



1. Dr Anna M. Longshore-Potts

attained real national prominence. One was Mary Proctor, who succeeded her father, astronomer and science populariser Richard Proctor, on the lecture circuit.¹ Another was Anna M. Longshore-Potts, a physician who became a nationally and even internationally known medical lecturer (Fig.1). Today, Anna Longshore-Potts is known mostly to scholars of women in medicine and is virtually unknown to magic lantern scholars.²

Anna M. Longshore was born into a Quaker family in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1829. From an early age, she had an interest in anatomy and medicine. In 1850 her brother Joseph founded the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania (later called the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania) in Philadelphia (Fig.2), the second American institution devoted to training women doctors (the first was the Boston Female Medical College, founded in 1848).³ After a two-year course of study, Anna was one of eight women in the first graduating class in 1852. According to one biographical sketch: "The commencement exercises on that memorable occasion were marked by the hoots of the male medical students, by the groans of the established medical practitioners, and by the faint applause of the friends of the brave girls."⁴ She soon established a medical practice in Philadelphia and later moved to Langhorne, Pennsylvania, where she married a local merchant, Lambert Potts. Some years later she moved to Michigan, where she established another medical practice.

Her lecture career began in the 1870s, with private lectures to her patients, later progressing to public lectures in churches and other venues in small towns and cities. In 1881, she lectured in San Francisco, her first appearance in a major city. She then went on a tour of other coastal cities from San Diego to Seattle, followed by a voyage to New Zealand by way of Hawaii in 1883, a trip that eventually evolved into a world lecture tour that lasted several years. This was the first of two such international lecture tours, the second taking place in the 1890s, each time followed by a return to the lecture circuit in the United States. On her international tours, she visited much of the English-speaking world, including Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Ceylon.⁵ In 1895, while lecturing in Ceylon, Dr Longshore-Potts teamed up with Lady Havelock, the wife of the British governor, to raise funds for a hospital for women and children, named the Lady Havelock Hospital for Women and Children (renamed in 1910 after another governor's wife as the Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children).⁶

On some of her lecture tours, both international and in the United States, Dr Longshore-Potts was accompanied by fellow American physician and lecturer J. Charles Harrison, whose specialty was lecturing on men's health and reproduction. On the initial trip to New Zealand, Dr Harrison brought along his mother, while his brother served as business manager for the joint lecture tour. The group also included an experienced projectionist, Frank Stanert.⁷ Sometimes Drs Longshore-Potts and Harrison lectured in tandem, with both names on the same newspaper announcement, or two

"AS GOOD AS AN HOUR WITH MARK TWAIN": THE MEDICAL LECTURES OF ANNA M. LONGSHORE-POTTS

Kentwood D. Wells

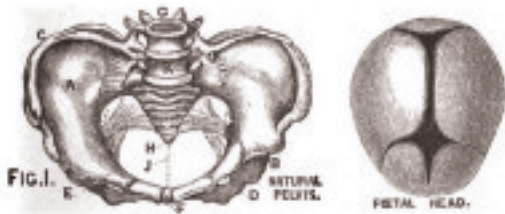
While I was surveying 19th century American newspapers for material on popular science lectures illustrated by the magic lantern and the stereopticon, one pattern that emerged was a shortage of female lecturers in this field. There were, of course, women who gave occasional lectures on scientific subjects, mostly to local audiences, but only a few

separate announcements on the same page. When lecturing together, Dr Longshore-Potts handled the delicate matters covered in lectures "for ladies only" while Dr Harrison covered similar subjects "for gentlemen only." Both doctors also gave lectures independently and both featured colourful stereopticon views in their talks. Dr Harrison was something of a showman, including not only anatomical slides in his lectures but also travel photographs and dissolving views, perhaps to relieve the tedium of viewing one body part after another. When he lectured in Chicago in 1890, one newspaper reported that his lecture included "a few ludicrous views, which, interspersed at proper intervals, relieved the general seriousness of the subject and added a good deal to the evening's entertainment."⁸ Some newspaper announcements stated that "Dr Harrison is the only American physician who has traveled around the world delivering illustrated lectures and he has spent the last seven years in so doing ..."⁹ This obviously was not true since he was accompanied on this seven-year tour by Anna Longshore-Potts. She also inserted seemingly miscellaneous slides of art, travel, the formation of the earth, facial types of various human races and entertaining views at intervals in her lectures, although this practice was mentioned less frequently than in accounts of Dr Harrison's lectures. After the discovery of X-rays in 1895, Dr Longshore-Potts added slides of X-ray photographs to her lectures, a common practice among scientific lecturers of the time.¹⁰

Newspaper accounts of Anna Longshore-Potts's lectures universally praised her intelligence, her clear method of conveying information and her sense of humour. One newspaper went so far as to say that her lectures were "as good as an hour with Mark Twain", a somewhat dubious claim.¹¹ Despite her fame as a physician and a lecturer, newspapers often seemed not to know what to make of this woman trespassing on two male-dominated fields – medicine and lecturing. They often added feminised language to their accounts, referring to her as a "Quakeress", a "Quaker lectress", "Mrs Longshore-Potts, M.D." or, most peculiarly, "Mrs Dr Longshore-Potts."¹² In addition to summarising her lectures, some papers devoted a good deal of space to her physical appearance and clothing. In January 1890, the *St Louis Republic* wrote: "In person, she is below the medium size [contradicting another paper that called her "tall"], slight of figure, but well rounded and very symmetrical, with well cut features illuminated by most benign and intelligent gray eyes and brown hair, thickly sprinkled



2. Female Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1850 (Drexel University medical archives via Wikimedia)

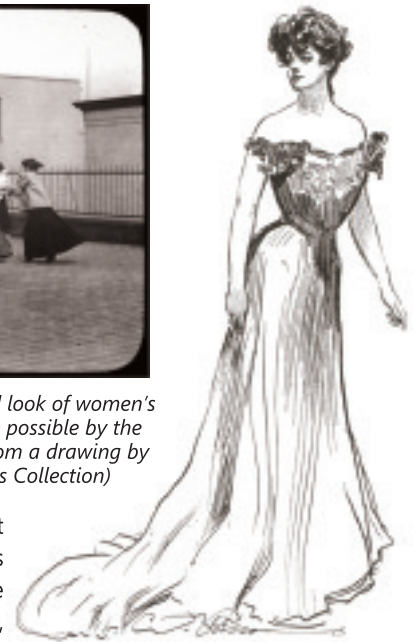


3. (above) Illustrations of the human female pelvis and the head of a fetus (from Discourse to Women on Medical Subjects)

4. (right) Lantern slide of office girls dancing on the roof of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York 1899. One wonders if their dresses were sufficiently loose to avoid bodily harm (Wells collection)



5. (right) The wasp-waisted look of women's fashion in the 1890s, made possible by the wearing of tight corsets (from a drawing by Charles Dana Gibson, Wells Collection)



with gray, worn short, but without a hint of mannishness ... She has a womanly love of rich attire, and nothing could have been more suitable or becoming than the elegant black velvet gown she wore, the black breadth sweeping away in a graceful train, the sides falling in long, plain panels finished with a rich black fringe. A vest of duchess lace fastened to the pointed velvet bodice by many finely jeweled pins and deep racamier cuffs of duchess lace completed an elegant costume."¹³ In contrast, most accounts of Dr Harrison's lectures did not mention his appearance at all, although his lectures were said to be "handsomely illustrated."¹⁴ The *Kansas City Times* simply described Dr Harrison as follows: "He is said to be a fluent and graceful speaker, of intellectual and pleasing appearance."¹⁵

The general programme of Anna Longshore-Potts's lectures did not change much over the years. Usually she gave a series of lectures over several nights in the same venue. The lectures were fairly long, some lasting more than two hours. A lecture series typically began with an introductory lecture for the general public, often given free of charge. These lectures focused on general anatomy and physiology, including topics such as the growth and development of the bones and muscles, and differences between males and females. In addition to coloured stereopticon slides of human anatomy, she used other visual aids, including various human bones. As she stood on stage, she was flanked by two human skeletons, one male and one female, often draped in red cloth that was dramatically removed to reveal the skeletons. She used these to illustrate features such as the wider pelvis in females, allowing them to give birth (Fig. 3)¹⁶, and the more robust skeletal features of males.

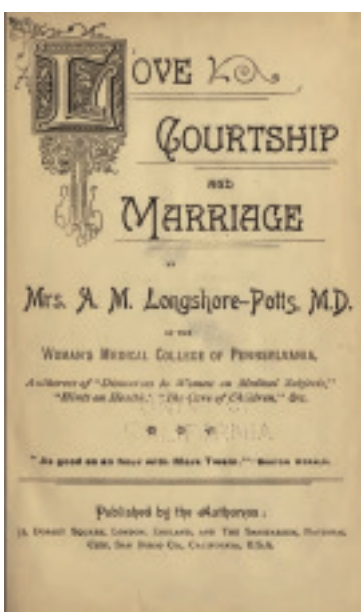
Despite her status as a pioneering woman in a man's field, Dr Longshore-Potts had surprisingly traditional views of the roles of men and women. She often opened her first lecture by describing the differences between the sexes: "They were different ... in their structure, in their emotions, desires, thoughts, and even in their brains. Man is made of coarser, stronger fiber than woman to fit him for carrying the heavy burdens of brain and body."¹⁷ She did acknowledge, however, that women bore a heavy burden of being wives and mothers: "Man is intended by his physical structure to be the burden bearer and support. He is

built for strength, but let not the woman who, as wife and mother, keeps the home bright and happy, deem that she does nothing in the world. Her burdens, physical and mental, are those under which a man might sink. The woman who is wife and mother holds the highest, holiest place on earth."¹⁸

Dr Longshore-Potts touched on many other topics in anatomy and physiology, including the structure and function of the brain and nervous system, again illustrated with charts, diagrams and stereopticon slides. Presumably the scientific content of these lectures would not be recognisable by modern neuroscientists. She was a believer in phrenology, a pseudoscientific study of the brain very popular in the Victorian era. Sometimes at the end of a lecture she would summon two women or two men of different appearance to the stage and would perform a phrenological examination of bumps on the head that were thought to reveal features of mental capacity and personality.¹⁹

The featured events of a Longshore-Potts lecture series were one or more lectures addressed to "ladies only" which not only illustrated the delicate subjects of sex and reproduction, but also the various medical conditions particular to women. One newspaper account noted that the stereopticon slides were projected by a young woman, which was said to be "something of an innovation", eliminating any reason for a man to be in the lecture hall.²⁰ Dr Longshore-Potts believed that men, and especially male physicians, did not understand women, hence the need for more female doctors. She also was convinced that many ailments experienced by women could be avoided if they knew more about their own bodies, so she made it her mission to teach them. Picking up on the theme of women having more delicate bones and bodies in general, she argued against certain practices that could harm a woman's body, especially at a young age: "She particularly inveighed against women's running up and down stairs, alluding to the too common practice in all large schools of sending girls from floor to floor up three-storey buildings to make their recitations. She inveighed against girls jumping ropes and riding at a fast gait and long distances, and also against too frequent dancing in tight dresses up until late hours of the night" (Fig. 4).²¹

Dr Longshore-Potts had especially strong objections to women wearing corsets to produce the wasp-waisted appearance popular at the time (Fig. 5). After an 1891 lecture to a mixed audience in Cleveland, the local newspaper reported that: "On the subject of corsets she dwelt longer than on any other topic. That the tight lacing so prevalent among women and young girls affects their health most injuriously she did not doubt and in proof that the slender artificial waist failed to please the men, she took a vote among the men in the audience ... by acclamation the result being unanimously condemnatory of the corset."²² In another



6. Front cover of Dr Longshore-Potts's lecture on 'Love, Courtship and Marriage'. The quotation below the title says "As good as an hour with Mark Twain"

lecture, she urged men to join with women to fight the corset fashion. "All who incline to have the change should unite in one conclusion: to have a hall secured, and to meet there twice a week, and to call it the Anti-Corset Society. ... Have [women] bring their corsets with them – not wearing them, but wrapped in paper – and you have a deep hole dug near by; and when they come, let them drop their parcels in, one by one, until the corsets all get there; then cover them up and let them stay there until the resurrection day ..."²³

She also railed against another unhealthy habit, drinking alcohol: "The lights were turned down and the lecture for a time accompanied by stereopticon views, consisting for the most part of pictures of the nervous and muscular systems; the organs in proper form and abnormal. Among other things, reproductions of the stomach normally and when inflamed by alcoholic stimulants were thrown upon the canvas."²⁴ Sometimes she gave separate lectures on temperance, and she extended her opposition to alcohol to the use of alcoholic patent medicines that flooded the market in the 1890s.²⁵

The concluding event in most of her lecture series was her famous lecture on 'Love, Courtship, and Marriage', which she delivered hundreds of times to mixed audiences all over the world (Fig. 6). Despite having been divorced from Mr Potts for many years, she set herself up as an expert on the subject. She instructed her audiences on the different forms of love, on the process of choosing and courting a prospective spouse, and the qualities of men and women that make a marriage successful. This lecture was very different from her medically-oriented talks. Instead of scientific facts about anatomy, physiology, health and disease, this lecture was an assortment of personal philosophy, opinions and anecdotes – an approach not well suited to illustration. Indeed, when she gave this lecture in New Orleans, the local paper stated that: "The skeletons, anatomical charts, stereopticon and other modes of illustration were taken down and both sexes were invited to sit together and listen to a lecture on 'Love, Courtship and Marriage.'²⁶

She dispensed homespun advice on the nature of love and requirements for successful courtship and marriage. Love she considered to be a universal force of attraction, found in everything from the elements in rocks to insects, birds and humans. She decried the superficial courtship involving a man calling upon a woman and discussing frivolous matters. Far more practical was courtship involving serious conversations about serious subjects, allowing a couple to really get to know each other. She complained about social conventions that placed men in the role of actively courting women, whereas women often had to choose a husband from a limited number of individuals.

She argued that couples mismatched in level of education would make for poor marriages and she advised people to not choose sickly or feeble-minded partners. She also managed to slip in ever-so-gentle comments on women's rights – the right of a woman to make her own choices, the right to equal access to household resources and, most of all, the right to vote. Although hardly a radical feminist, Anna Longshore-Potts had already broken new ground in two male-dominated professions, medical doctor and travelling stereopticon lecturer.

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12. Drawn from many different American newspapers
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IMAGES OF WOMEN IN SLIPPING SLIDES

As we know, these are not always complimentary! But they do tell us something about how women were viewed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Our thanks to Jennifer and Keith Utteridge and Gwen Sebus for these examples. *More on page 12.*