



MichiganWomenForward



## Grace Eldering

(1900 - 1988)

*Inducted: 1983*

*Locale: Grand Rapids*

*Era: Contemporary*

*Area(s) of Achievement: Public Health*

Drs. Pearl Kendrick (1890-1980) and Grace Eldering (1900-1988) are justly renowned for their development of the first successful vaccine for whooping cough, an accomplishment all the more significant and rare considering the circumstances.

During the 1930s, whooping cough claimed an average of 6000 lives a year in the United States alone. Ninety-five percent of these deaths, moreover, were in children under the age of five years. Although the causative organism of this dread disease had been identified as early as 1906, no effective vaccine was ready and the available treatment of the day was ineffective.

These facts spurred Dr. Kendrick to research the disease following her graduation from Johns Hopkins University in 1934. The work itself centered around Kendrick's native Grand Rapids, where she was serving as Chief of the Western Michigan Branch laboratory of the Michigan Department of Health. In this effort, Dr. Kendrick enlisted the support of Grace Eldering who had been working for the State Department of Health in Lansing. The two doctors recruited Loney Clinton Gordon, a lab technician, for assistance. Together the three women devised a program of research, conducted lab experiments, did countless field tests, and ultimately succeeded in growing pertussis (the causative) in a medium of sheep's blood. They then began inoculating area children, carefully controlling the population for research purposes. The rest is history.

In 1940 the State of Michigan began producing and distributing the vaccine, which virtually ended the incredible toll of whooping cough deaths. Kendrick and Eldering later successfully combined shots for diphtheria, whooping cough, and tetanus into the single DPT shot which is routinely given for prevention today.

Following her retirement from the Michigan Department of Public Health in 1951, Dr. Kendrick joined the faculty of the Department of Epidemiology of The University of Michigan, where she taught and conducted basic research until her second retirement in 1960.

Both women were active in numerous professional organizations, including the American Public Health Association and the American Board of Bacteriologists. Each in turn served a term as president of the Michigan Branch of the American Society for Microbiology.

Pearl Kendrick died in Grand Rapids on October 8, 1980. Grace Eldering, her longtime friend and colleague, continued to reside in that city where she engaged in volunteer service for the blind and the physically handicapped until her death in 1988.

Photo Courtesy of the Grand Rapids Public Library