

# Elizabeth Blackwell: The First Female Physician

Abi Vance, Ellee Frandsen

Junior Division

Group Exhibit

Student-composed Words: 499

Process Paper: 500 words

## Process Paper

We have always been drawn to the subject of Women's Rights. When our teacher introduced us to Elizabeth Blackwell, we were fascinated. We decided her impact on our lives is so important and wanted to share her story.

In order to share Elizabeth Blackwell's accomplishments, we were required to research. We went to the library and borrowed some books. These books were imperative to our research. We also searched online for information on her life. We took Cornell notes on details. Online we also found a manuscript collection titled, "The Blackwell Family Papers." This collection was showcased on many different websites and libraries. We came across documents from her time that help you have further understanding of the topic. An abundance of photos and illustrations came from this source. As we researched, we understood Elizabeth Blackwell's impact on the world.

We chose to create an exhibit because we really wanted to paint a picture. Because of Elizabeth Blackwell's heavy impact on society, we thought it was fitting to demonstrate the hardships she had to go through from words, pictures, and props.

Our research helped greatly with creating our exhibit. We started the actual exhibit by buying two trifolds. We put them together and cut it so the exhibit was the height we wanted. We painted it pink to add color. Online we found a pattern that we could use to enhance the exhibit's title and glued it on. Next, we printed out our summaries, title, pictures, and quotes. We framed each piece of paper with cardstock to focus your eyes better. We added lights and flowers to the title to draw attention to it. During the research phase of our project, we studied what physicians back then. We gathered some of these tools to use as props. This helped demonstrate the time

period she lived in. Along with medical tools, we put a selection of her notes and important documents into a booklet to also help demonstrate her diligent studies. Finally, we arranged the poster and asked peers for critique to make our project the best it can be.

After we received critique from the regional competition, we decided to add a timeline to the exhibit. This helped the audience envision what time period Blackwell lived in. To do this, we printed out some information about Elizabeth's life, and used a website to find major events that took place in her life span.

Elizabeth Blackwell faced many barriers throughout her career, and she successfully overcame them. At medical school she challenged society's perception of a women's role. When she first was accepted into Geneva Medical College, she broke the stereotype for females in the medical field. Blackwell knew that she was being judged and scorned, she persevered and was determined to succeed. Because she was strong willed, females have acquired the equal respect that we should have. We are very grateful for Elizabeth Blackwell and how this project has positively influenced how we act when there are obstacles.

# Annotated Bibliography

## Primary Sources

Beecher Stowe, Harriet. "*Note from Harriet Beecher Stowe Requesting a Visit from Elizabeth or Emily Blackwell.*" Blackwell Family Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard.

This document showed how important Elizabeth Blackwell is to people. We used this document in a little notebook as a prop to help paint the picture.

Blackwell, Alice Stone. "*The First Woman Physician, Elizabeth Blackwell.*" Blackwell Family Papers. Library of Congress.

This manuscript from 1909 about Elizabeth Blackwell's life explained her early life. It also talked about how she didn't have a great appeal towards the medical field at first, but changed her mind.

Blackwell, Elizabeth. "*Lecture notes for Charles Lee.*" Blackwell Family Papers. Library of Congress.

We used this document to demonstrate Elizabeth Blackwell's experience in medical school. Her precise notes helped me understand how much effort she put into her profession.

"*Elizabeth Blackwell's letter of admission.*" Blackwell Family Papers. Library of Congress.

We used this document to help describe Elizabeth's admission into Geneva Medical College. It helped us understand how professional the letter was, even though it was voted as a joke.

Blackwell, Elizabeth. "*Letter to Kitty Barry Blackwell.*" Blackwell Family Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard.

We used this document to demonstrate Elizabeth's relationship with her daughter. We put it in a little notebook as a prop.

Blackwell, Elizabeth. "*Letter Written by Elizabeth Blackwell, 1887.*" Blackwell Family Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard.

We used this letter written by Elizabeth Blackwell to help draw a picture in the audience's mind on the environment and society she lived in. In this letter she describes



the term "doctor" and talks about how when applied to females, it isn't taken professionally.

Blackwell, Elizabeth. *Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women: Autobiographical Sketches*. London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895.

This autobiography helped us understand Elizabeth Blackwell's perspective on her journey through medical school. We got many quotes from this source.

Blackwell, Emily. *Group portrait of members of the Blackwell and Spofford families outside on a*

*lawn*. 1880-1893. Photograph. Library of Congress. [www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012647968/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012647968/).

We used this photograph from the Library of Congress to support the information about Elizabeth Blackwell's family. This photograph helps us understand that she wasn't lonely all throughout her life.

Blackwell, Samuel. "Poem by Samuel Blackwell to his Daughters." Blackwell Family Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard.

We used this document to help show that Elizabeth Blackwell had a strong relationship with her family. We put this image in a little notebook as a prop for our exhibit.

Corbis. "Elizabeth Blackwell During Operating Class". Illustration. Magnolia Box.

[www.magnoliabox.com/products/elizabeth-blackwell-during-operating-class-s533](http://www.magnoliabox.com/products/elizabeth-blackwell-during-operating-class-s533).

We used this drawing by the artist Corbis to demonstrate the trials Elizabeth Blackwell had to go through. It helped us understand how she was treated at Geneva Medical College.

Countess Clarice de Charnace. *Pencil Drawing of Elizabeth Blackwell*. 1859. Illustration. Glasgow University Archives.

This illustration of Blackwell at age 38 helped us to see what she looked like. We used it to help put a picture in the audience's mind.

"Draft partnership agreement between Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell." Blackwell Family Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard.

This document showed how professional Elizabeth Blackwell was. This rough draft of an agreement demonstrated how Elizabeth valued her job and wanted to do everything to keep it going.

Elizabeth Blackwell Stamp. Circa 1970. Photograph. Mystic Stamp.

[www.mysticstamp.com/Products/United-States/1399/USA/](http://www.mysticstamp.com/Products/United-States/1399/USA/).

This stamp was printed as a protest for women's rights. It shows how important Elizabeth's story is to society and the Women's Liberation Movement.

*Geneva Medical College Diploma of Elizabeth Blackwell*. 1849. Photograph. Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University

[www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/schlesinger-library/item/geneva-medical-college-diploma-elizabeth-blackwell-1849](http://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/schlesinger-library/item/geneva-medical-college-diploma-elizabeth-blackwell-1849).

This photograph was of Elizabeth Blackwell's diploma from 1849. It helped us understand how diplomas looked 171 years ago and helps prove where she graduated from.

*"Hand-drawn Blackwell Family Tree."* Blackwell Family Papers. Schlesinger Library, Harvard.

This image from the early 1900's helped show how close Elizabeth Blackwell was to her family. From this picture we learned more about her relatives.

Leslie, Frank. *The Anatomical Lecture Room*. April 16, 1870. Illustration. National Library of Medicine. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/blackwell/career.html>.

This illustration from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper in 1870 showed us what it really looked like when Elizabeth was in a lecture room. It helped us picture how she was treated in medical school.

Walsh, James. *History of Medicine in New York: Three Centuries of Medical Progress*. New York: National Americana Society, 1919.

This book from Elizabeth Blackwell's time period explained how important she was to the medical students at Geneva at the time. We got a quote from this book helping me understand her impact on society.

Webster, James. *"Anatomy Syllabus."* Blackwell Family Papers. National Library of Medicine.

We found in this document that students back then still had syllabuses. This syllabus was specifically from one of Elizabeth Blackwell's professors and talked about a dissection they performed.

## Secondary Sources

"Elizabeth Blackwell Biography." Encyclopedia of World Biography, Advameg Inc., [www.notablebiographies.com/Be-Br/Blackwell-Elizabeth.html](http://www.notablebiographies.com/Be-Br/Blackwell-Elizabeth.html)

In this article we learned that Elizabeth Blackwell continued on her medical path after graduation. It gave details on how she has affected so many peoples' lives positively.

"Elizabeth Blackwell Quotes." BrainyQuote.com. BrainyMedia Inc, 2020. 25 February 2020. [www.brainyquote.com/quotes/elizabeth\\_blackwell\\_187357](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/elizabeth_blackwell_187357)

We used this website only to get a quote from Elizabeth Blackwell. This quote helps us explain our point with how she broke the barrier.

Harrison, Pat. "Elizabeth Blackwell's Struggle to Become a Doctor." Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, 2 Feb. 2017, [www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/news/schlesinger-newsletter/elizabeth-blackwells-struggle-become-doctor](http://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/news/schlesinger-newsletter/elizabeth-blackwells-struggle-become-doctor).

In this newsletter from Harvard, we became aware of the process it took for Elizabeth Blackwell to be accepted into medical school. It helped us understand how hard it really was for her to persevere.

Healio. "For the First Time, More Women than Men Are in Medical School." *Healio*, 12 Dec. 2019, [www.healio.com/primary-care/practice-management/news/online/%7B4a20c9a0-7678-41b1-a26b-dbcf9a7e8ac0%7D/for-the-first-time-more-women-than-men-are-in-medical-school](http://www.healio.com/primary-care/practice-management/news/online/%7B4a20c9a0-7678-41b1-a26b-dbcf9a7e8ac0%7D/for-the-first-time-more-women-than-men-are-in-medical-school).

We used this source to find the percent of women that applied to medical school in years 2015, 2018, and 2019.

"HWS: History of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell." *Hobart and William Smith Colleges*, [www.hws.edu/about/blackwell\\_history.aspx](http://www.hws.edu/about/blackwell_history.aspx)

We used this source to find only a quote from Elizabeth blackwell. It helped us find out that Elizabeth Blackwell thought that being someone different is hard.

*Ignatofsky, Rachel. Women in Science: 50 Fearless Pioneers Who Changed the World. Ten Speed Press, 2018.*

This book told us about the hard times Elizabeth Blackwell had to go through. It helped us understand the trials she faced and how we can learn from her experiences.

Latta, Susan. *Bold Women of Medicine*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press Inc., 2017.

This book helped me learn more about Elizabeth Blackwell's backstory. We found a quote from this source.

Maggs, Sam, and Sophia Foster-Dimino. *Wonder Women: 25 Innovators, Inventors, and Trailblazers Who Changed History*. Quirk Books, 2016.

We used this book to learn about the hard times Elizabeth had to go through and how she was constantly being teased and made fun of. We learned a lot about her lifestyle.

“The Majority of U.S. Medical Students Are Women, New Data Show.” *AAMC*, 9 Dec. 2019, [www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/majority-us-medical-students-are-women-new-data-show](http://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/majority-us-medical-students-are-women-new-data-show).

We used this source to find out what percent women applied to medical school in past years. We used it to compare men to women.

Michals, Debra. “Elizabeth Blackwell.” National Women’s History Museum, 2015. Jan 13 2020. This article explained how Elizabeth Blackwell was inspired to study medicine. It gave details on her admittance into medical school, and how she persevered through it.

Peck, Ira. *Elizabeth Blackwell*. Brookfield, Connecticut: The Millbrook Press, 2000. This book taught us all about Elizabeth’s Blackwell’s life. It had a lot of details on how she got into medical school and her life experiences.

Pearson, Steve. “The People History from 1800 to Present Day News, Prices, Popular Culture and More.” *The People History*, [www.thepeoplehistory.com/](http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/).

We used this website to make the world timeline. We created a timeline to help the audience picture what time period Elizabeth Blackwell grew up in.

Schneir, Miriam. “Blackwell, Elizabeth.” World Book Student, World Book, 2020, [www-worldbookonline-com.lili.idm.oclc.org/student-new/#!/article/home/ar063500/elizabeth%20blackwell](http://www-worldbookonline-com.lili.idm.oclc.org/student-new/#!/article/home/ar063500/elizabeth%20blackwell). Accessed 12 Feb. 2020.

This article taught us about Elizabeth Blackwell fighting for her desire to become a doctor. Despite previous beliefs and strong judgement, she persevered through medical school.

Searing, Linda. “The Big Number: Women Now Outnumber Men in Medical Schools.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 23 Dec. 2019, [www.washingtonpost.com/health/the-big-number-women-now-outnumber-men-in-medical-schools/2019/12/20/8b9eddea-2277-11ea-bed5-880264cc91a9\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/health/the-big-number-women-now-outnumber-men-in-medical-schools/2019/12/20/8b9eddea-2277-11ea-bed5-880264cc91a9_story.html).

We used this source to see what percent of women applied to medical school in 2019. I found that 50.5% of medical students in 2019 were women.

Stone, Tanya Lee, and Marjorie Priceman. *Who Says Women Can't Be Doctors?: The Story of Elizabeth Blackwell*. Square Fish/Henry Holt and Company, 2018.

In this book we learned about how Elizabeth went through her childhood and some of the struggles that she had.

Whiteman, Honor. "Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell: A Heroine for Women." Medical News Today, 17 Mar, 2017.

This article helped us understand how much Elizabeth Blackwell has inspired us today. Women now make up about 50.5% of the medical students in the world.

# Exhibit Entry Information

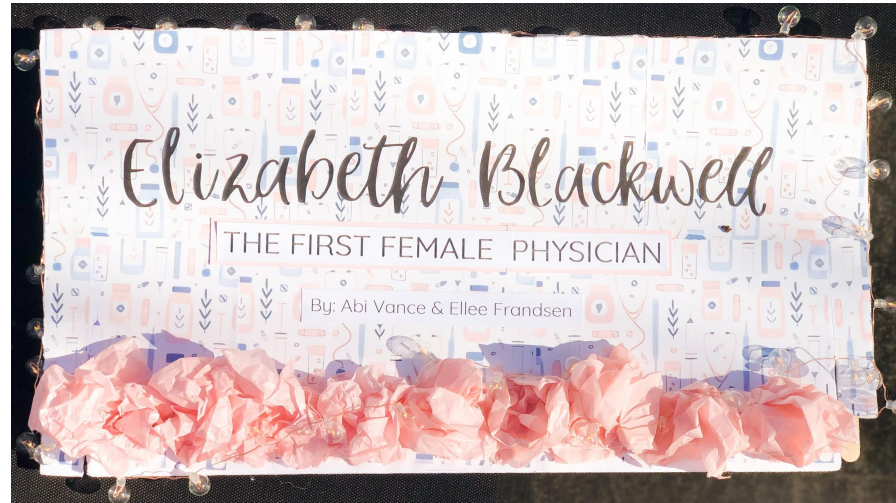
Elizabeth Blackwell: The First Female Physician

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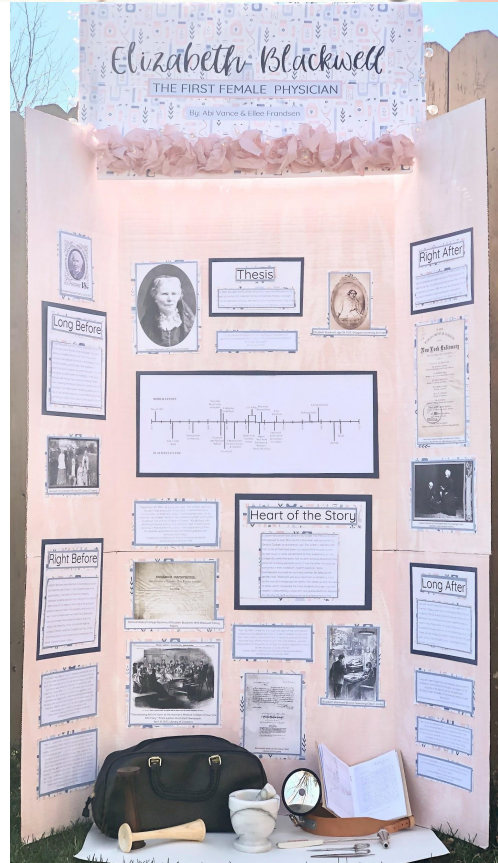
Junior Division

Group Exhibit

499 Student Composed Words



# Picture of Entire Exhibit



# Picture of Left Panel of Exhibit



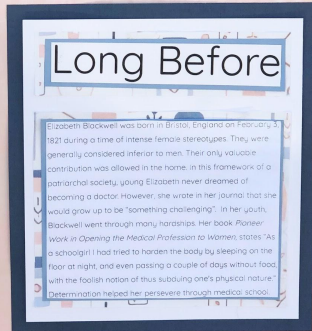


# Picture & Text on Left Panel of Exhibit 1 of 2



## Long Before

Elizabeth Blackwell was born in Bristol, England on February 3, 1821 during a time of intense female stereotypes. Women were generally considered inferior to men. Their only valuable contribution was allowed in the home. In this framework of a patriarchal society, young Elizabeth never dreamed of becoming a doctor. However, she wrote in her journal that she would grow up to be “something challenging”. In her youth, Blackwell went through many hardships. Her book *Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women*, states “As a schoolgirl I had tried to harden the body by sleeping on the floor at night, and even passing a couple of days without food, with the foolish notion of thus subduing one’s physical nature.” This determination helped her persevere through medical school.



# Picture & Text on Left Panel of Exhibit 2 of 2

## Right Before

Elizabeth Blackwell never dreamed of becoming a physician. She hated the sight of blood. In fact, Elizabeth wrote in her autobiography, "I had been horrified also during my schooldays by seeing a bullock's eye resting on its cushion of rather bloody fat, by means of which one of the professors wished to interest his class in the wonderful structure of the eye." In a turn of events when her friend, Mary Donaldson, was dying, Elizabeth reevaluated the medical field. Mary refused to be treated by a male, and said she might've survived if a female treated her. Elizabeth saw Mary's need for a female physician as an opportunity to break down the barrier of women's place in society.

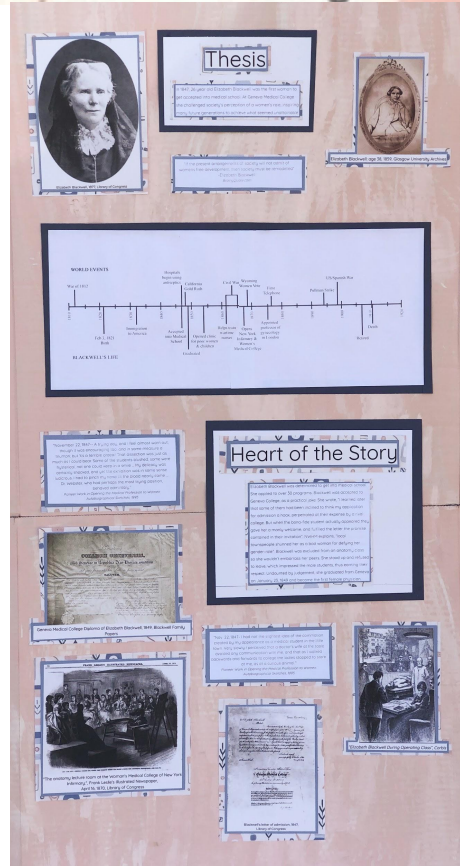
"This friend finally died of a painful disease, the delicate nature of which made the methods of treatment a constant suffering to her. She once said to me: 'You are fond of study, have health and leisure; why not study medicine? If I could have been treated by a lady doctor, my worst sufferings would have been spared me.' But I at once repudiated the suggestion as an impossible one, saying that I hated everything connected with the body, and could not bear the sight of a medical book. ...So I resolutely tried for weeks to put the idea suggested by my friend away; but it constantly recurred to me."

*Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women: Autobiographical Sketches, 1895*

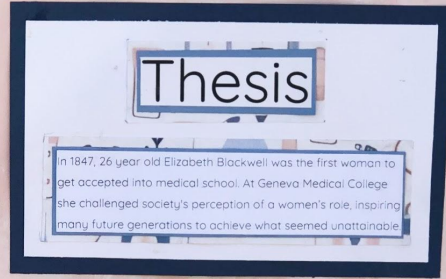
"May 27. - Called on Dr. Jackson (one of the oldest professors in Philadelphia), a small, bright-faced, grey-haired man, who looked up from his newspaper and saluted me with, 'Well, what is it? What do you want?' I told him I wanted to study medicine. He began to laugh, and asked me why. Then I detailed my plans. He became interested; said he would not give me an answer then; that there were great difficulties, but he did not know that they were insurmountable; he would let me know on Monday. I came home with a lighter heart, though I can hardly say I hope. On Monday Dr. Jackson said he had done his best for me, but the professors were all opposed to my entrance."

*Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women: Autobiographical Sketches, 1895*

## Picture of Center Panel of Exhibit



# Picture & Text on Center Panel 1 of 3



## Thesis

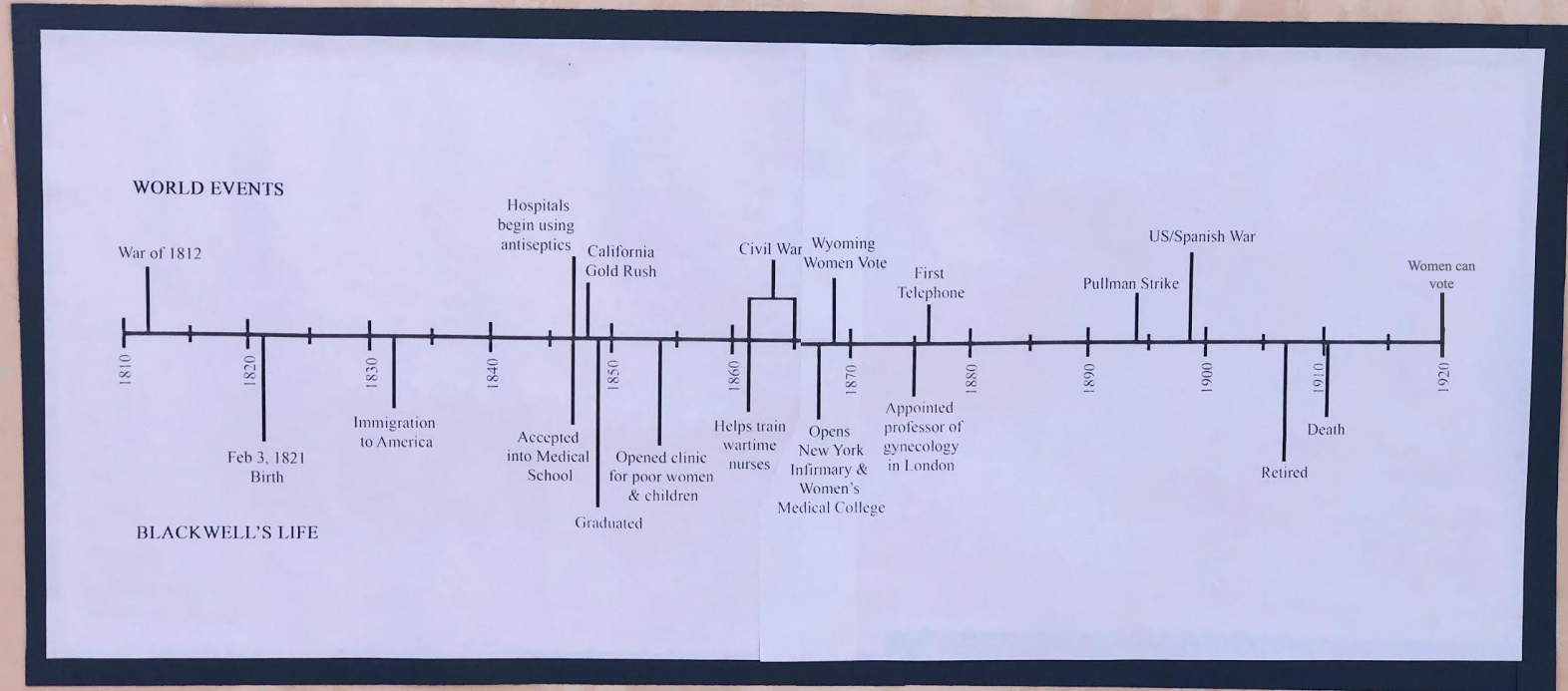
In 1847, 26 year old Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman to get accepted into medical school. At Geneva Medical College she challenged society's perception of a women's role, inspiring many future generations to achieve what seemed unattainable.

"If the present arrangements of society will not admit of womens free development, then society must be remodelled"

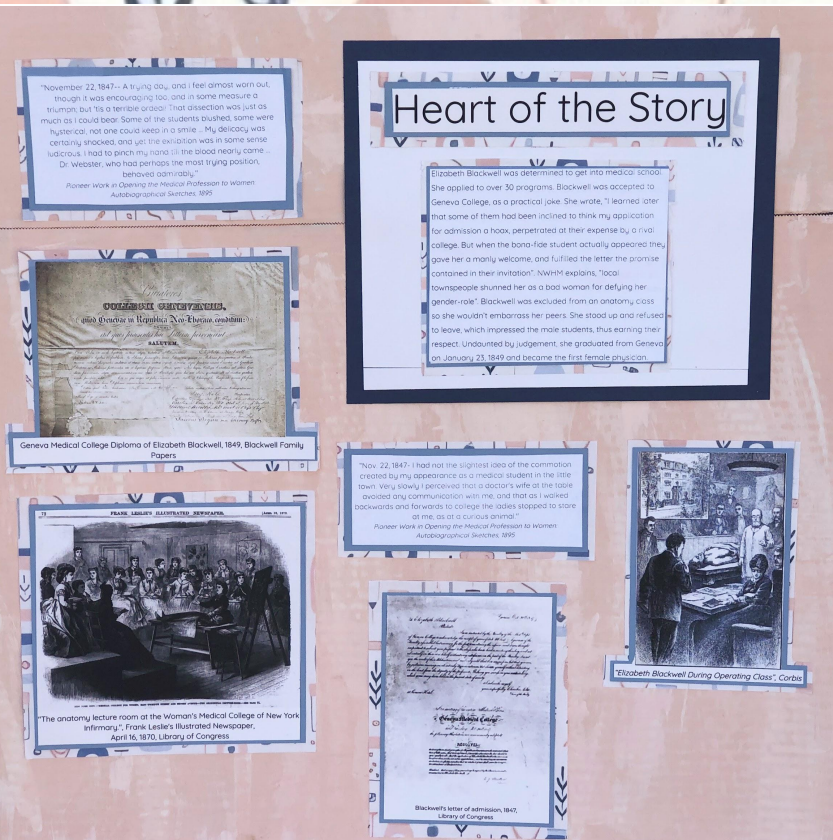
*-Elizabeth Blackwell*



# Picture & Text on Center Panel 2 of 3



# Picture & Text on Center Panel 3 of 3



## Heart of the Story

Elizabeth Blackwell was determined to get into medical school. She applied to over 30 programs. Blackwell was accepted to Geneva College, as a practical joke. She wrote, "I learned later that some of them had been inclined to think my application for admission a hoax, perpetrated at their expense by a rival college. But when the bona-fide student actually appeared they gave her a manly welcome, and fulfilled the letter the promise contained in their invitation". Debra Michals explains, "local townspeople shunned her as a bad woman for defying her gender-role". Blackwell was excluded from an anatomy class so she wouldn't embarrass her peers. She stood up and refused to leave, which impressed the male students, thus earning their respect. Undaunted by judgement, she graduated from Geneva on January 23, 1849 and became the first female physician.

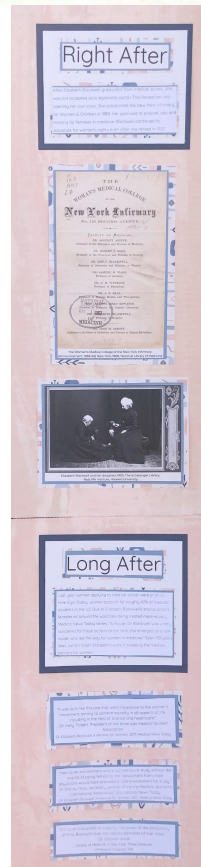
"November 22, 1847-- A trying day, and I feel almost worn out, though it was encouraging too, and in some measure a triumph; but 'tis a terrible ordeal! That dissection was just as much as I could bear. Some of the students blushed, some were hysterical, not one could keep in a smile ... My delicacy was certainly shocked, and yet the exhibition was in some sense ludicrous. I had to pinch my hand till the blood nearly came ... Dr. Webster, who had perhaps the most trying position, behaved admirably."

*Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women: Autobiographical Sketches, 1895*

"Nov. 22, 1847- I had not the slightest idea of the commotion created by my appearance as a medical student in the little town. Very slowly I perceived that a doctor's wife at the table avoided any communication with me, and that as I walked backwards and forwards to college the ladies stopped to stare at me, as at a curious animal."

*Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women: Autobiographical Sketches, 1895*

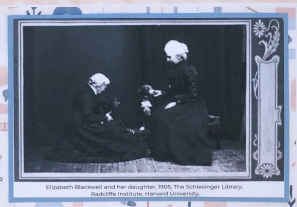
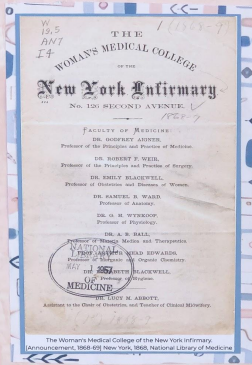
# Picture of Right Panel of Exhibit



## Picture & Text on Right Panel 1 of 2

## Right After

After Elizabeth Blackwell graduated from medical school, she was not accepted as a legitimate doctor. This forced her into opening her own clinic. She established the New York Infirmary for Women & Children in 1868. Her goal was to provide jobs and training for females in medicine. Blackwell continued to advocate for women's rights even after she retired in 1907.



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# Picture & Text on Right Panel 2 of 2

## Long After

Last year women applying to medical school were at an all time high. Today, women account for roughly 47% of medical students in the US. Due to Elizabeth Blackwell's strong actions, females all around the world are being treated more equally. Medical News Today states, "Although Dr. Blackwell was widely slandered for these actions at the time, she emerged as a role model who led the way for women in medicine." Even 170 years later, we still credit Elizabeth's work in breaking the medical barriers for women.

"It was acts like this one that were imperative to the women's movement, aiming to achieve equality in all aspects of life, including in the field of science and healthcare."  
-Dr. Kelly Thibert, President of the American Medical Student Association  
*Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell: A Heroine for Women, 2017, Medical News Today*

"Having an environment where women could study without the stigma of being female or the harassment from male physicians would have provided a safe environment for study."  
Dr. Shelley Ross, secretary general of the the Medical Women's International Association, told Medical News Today.  
*Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell: A Heroine for Women, 2017, Medical News Today*

"It is quite impossible to magnify the power of the personality of Miss Blackwell over the lawless elements of that class."  
-Dr. Stephen Smith  
*History of Medicine in New York: Three Centuries of Medical Progress, 1919*

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# Picture & Text on Table in Front of Exhibit

## medical tools



a. *Stethoscopes from the 1800s*- This kind of stethoscopes were used by Elizabeth Blackwell until they invented the modern day stethoscope.

b. *Mortar and Pestle*- Used to grind up herbs to make medicine.

c. *Doctor's Bag*- Many doctors used a bag like this in Blackwell's time.

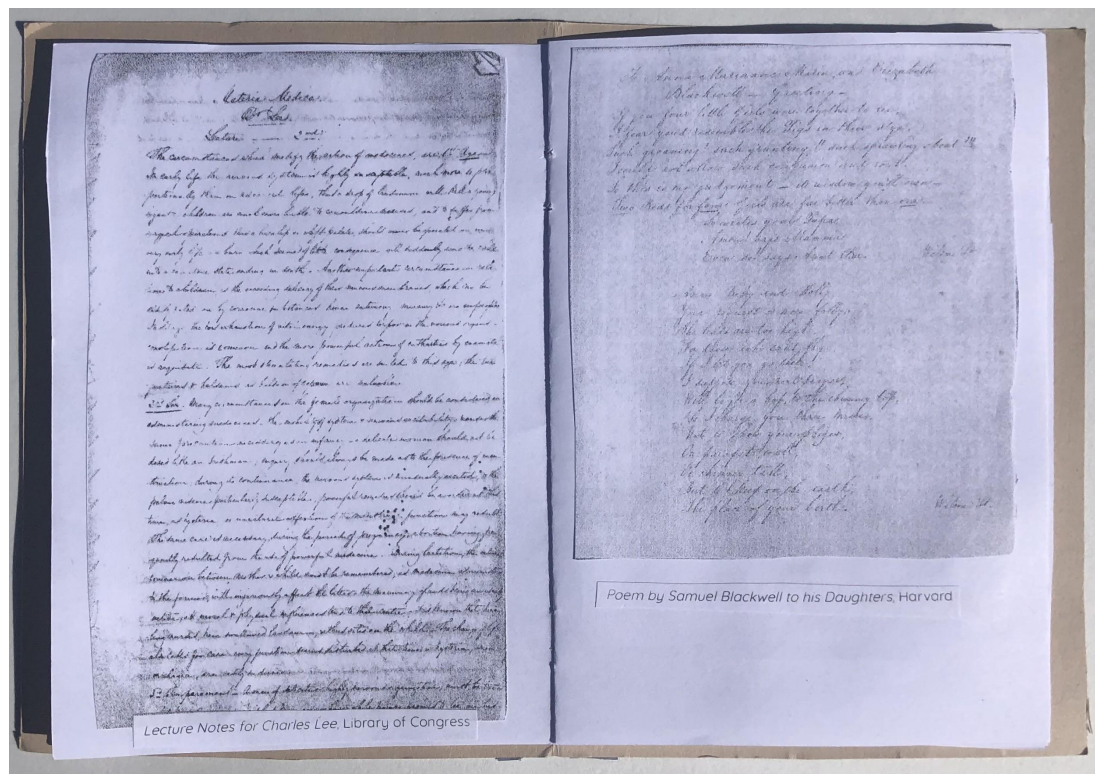
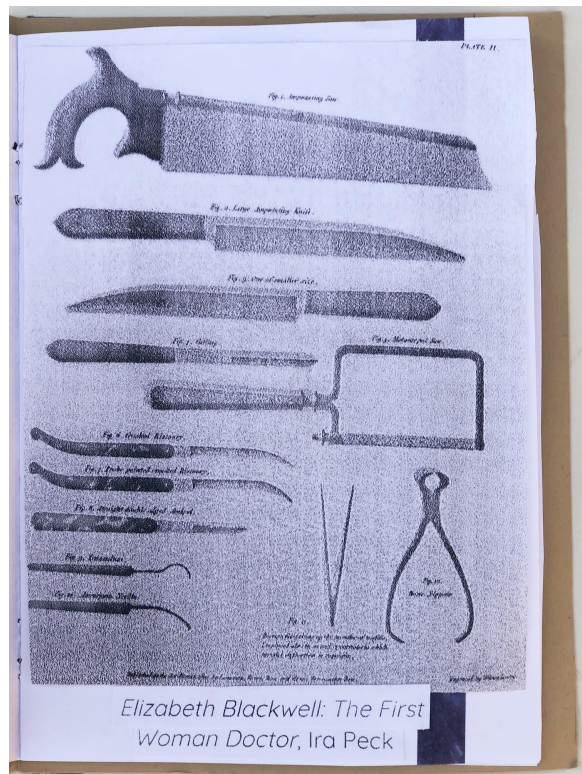


d. *Head Mirror*- This is typically used by physicians to illuminate the patients' nasal passages.

e. *Collection of Elizabeth Blackwells letters, notes, and documents*- We compiled a booklet of Blackwell's important documents to show how diligent she was. More details on next slide.

f. *Reflex Hammer*  
g. *Surgical Scissors*  
h. *Tweezers*

# Picture & Explanation of Interactive Elements on Your Exhibit





# Picture & Explanation of Interactive Elements on Your Exhibit *cont.*

