



**Emma Sadler Moss, MD**  
(1898–1970)

## Emma Sadler Moss, MD

The First Woman Director of the Department of Pathology at Charity Hospital in New Orleans and the First Woman President of the American Society of Clinical Pathologists

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Emma Sadler Moss (“Emmie”) was born in Pearlington, Mississippi, on September 19, 1898, the daughter of Paul and Lou Sadler. She was born prematurely when premature infants rarely survived. She survived an illness-filled childhood and, as a young woman, attended the Mississippi State College for Women in 1915. She originally intended to become an elementary school teacher—“one of the few careers open to a young Southern gentlewoman,”<sup>1</sup> but she opted to pursue science. “I was not gentle enough to devote myself to teaching school.”<sup>1</sup> She graduated in 1919 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Bacteriology and she began her career in health care as a medical technologist. She worked for ten years “at the bench.” When her husband, John Moss, died a painful death from tuberculosis in 1929, Emmie determined to dedicate herself to medicine with the goal to “help prevent and cure disease.”<sup>1</sup> She never remarried and she had no children.

She began her medical education in 1930 at the University of Alabama School of Medicine (which was only a two year medical school at that time). Subsequently, she transferred to the Louisiana State University (LSU) School of Medicine in New Orleans and received her MD degree in 1935. She interned and completed her residency in pathology training at Charity Hospital in New Orleans in 1939. She was an outstanding student and was elected to the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. She was certified by the American Board of Pathology in anatomic and clinical pathology and in clinical microbiology.

In 1939, within less than one year of completing her residency, she was appointed the acting director of the Department of Pathology at Charity Hospital and, concurrently, she was also appointed to the faculty of the LSU School of Medicine. In 1940, she was named the director of pathology at Charity Hospital and she held that position for the next 30 years. She progressed through the academic ranks, holding academic appointments in both the Departments of Pathology and Microbiology and she was named clinical professor of pathology at the LSU School of Medicine in 1951. She served as acting head of the LSU School of Medicine Department of Pathology from December 1945 to July 1946.

During her brief tenure as the Acting Head of the LSU School of Medicine Department of Pathology, the faculty of

the school was in turmoil. To provide the medical students with an appropriate course of instruction in pathology, Dr. Moss called upon many of her pathology colleagues. The pathology course that year was presented by nationally renowned and distinguished pathologists from across the country who presented lectures in their particular areas of expertise. No medical school pathology course, before or since, has probably had such an exemplary curriculum. No one, other than Dr. Moss, could probably have organized such a course in such a short time.<sup>2</sup>

During her long tenure as director of the pathology department at Charity Hospital, it was one of the largest and most active hospitals in the world. It had nearly 3,000 active beds, 60,000 admissions per year, and 600,000 annual outpatient visits. In an era long before automated laboratory instrumentation and computer information systems, when manual laboratory procedures were the norm, the Charity Hospital pathology department annually performed over 750,000 clinical laboratory tests, over 1,800 autopsies, and sectioned over 15,000 surgical specimens. Dr. Moss’s outstanding administrative skills accounted for the high productivity and efficiency within the Charity Hospital pathology department.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Moss had many scholarly achievements and awards including Gold Medals from the American Society of Clinical Pathologists (ASCP) for exhibits on tropical diseases (1944 with Schenken, Burns, and Palik), mycotic infections (1947 with McQuown), and parasitology (1951 with Swartzwelder, Hood, Walker, and Frye). She received the Billings Gold Medal in 1954 from the American Medical Association for her exhibit on “Fungous Diseases.” She was also the author or coauthor of numerous peer-reviewed scientific articles, book chapters, and books relating to her interests in tropical, parasitic, and mycotic diseases. She was also selected as the 1954 Medical Woman of the Year by the New Orleans Branch of the American Medical Woman’s Association, and she received the Silver Distaff Award in 1955 from Woman’s Home Companion Magazine.

Dr. Moss left a significant legacy in medical education at the undergraduate and graduate level, both with medical technologists, medical students, and pathologists, as well as in continuing medical education. She was particularly proud to have mentored and personally supervised the training of over

150 pathology residents and exactly 578 medical technologists during her career. Few program directors can match (or even approach) such a legacy.

It was Dr. Moss who, in 1941, established the first medical technology training program to require a baccalaureate degree.<sup>1</sup> It was Dr. Moss who was the force behind the creation and establishment of “continuing education” workshops in the early 1950s and other such programs for the Louisiana Pathology Society and the ASCP. It was Dr. Moss who gathered ASCP leaders together at a meeting in St. Louis, MO, in 1955, to develop the plans for, and to discuss ASCP sponsorship of, the first organized and coordinated programs in continuing education. Drs. John Sheehan, John Andujar, John Goforth, and Clyde Culbertson were the attendees at Dr. Moss’s St. Louis meeting, and the Committee on Continuing Education (CCE) was born at this meeting with a budget of \$5,000.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Coye Mason, who, in 1957, followed Dr. Sheehan as the chair of the CCE, organized the first national program of 15 continuing education workshops held in New Orleans. Such hands on programs were popular in the late 1950s since many pathologists and technologists did not have the basic knowledge required to maintain their individual clinical laboratories, particularly when it came to repairing and keeping equipment running. These programs became the prototypes for today’s ASCP workshops and other organizations’ continuing education programs.

Dr. Moss joined the ASCP in 1938 and served on countless ASCP committees, the Board of Directors, and was elected the first woman president for the 1955–1956 term. In becoming the first woman president of the ASCP, she was also the first woman president of any major medical association.<sup>3</sup> She was the first and only woman president of the ASCP until Dr. Anna Graham became the second woman president in 2001–2002.

Dr. Moss continued her work at Charity and LSU until her death on April 30, 1970. It was the day she was to have retired after 36 years of service.<sup>1</sup>

The LSU School of Medicine Department of Pathology remembers Dr. Moss with the “Emma Sadler Moss Lectureship,” awarded to a nationally recognized pathologist who is invited to LSU to present lectures and seminars to students, faculty, and staff over several days. This lectureship was initiated in 1968 by Dr. Jerry Schenken and other friends, colleagues, and pathologists who had served as residents under Dr. Moss. Dr. Moss personally attended the first Lectureship in 1969 presented by Dr. John Schenken.<sup>2</sup>

Emmie was an outstanding woman and pathologist! Clearly, she is an equal to other women who were “giants” in medicine such as Maude Abbott and Helen Taussig. The ASCP, Charity Hospital, the Department of Pathology of the LSU School of Medicine, and the profession of pathology and laboratory medicine as a whole were made better by the actions and legacy of Dr. Emma Sadler Moss.

### Suggested Reading

Moss and McQuown, “*An Atlas of Medical Mycology*,” Williams and Wilkins, 1953. Second Edition, 1960.

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1. Pathology Pioneers—Emma Sadler Moss, MD. *ASCP News*. March/April 1996:5.
  2. Personal communications. Jack P. Strong, MD. Head, Department of Pathology, LSU School of Medicine.
  3. Rodriguez FH, Ball JR, The American Society for Clinical Pathology: The Pathology Society of ‘Firsts.’ *Lab Med*. 2007;38:595-601.