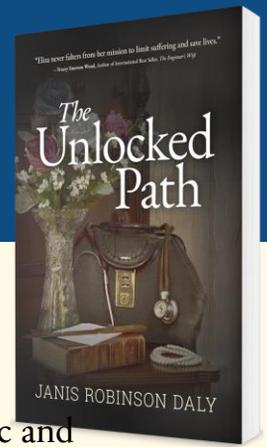


The Unlocked Path

Author's Note



Inspired by a love of social history, the time of my grandparents' lives has always fascinated me, especially my paternal grandmother who lived from 1879 to 1957. Think of the global events she witnessed as a young woman: the dawn of a new century, a World War, the Titanic and Lusitania sinkings, an influenza pandemic, and ratification of the 19th Amendment. From these events, I formed the initial storyline for Eliza. With a desire to learn more about Elizabeth Peirce Elliott Robinson, who died before my birth, I fell into the rabbit hole of genealogy research. I knew from off-handed remarks that her grandfather was a Judge Peirce in Philadelphia and the family hailed from the city's society circles. Unfortunately, I never asked my father questions before he passed to learn more. How and why did my grandmother move from Philadelphia to the Boston area? Why did she not marry until she was thirty-two? (An advanced age for a first-time bride in 1912.) Why did she endure a twenty-year separation and refuse to divorce my grandfather until her sons graduated from college? Having no answers, I created them instead.

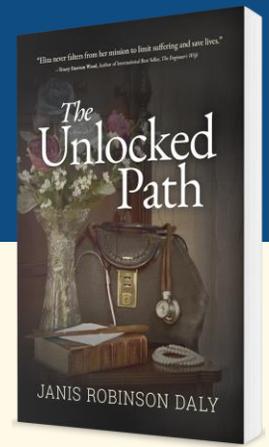
Two nuggets about Judge William Shannon Peirce propelled me forward. From Rittenhouse Square, Past and Present, Charles J. Cohen wrote of his friendship with Judge Peirce, noting: He would take great delight in discussing various phrases of the Old Testament with which he was very familiar. His daughters were women of character and intellectual attainments. In fact, according to census reports and the family plot in Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, I pieced together the Judge and his wife, Elizabeth, had seven daughters and one son who lived to adulthood. One daughter was named Florence. And, while still to be confirmed, I sourced a Florence Peirce, who while working at Denison House, discovered Kahlil Gibran's drawing talent. The unusual name, the spelling of Peirce, and years aligned to make it possible that Florence was one of the Judge's daughters.

The second piece of information comes from FamousAmericans.net. Most of the entry discusses Judge Peirce as an advocate of emancipation. As co-counsel with the Anti-Slave Society, he defended Daniel Dangerfield, a runaway slave from Virginia, who, although found not guilty and set free, fled to Canada through the Underground Railroad. Given my graduation from an all-women's college, the last line of the entry, however, ignited the spark for my story: He took an active part in founding the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia. A young woman surrounded and influenced by a widowed mother and maiden aunts of high intellect and character, and a grandfather who embraced equal rights, would embark on a journey to become a New Woman of the early 1900s.

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Author's Note



Eliza and Edith are composite characters created from diaries, letters, and reference materials I accessed through Drexel University College of Medicine's archives. The Woman's Medical College (WMC) of Pennsylvania was the first accredited medical school in the country for women, established in 1850, and the last to remain open as an all-women's institution until it admitted a few men in 1970 and changed its name to the Medical College of Pennsylvania (MCP). In 2001, Drexel purchased MCP but ran it as a separate non-profit corporation until it finally merged completely into the Drexel University system in 2014.

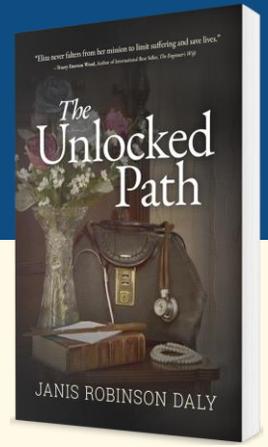
I am forever grateful to Matt Herbison for assembling a cart teeming with materials from the late 1890s and early 1900s for my research during the day I spent buried in Drexel's archives, including grade reports, expenses, a Bone Box, and the leatherbound journals of the Board of Trustees' meeting minutes from 1852-1855, inked and signed by William S. Peirce, Esq., Secretary. Many readers may find it unbelievable Eliza could enter Woman's Med. straight from high school. The entrance requirements, however, until the 1890s admitted eighteen-year-olds who provided recommendations and passed the arduous Entrance Exam. Since I could not find the exact year the admittance rule changed to requiring an undergraduate degree, I allowed Eliza to enter in 1897.

I based three characters on real graduates of Woman's Med. One of the first search returns for WMC is the story of Anandibai Gopal Joshi. When I read her application letter, I knew these women's stories needed to be told. I took some author license to place Anandi at WMC in 1897 to align with my timeline, instead of 1886, when she graduated. Her tragic story is true. I also adjusted the graduation of Charlotte Fairbanks, M.D. from 1902 to 1901. Her remarkable educational achievements included degrees from Smith, Yale, and Bryn Mawr before attending WMC. She joined a team of women doctors who went to France as part of the American Women's Hospital, eventually named surgeon in charge and received the Medal Reconnaissance from the French government and awarded French citizenship. While she did not work at the Women's Prison, other WMC graduates did and reported similar experiences to those I assigned to Charlotte. Olga Povitzky, M.D. emigrated from Marijampole, Russia (Lithuania) and graduated in 1901. The phrase about the Darwin lecture and monkey business is attributed to her. Hence her spunky character. She did not return to Russia, but remained in the US, working for the NYC Department of Health for forty-one years, also served with the Women's Overseas

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Hospitals, and was active in the suffrage movement. She designed a culture bottle which Salk later used while developing the polio vaccine.

I tried to stay authentic to the novel's setting, including terms and references which would be unacceptable today– Negress, wop and the use of the term, mongolism. Down syndrome became standard terminology in 1965. The horrors and abuses detailed about the Elwyn Training School are true. I lifted Dean Marshall's introductory address identifying women as a slave to society from one of her speeches. I based the facial surgery scene and the WMC students' reactions from the experiences of Dr. Mary Bennett Ritter as documented in her autobiography, *More Than Gold in California*. The newspaper headlines and articles I used are verbatim, thanks to the indispensable resource for a historical fiction writer: NewspaperArchives.com.

The *Unlocked Path* is a work of fiction, although through extensive research, I hope I've created a story which educates and offers glimpses into the lives of the pioneering women who entered the medical profession when only five percent of doctors were women. They paved the path, brick by brick, for all who followed. We, their patients, are thankful for the doctors today who approach their practice with a careful application of sympathy and science.

- Janis Robinson Daly, August 25, 2022