



## Dr. Jessie Findlay (1884 -1975)

**Former Principal and Professor of Surgery at CMC Vellore, Dr. Findlay joined the institution in 1920 when it was still a Medical School and rendered yeoman service till her retirement 25 years later**



Dr. Jessie Findlay, a missionary of the Canadian Baptist Church, felt called to serve India in 1908, at the age of 24 and she came to Andhra Pradesh, which was the mission field of her Church, as a school teacher. While working as school teacher in the Timpany Memorial Anglo-Indian School, in Kakinada, she observed the acute lack of medical facilities in India then, and hence, returned to Canada to study medicine at the University of Manitoba College of Medicine.

On completion of her training, she returned to India and joined the Christian Medical College, Vellore, as assistant to Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder in the Department of Surgery in 1920, just two years after the inauguration of the Missionary Medical School for Women. In 1925, Dr. Jessie Findlay became Assistant Professor of Surgery and later in 1940, Professor of Surgery.

Dr. Jessie Findlay was a very competent surgeon. By the year 1940, Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder and Dr. Jessie Findlay had established excellent clinical and academic standards for the Department of Surgery. **Dr. Jessie Findlay was an excellent teacher of Surgery and had a special interest in Orthopaedics, and indeed laid the foundation for Orthopaedics as a specialty in the Department of Surgery.**

In May 1941, the Missionary Medical School for Women was upgraded as Medical College, affiliated to the University of Madras, and the communication from the Syndicate of the University had granted provisional recognition for starting the MBBS Course. Thus, the Missionary Medical School became the Missionary Medical College for Women and the first batch of 25 women medical students were admitted in July 1942. Later, in 1945, when it was decided that the institution should become co-educational and be owned by an association of Churches and Church-related organisations in India – “The Christian Medical College Vellore Association”, the college became, “Christian Medical College, Vellore”.

This important milestone, however, imposed two priorities on the then faculty; funds for upgrading and developing the infrastructural physical facilities for patient care and the faculty to acquire qualifications as per the university protocol. These priorities had to be achieved within five years of the grant of provisional affiliation as a Medical College of the University of Madras. Unfortunately, this grace period coincided with World War II (1941 to 1944) and hence was quite stressful. However, without any delay, Dr. Ida Scudder proceeded to the USA for raising funds and for upgrading the hospital facilities, while other senior faculty went out to other centres in India and abroad, to upgrade their qualifications as per the university requirements.

At this stage, Dr. Jessie Findlay stepped in as the Principal of the Medical College and Head of the Department of Surgery, in the absence of Dr. Ida Scudder, and held the fort during the most crucial and difficult phase in the history of our institution. She had two assistants in the Department of Surgery then – one with MBBS and the other with LMP qualification.

It was the self-sacrificing service of Dr. Jessie Findlay which held the Institution together during those crucial years. The depth of her commitment and love for the institution is evident from the following song which she wrote in 1932:

“God made the hills, the clouds, the sky  
Without human gifts or Knowledge.  
But we’re given the joy of building with God  
This home for our Medical College

With the grey of the clouds in its pillars and walls,  
The blue of the sky in its flowers,  
And the peace and beauty of God’s out of doors  
To gladden our waking hours.

God gives us sleep’ midst the calm of the hills  
We wake to the song of the dove  
And feel in the beauty of nature and art  
The touch of an infinite love.”

Initially, A ward, where the present Department of Accident and Emergency Services is located, alone was adequate for the surgical patients. However, the increasing number of patients and the University requirement for upgrading of the institution to Medical College status needed more space for surgical inpatients. Hence, B ward was built above A ward and the former became clean surgical ward and the latter the ‘Septic Surgical Ward’ which also included a facility for care of burns patients.

When B ward was nearing completion, Dr. Jessie Findlay and the doctors in the Department of Surgery, along with the nursing faculty in the operation theatre and the surgical wards, who knew machine stitching, used to meet after dinner every night and stitch night gowns, sheets and draw sheets for the new surgical ward.

In addition to her commitment to General and Orthopaedic Surgery in the main hospital, Dr. Jessie Findlay developed a large roadside clinic and an ambulance was acquired for the purpose. Dr. Ida Scudder and Dr. Jessie Findlay christened the new ambulance for the clinic, ‘The Bronson-Porter Highway’, in memory of the two donors from New Haven (USA). The spirit with which Dr. Jessie Findlay and the ambulance staff came home late one night, after a break-down on top of a long, heavy day, was characteristic. As the gates swung open to let the late-comers in, the following song was carried on the still night air:

“Keep on thinking Arni roadside’s fine.  
Keep on hoping that the light will shine.  
Keep on trusting that you soon will dine  
And you’ll get there  
And you’ll get there before morning.”

“Keep on singing when the motor stops  
Keep on smiling when the back tyre pops  
Keep on hoping when the petrol drops  
And you’ll get there, etc.”

The spirit of the song was characteristic and prophetic as well, for it was Dr. Jessie Findlay, who stood by Dr. Ida Scudder in her vision of the suitability of the College Hill site, in Bagayam, at a time when no one else believed in its feasibility. Her steadiness was a source of great strength to the Medical College community, during the most stressful period of transition from a women’s college to a co-educational institution, and from the L.M.P / D.M.S course to the M.B.B.S. Further, the students and Dr. Ida Scudder relied on Dr. Jessie Findlay for steering and enlivening the social as well as the academic life of the Medical College. In recognition of her outstanding leadership, the Indian government honoured her with the prestigious award of “Kaiser-i-Hind” medal on the eve of her retirement.

**This narrative on Dr. Jessie Findlay, highlights, how the lives of two individuals, Dr. Jessie Findlay and Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder, who came to India initially for different purposes in different geographic locations, were challenged by God’s call for His ministry of healing and converged to Vellore in fulfillment of the call.**

Secondly, this narrative highlights the closeness and loyalty of Dr. Jessie Findlay to Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder the founder of Christian Medical College, and her commitment to the development of our institution as the Christian Medical College, Vellore. It is also evident that Dr. Jessie Findlay was a companion and strength to Dr. Ida Scudder and the earliest faculty of the Department of Surgery during the foundational stages of the Christian Medical College, Vellore.

Dr. Jessie Findlay retired in 1945, after 25 years of loyal and dedicated service to the Institution and particularly to the Department of Surgery and returned to Canada. But, very soon she returned to India for another term and served her own Canadian Baptist Mission in Andhra Pradesh, playing a leadership role at the Christian Medical Centre, Pithapuram, East Godavari District, till 1951.

Today, as we look around in the Medical College (Bagayam) and Hospital campuses of the Christian Medical College, Vellore, we find that, there is no visible monument in the institution to remind us of the yeoman service rendered by Dr. Jessie Findlay, except two photographs – one in the office of the Principal, as one of the former Principals and the other in the Division of Surgery Library, as one of the former Heads of the Department of Surgery.

It is hoped that, this narrative on Dr. Jessie Findlay, will serve as a monument on paper, to educate the present and future generations of the Christian Medical College Vellore community about the dedicated service of an individual who helped Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder, to lay a strong foundation for the Christian Medical College Vellore and its Departments of Surgery and Orthopaedics (Reference: Mathew 7:24-27/Luke 6:47-49 Holy Bible).

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