality, character and accomplishments of this truly amazing woman of God. I am deeply indebted to and gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Melanie Whitfield, Cyndy Allcock, Bonnie Porter, Frances Groves, Beth Hibbard and several others. Particularly, I would like to recognize the excellent work of Dr. Claude Cox in a biographical sketch of Dr. Robinson written by him and published by Grove Park Home in Barrie.

Biographical Background



Eleanor Robinson was born in York Township on November 26, 1909, the only child born to Michael Henry William Robinson (1880-1967) and Janet McArthur (1881-1982). Her father was born in Collingwood Township, Ontario and then moved to Manitoulin Island where he met and married Janet in 1907. The couple then moved to Toronto where Eleanor was born and grew up. Dr. Robinson recalled that in those days Toronto ended at St. Clair Avenue. She attended Pauline Ave. Public School, Oakwood Collegiate and Bloor Collegiate Institute. Though Her father had learned sheet metal-working at night school work was hard to find in Toronto during the Depression. Her mother was a baker and started a bakery in that difficult time which continued for four years until she seriously cut her hand, bringing the business to an end. At considerable sacrifice to all three of them Eleanor was able to attend medical school during the Depression. From the age of nine she knew that she wanted to be a medical missionary doctor. When her grade 13 math teacher asked her to apply for a university scholarship she responded, "No thanks, I'm going into medicine!" Dr. Robinson entered medical school in 1927 and graduated in 1934. Sadly her dream of becoming a medical missionary was never realized as there was no money to finance the venture.

Family



Dr. Eleanor was an only child. Earlier in life she was blessed with many cousins, especially on her mother's side and some on her father's side as well. There were many wonderful family experiences which she enjoyed immensely and treasured, especially the periodic trips to Manitoulin Island. Later in life it gave her satisfaction that, living in Barrie, she had relatives nearby in Stayner who she visited as she had opportunity.

Dr. Robinson was a firm believer that ministry begins at home. She found great satisfaction in taking her parents on a trip across Canada when they were in their late 70s and 80s, something they were

unable to do in their younger years. Later she fondly looked back on this as being important. She was fully convicted of the responsibility of adult children to attend to the needs of their parents and other family members (Eph. 6:1-3; cf. Ex. 20:1; 1 Tim. 5:3-8). She looked after her parents with grace. Her mother passed her 100th birthday and except for a period when she lived in Barrie at Grove Park Home and another at Runnymede (chronic) Hospital she lived with Eleanor.

Over the years the church increasingly became Dr. Eleanor's family and various individuals such as the Zila family from Uxbridge, Ontario "adopted" her into their families. Although Dr. Robinson had neither sibling nor descendant and her only blood relatives were some cousins whom she loved and cherished, she inherited a large family of friends and brothers and sisters in the Lord, including a great many grateful young people she encouraged and helped and whose lives were forever changed for the better by this remarkable woman. Melanie (Zila) Whitfield commented: "What a blessing, what a servant, what a mentor, what a friend! Thank you Aunt Eleanor."

Professional Accomplishments



Dr. Robinson was an influential doctor at a time when it was rare for women to choose that profession. She was one of the first two female interns admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital. It was while taking her internship at St. Joseph's that she had the chance to become a specialist in the care of diabetic patients. Sixteen years at St. Joseph's were followed by a twenty-five year practice at Women's College Hospital. In 1950 she wrote exams to obtain the Certificate of the Royal College of Physicians and in 1970 she was made a Fellow (FRCPC). During her time at Women's College Hospital she was instrumental in setting up a Diabetes Education Centre which eventually became TRIDEC involving her own hospital, Toronto General and Mt. Sinai hospitals. For fourteen years Dr. Eleanor was on the staff of the Toronto General Hospital Diabetic Clinic and for many years she served as the Ontario Medical Association representative on the Continuing Diet Manual Committee and the Manual Revision Committee of the Ontario Dietetic Association. In addition she worked part-time with the Toronto Department of Education secondary school service.

From 1966 she lectured at the University of Toronto and in 1972 was awarded a fellowship by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. She was a member of the Canadian Academy of Allergists and at the time of her anticipated retirement was honoured with a Life Membership by the Ontario Medical Association.

Though she retired in 1976 Dr. Robinson continued to study. She took courses in various subjects at Ryerson Polytechnical Institution (now University) and graduated with a certificate in gerontology. For all her accomplishments she remained humble and caring.

Church Life



Eleanor was deeply committed to her Lord and maintained a high level of involvement in the church. She first attended Bathurst Street Church of Christ in Toronto where she was baptized in July 1923. For several years she was a dedicated Sunday school teacher. In the early 1940's Dr. Robinson began to worship with the Fern Avenue congregation when the Bathurst Street church moved to Bayview Avenue. When the Fern Avenue congregation ceased meeting in the late 1960's she became a member of the Bayview church. While living in Toronto Dr. Eleanor taught a group of people in a Bible study at the Maynard Nursing Home. In 1988, because she didn't want to be a burden to anyone, Dr. Robinson independently decided to move to Grove Park Home while she could still look after her own future and became a vital part of the congregation in Barrie, Ontario.

In the 1940's the Fern Avenue congregation went through a time of crisis following a suspected arson at the church building. In order to help the women cope with the situation Dr. Eleanor started a Bible study group. This Bible study continued for forty years, with a couple short breaks, as long as she was able to lead it. Dr. Cox comments: "This was typical of Dr. Eleanor's work in the kingdom of God: a need quietly filled, a valuable ministry provided." Numerous women such as Frances Groves and Bonnie Porter spoke of being impressed and intrigued with her depth of Bible knowledge and strong Christian faith. The late Joe Canon, a veteran missionary to Japan and New Guinea, said that Dr. Eleanor's Bible class had been crucial to his sister's faith. The same might be said of a great many others.

On one occasion Dr. Robinson, along with Frances (Bennett) Groves as a co-facilitator, presented a "Women's Class" lecture on abortion, a hot topic of the day, at a GLCC lectureship. Frances recalls that Dr. Robinson was a gentle teacher and there were so many questions to be answered and philosophical and moral judgements that needed to be reviewed before deciding on a Christian point of view on the topic. "I can remember the day of the lecture vividly," she says, "I was kind of unnerved by the fact that men were in the audience. Expressing my hesitation, she (Dr. Robinson) gently suggested that the men had come to the lecture on their own volition because they needed the information. We carried on the lecture as planned and had a great discussion and many good questions from the group. Standing room only, in the room, as I recall."

Dr. Eleanor was a diligent student and an excellent teacher. Her interests were many and varied and she thoroughly enjoyed reading and studying, especially matters relating to the Bible. Her one regret was that she did not have the opportunity to learn Koine New Testament Greek when she was younger so she could read it for herself rather than relying on the thoughts and comments of others.

In the words of Dr. Cox: "The contribution that she made to her church and community is exemplary. With grace she brought credit to the contributions which women make to the life of the church and she ennobled the life of the single Christian woman."

A Life of Service

For many years Dr. Eleanor made weekly trips from Toronto to Omagh Bible School/Camp near Milton, Ontario and ensured the camp met various regulations of the Ministry of Health. From 1945-1957 she served as the medical director. During that period she is the only woman mentioned as serving in any leading capacity. In 1949 an infirmary was included in the construction of a new building, quite likely due to Dr. Robinson's influence. Her interest and involvement in Omagh continued for several years including the time she attended family week and eventually, seniors' week.

In December 1972, Dr. Robinson became the first woman to be appointed to the Board of Directors for Great Lakes Christian College (now High School), located in Beamsville, Ontario. She continued to serve in this capacity until 1980. Over the years she was a promoter and supporter of the school in various ways. One of the things she did was encourage numerous young people to attend and also helped by providing some or all the finances for those who otherwise could not afford to attend. In addition, she left a generous bequest to Great Lakes in her will which became the "Dr. Eleanor Robinson Future Student Endowment Fund."

Dr. Robinson was respected and admired for her contributions to life at Grove Park Home and in the community equally as much as for her contributions to the kingdom. While studying at Ryerson Dr. Eleanor was part of a "recollections" group. When she moved to Barrie she started such a group at Grove Park Home. In 1991 this group was able, with the help of a New Horizons grant, to publish "Tales of Yesteryear." This book includes four brief stories by Dr. Eleanor and many more by others. With the publication of the book there were articles about Dr. Eleanor in the local press and an appearance on a local cable TV talk show. The book project was so successful that a second volume containing five stories by Dr. Robinson was published in 1993. She also contributed six stories to the third volume in the series which also contained a poem dedicated to her. In addition to these three books Dr. Eleanor's writings appeared, from time to time, in the Barrie Examiner, the Barrie Banner and Spotlight. These same periodicals also published articles about her efforts to make people's lives better and more enjoyable, often accompanied by pictures. One article in particular by Dr. Eleanor, "Thoughts on Old Age: Growing Older is a Stage in Life to be Enjoyed." was published, in the Barrie Examiner March 27, 1990.

Facing Difficulties

Not all was smooth sailing. The good doctor also knew the life of a patient. She was near the top of her class in medical school when she was forced to take a year off after the fifth year when it was suspected that she had TB. In 1964 she had her first experience with cancer and later she had malignant tumours removed from her throat, leaving her with a weakened voice. She said that the quality of her voice was a small price to pay for her life! In 1991 the cancer returned and in 1992 she spent a month in treatments at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto.

In the spring of 1985, after studying for her certificate in gerontology and while tutoring one of the classes, Dr. Eleanor suffered a heart attack that required her to carefully monitor her level of activity. After her heart

attack Cyndy Allcock lived with Dr. Eleanor while Cyndy pursued a master's degree in gerontology at the University of Toronto. They had much to talk about because Dr. Eleanor was working on the Certificate of Gerontology at Ryerson at the same time. Cyndy is one of a number of younger women who were part of a circle of valued friends. The heart attack was a "peak experience" for Dr. Eleanor and she often spoke about the sense of peace she experienced while lying on the floor waiting for the ambulance to arrive. She credited this sense of peace with possibly saving her life at that time. Out of the experience Dr. Eleanor came to feel that it would be alright to die. Her faith was one that sustained whatever happened. All of these things she faced with dignity.

Much more could and perhaps should be said about this godly woman although truthfully she would be uncomfortable by a fuss being made over her. Three passages of Scripture somewhat sum up Dr. Robinson's approach to life:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."
(Phil. 2:3, 4; NIV)

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col. 3:17; NIV)

"I can do all this through Him who gives me the strength." (Phil. 4:13; NIV)

Dr. Robinson went home to be with her Lord on December 31, 1994, at the age of eighty-five, following a brief illness. She passed away peacefully at Grove Park Home where she had been lovingly cared for by a staff of people who knew, respected and thought highly of her. Her friends Cyndy Allcock and Patsy (MacRiner) Young were by her side.

We conclude with one final thought from Solomon's tribute to a worthy woman:

*"Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
Honour her for all that her hands have done,
and let her works bring praise at the city gate."*
(Prov. 31:31:30, 31)

Compiled by Randall Morritt – See first paragraph for acknowledgments

A search on our website (<https://ccchs.ca>) under the Archives tab reveals that there are several entries regarding Dr Robinson.

INVITATIONS

1. The CCCHS Board of Directors invites you to consider our stalwarts of the 20th Century and participate in recording their lives of service to the church. We would like to receive interviews of these people in written or video format. If you think of someone who should be acknowledged but do not feel capable of doing the project yourself please pass on your information to one of the board members.
2. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING on Saturday August 20, 2022 at Great Lakes Christian High School. The theme is Christian Education in the Canadian Restoration Movement. The event will be offered virtually as well as in person.

9:00 – Welcome time.

9:30 – Business Meeting

10:45 – Introductions and Keynote Address by Shelley Jacobs

12:00 – Lunch, bring your own. Drinks and light snacks provided.

1:15 – Art Ford: Great Lakes Christian College

2:15 – Thomas Marshal: Intro to Maritime Christian College

2:45 Panel Discussion, chaired by Stan Helton, opportunity for questions

Tours of the archives facility will be available during the lunch break and after the last session.

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Membership of \$25.00 per year is due at the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1st.

Dues may be paid by cheque to CCCHS, c/o Margaret Hibbard, 47 Madison Crt W, Welland, ON L3C 7G1

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