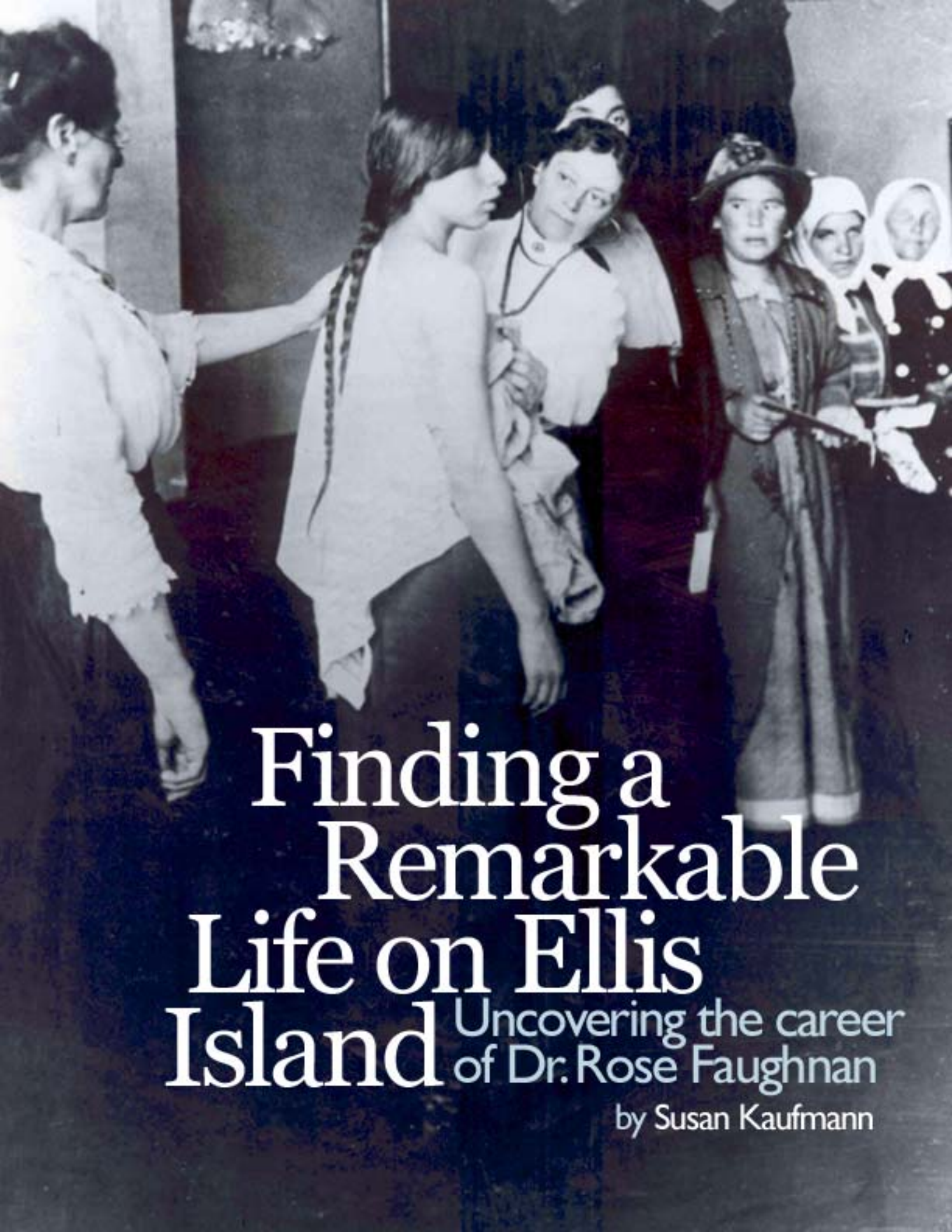

Finding a Remarkable Life on Ellis Island

Uncovering the career of Dr. Rose Faughnan

by Susan Kaufmann

As a volunteer interpretive guide at Ellis Island, I've been fortunate to share the history of a place which changed lives and a nation forever. Specifically, working with National Park Service partner Save Ellis Island, I've told the medical side of the immigrant story: the reasons for the physicals newcomers were required to undergo before being allowed to enter the United States, and what happened if they didn't pass muster.

The story of Ellis Island as the Island of Hope is well known, and tales about immigrants sent back for physical reasons are legion. However, many people don't know that a fully equipped hospital operated there during the first half of the 20th century. Its medical professionals both safeguarded public health and cured many immigrants whose physical or mental conditions otherwise would have excluded them from admission. In fact, while ten percent of all immigrants were detained at Ellis for further inspection or medical care, only one percent was ultimately sent back to their ports of origin due to disease or disability. The massive hospital was once among the busiest and most advanced healthcare facilities in the world.

While the hospital's existence isn't widely known, the people who worked there are virtually anonymous. Their relatives sometimes make themselves known to the museum staff and volunteers, but it's a rare occurrence. The medical exhibit in the Ellis Island Immigration Museum refers to a few of the doctors and nurses by name, but their lives outside the Public Health Service are left to the imagination.

My curiosity has led me to explore the internet and beyond to learn more about one of them: a New Jersey doctor who made history just by working at Ellis Island, but then did so much more. This is the story of that journey and the surprising discoveries along the way.

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First, though, some background:

As increasing numbers of immigrants flocked to the United States in the mid- and late 1800s, Congress passed a series of laws focused on protecting public health. A series of epidemics had sensitized Americans to the danger of what legislation deemed "loathsome and contagious diseases" that appeared to have been introduced by recent immigrants. Newcomers who showed signs of cholera, tuberculosis, and other highly communicable diseases, were to be quarantined upon arrival and returned to their port of origin. Others with physical limitations could be deemed unemployable and deported as 'likely to become a public charge.' Those deemed 'idiots, imbeciles, morons or insane' were also to be denied entry for their assumed inability to support themselves.

The United States Public Health Service (PHS) was responsible for assessing immigrants' medical and mental status before they were

cleared for landing. As the largest immigration station in the country, Ellis Island maintained the largest PHS staff, as well as a general hospital with contagious and infectious disease wards. Physicians—or surgeons, as they were called—wore uniforms on the job, reflecting their standing in PHS' commissioned officer system.

Many immigrants regarded the exams with suspicion, having never seen a doctor before. Women who had never been touched by a man outside their families often refused to disrobe for a secondary inspection by a male doctor, even with a matron present. The military-style PHS uniforms made the situation worse. Some women who had come to America to escape persecution dissolved into hysterics when they discovered they'd be inspected by men who dressed like the soldiers they'd fled from.

To provide a less intimidating experience and reduce immigrants' resistance to being examined, the PHS hired a handful of women physicians, starting with Dr. Rose Bebb in 1914. The medical exhibit at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum features a large photo of Dr. Bebb, and I often referenced her when talking with visitors. Always looking for ways to enhance the story, I wondered whether she had immigrant roots, and whether she was a New Jersey native.

U.S. census records answered those questions quickly. Dr. Bebb had been born in the Midwest to a family which appeared to have been in the United States for a few generations. Perhaps I'd have better luck with another doctor, but she was the sole female Ellis Island physician whose name I knew. I decided to put a few more hours into an internet scavenger hunt, hoping I'd find a scrap or two.

Fortunately during the Ellis Island years, the Public Health Service published directories listing the medical personnel assigned to each immigration station. A Google Books search led me to the 1914 edition, where I found a second woman listed as an acting assistant surgeon: Dr. Rose Faughnan. Checking census records again, I found a 26-year old Rose Faughnan listed in Newark in 1900. She lived with her father and several siblings, no profession cited. Ten years later, the same woman was recorded as a medical student, still living with her family. In 1930, she was in Passaic, working as a physician in a private hospital. This information looked promising.

Viewed in context with its times, census data reveals more than its few words might seem to convey, and Dr. Faughnan's was no exception. The 1880 census noted that her parents, Timothy Faughnan and Mary Farley, had arrived in America as children during the Irish Famine of the 1840s. Married in 1872 at St. James Catholic Church in Newark's Ironbound section, the couple welcomed Rose as their first child the

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following year. Mary, however, was absent from the 1900 census, leaving the frustrating question of when, exactly, she died. The 1890 census records were destroyed in a fire in the 1920s, leaving genealogists and historians with gaps that can't often be filled very easily.

Remarkably, Dr. Faughnan wasn't the sole accomplished professional in her family. Among her five younger brothers and sisters were a lawyer, a dentist, and a school teacher. The children had clearly been encouraged to take their schooling seriously and to meet their full potential.

The Faughnans appeared to have achieved the American dream in just one generation. Their story was even better than I'd hoped to find for my Ellis Island talks.

Browsing Ancestry.com for further information, I discovered Dr. Faughnan's 1922 passport application, complete with physical description and photo. Her unsmiling face was half obscured by shadow, either due to the photographer's lighting or a poor job of document scanning at the National Archives. Nonetheless, she looked like a firm but kind woman, the type who wouldn't brook much nonsense but would provide excellent care.

Additional online research revealed a few more crumbs of information. Her 1947 obituary in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* said she received her medical degree from the Women's Medical College of Baltimore in 1910. Beyond her tenure with the Public Health Service, she had worked for the Newark Public Schools and St. James Hospital in the Ironbound. The 1922 PHS directory listed her at the same "assistant" position as the 1914 directory had, but directories for the years beyond didn't mention her at all. How long had she worked at Ellis Island? What had her duties been?

I suspected that seeking answers to those questions would lead to a dead end. Through previous Ellis Island-related research and visits to the National Archives New York branch, I'd discovered that few of the hospital's records survived or could be located. I'd already learned much more than I'd expected, so I concluded my search.

Even with only a few scraps of information, I was starting to like and admire Dr. Faughnan, and I felt that more people should know about her. I started talking about her in broad strokes on my tours, and I wrote a St. Patrick's Day story about her for my website, *Hidden New Jersey*. Her life story is an excellent example of the hard work and persistence behind the luck of the Irish.

Fate, however, has a way of opening doors even when you believe they're permanently locked.

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About a month after publishing the story online, I got a surprising reader comment. "I cannot believe that I have found this!" Gina Stuart wrote. "I am the granddaughter of John Faughnan, Rose's brother. Aunt Rose has long been a legend in our family." She continued by telling me that her mother was named for Dr. Faughnan, and that after leaving Ellis, the doctor had run her own private hospital in Passaic. "You are correct about the emphasis on education in the family, and that has not changed two generations later."

Responding on the website with another comment to the story, I thanked Ms. Stuart for her note and asked that she reach out to me by e-mail. Now I had to hope that either she or someone else in the family would return to the story, see my note and feel comfortable enough to get back to me. Would they want to discuss their remarkable relative, or would they find my interest intrusive?

It didn't take long to find out. Several weeks later, I received an e-mail from Rose Faughnan Stuart.

"I was astonished when, at my daughter Regina's direction, I found your website!" she began. The youngest of the doctor's eleven nieces and nephews, she was born at Passaic Private Hospital, the facility Dr. Faughnan had founded after leaving Ellis Island. She also shared that the spirit of Dr. Rose, as the family calls her, lives on through Gina and her other daughter, who are both surgeons. If I was interested, she said, she would send me scans of a postcard of the hospital, as well as a *Passaic Herald-News* feature about Dr. Rose which was published on August 11, 1936.

If I was interested? Seriously? It was all I could do to keep from jumping out of my skin. She'd started her own hospital? There was clearly much more to the story than I'd imagined. I quickly wrote back to Mrs. Stuart, letting her know that I'd be grateful for any additional information she could share.

About a week later, she responded with the promised newspaper clipping and postcard, along with some additional family information. She also revealed that her grandmother Mary Farley Faughnan had died of pneumonia in 1887, just two months shy of Dr. Rose's 14th birthday. Mary's unmarried sister Margaret came to live with the family, but it was said she "went to business" and wasn't much of a homemaker. It wasn't clear whether she'd taken on any child-raising duties, but she was an undeniably strong personality. Mrs. Stuart theorized that the intimidating Aunt Maggie may have driven Dr. Rose and her siblings to achieve their successes.

The *Passaic Herald News* article was number 24 in the newspaper's series on "Women in Public Life." It offered substantially more about Dr.

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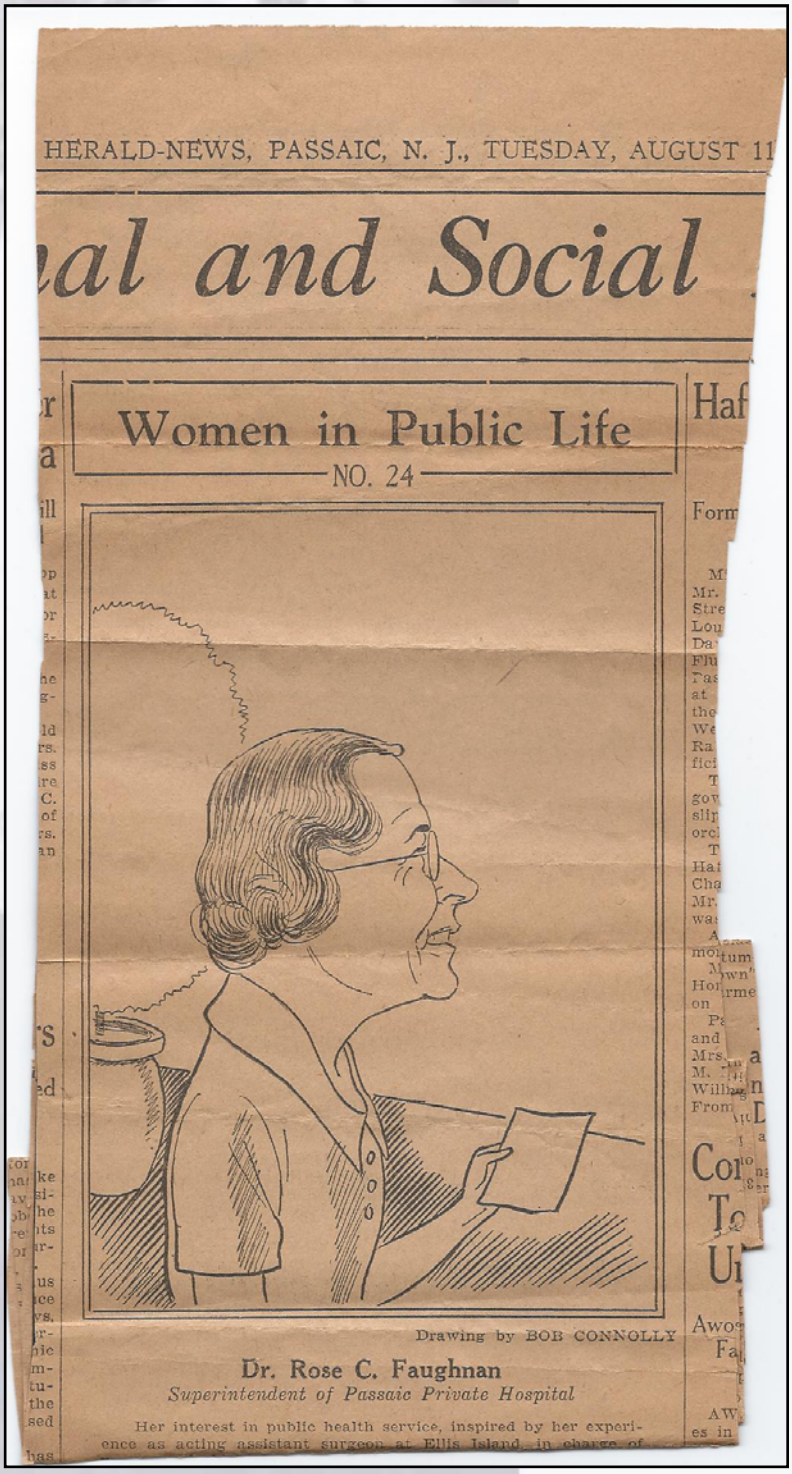
Rose's professional activities than her AMA obituary had. Following graduation from medical school, she'd interned at the hospital of the Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia. She then entered private practice in Newark, where she also served as an inspector for the city's school system. After leaving Ellis Island, she studied at the New York Lying-In Hospital and the Post-Graduate Hospital, subsequently starting her own private hospital in Harrison. Within the year, patients from Passaic had convinced her to move her practice, citing their city's inadequate hospital capacity.



HERALD-NEWS, PASSAIC, N. J., TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

al and Social

Women in Public Life

NO. 24

Drawing by BOB CONNOLLY

Dr. Rose C. Faughnan

Superintendent of Passaic Private Hospital

Her interest in public health service, inspired by her experience as acting assistant surgeon at Ellis Island, in charge of

The article opened up several more avenues of exploration, and the postcard gave me a location to visit. Still, details on Dr. Rose's tenure at Ellis Island were scant. The article confirmed that she'd done line inspections—the initial screening performed on immigrants to uncover potential medical issues before allowing entry to the U.S. Those with curable conditions would be referred to the hospital for treatment, while others would be deported. She also assessed immigrants who were deemed potentially mentally ill or of low intelligence. However, the article also intimated that she was in charge of "women and children" in the island's general hospital.

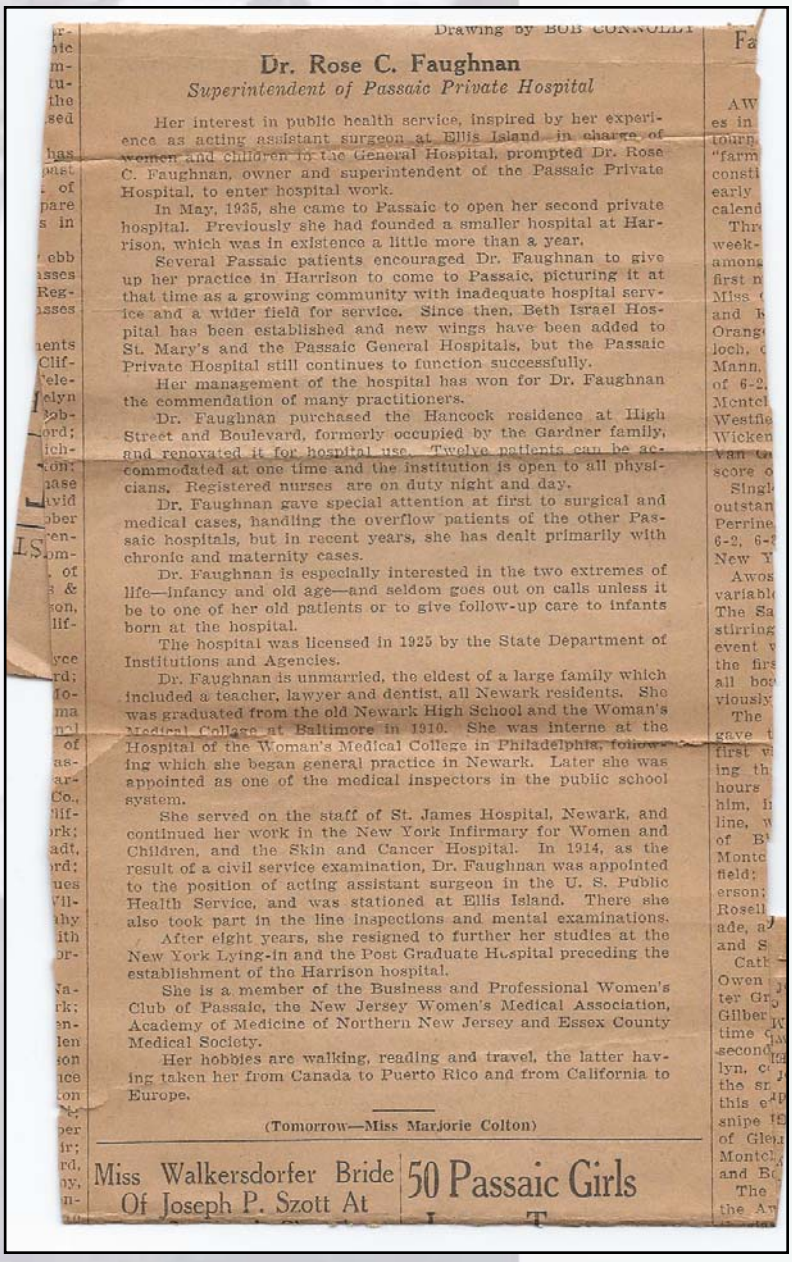
Had Dr. Rose ever treated patients at the Ellis Island hospital, or was she simply charged with sending immigrants there to be cured by others? Public Health Service records would hopefully shed some light—if they still existed.

My first stop was the Ellis Island library. Perhaps the physicians were included in the island's personnel records, or maybe one of the National Park Service historians had done some research on the staff.

Sadly, the library had less information about Dr. Rose than I did. While NPS historian Barry Moreno has spent much of his career researching the Immigration Station, his study of the personnel has focused primarily on those who worked on the legal and operational aspects of the island. What he knew about specific doctors was largely based on the few who'd had notable achievements before their Ellis

Island assignments. The library's brief notes on other medical staff members included just two lines about Dr. Rose.

Moreno did, however, confirm one of the difficult realities for women physicians working for the Public Health Service in the early 20th century. The prospects for advancement were slim to none. Every PHS doctor entered the service as "acting assistant surgeon," but only men could take the qualifying examination for a full commission. With that promotion, of course, would come the opportunity for more interesting work in the hospital—and relief from the tedium of line inspections.



Drawing by BOB CONNOLLY

Dr. Rose C. Faughnan

Superintendent of Passaic Private Hospital

Her interest in public health service, inspired by her experience as acting assistant surgeon at Ellis Island, in charge of women and children in the General Hospital, prompted Dr. Rose C. Faughnan, owner and superintendent of the Passaic Private Hospital, to enter hospital work.

In May, 1935, she came to Passaic to open her second private hospital. Previously she had founded a smaller hospital at Harrison, which was in existence a little more than a year.

Several Passaic patients encouraged Dr. Faughnan to give up her practice in Harrison to come to Passaic, picturing it at that time as a growing community with inadequate hospital service and a wider field for service. Since then, Beth Israel Hospital has been established and new wings have been added to St. Mary's and the Passaic General Hospitals, but the Passaic Private Hospital still continues to function successfully.

Her management of the hospital has won for Dr. Faughnan the commendation of many practitioners.

Dr. Faughnan purchased the Hancock residence at High Street and Boulevard, formerly occupied by the Gardner family, and renovated it for hospital use. Twelve patients can be accommodated at one time and the institution is open to all physicians. Registered nurses are on duty night and day.

Dr. Faughnan gave special attention at first to surgical and medical cases, handling the overflow patients of the other Passaic hospitals, but in recent years, she has dealt primarily with chronic and maternity cases.

Dr. Faughnan is especially interested in the two extremes of life—infancy and old age—and seldom goes out on calls unless it be to one of her old patients or to give follow-up care to infants born at the hospital.

The hospital was licensed in 1925 by the State Department of Institutions and Agencies.

Dr. Faughnan is unmarried, the eldest of a large family which included a teacher, lawyer and dentist, all Newark residents. She was graduated from the old Newark High School and the Woman's Medical College at Baltimore in 1910. She was interne at the Hospital of the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia, following which she began general practice in Newark. Later she was appointed as one of the medical inspectors in the public school system.

She served on the staff of St. James Hospital, Newark, and continued her work in the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, and the Skin and Cancer Hospital. In 1914, as the result of a civil service examination, Dr. Faughnan was appointed to the position of acting assistant surgeon in the U. S. Public Health Service, and was stationed at Ellis Island. There she also took part in the line inspections and mental examinations.

After eight years, she resigned to further her studies at the New York Lying-in and the Post Graduate Hospital preceding the establishment of the Harrison hospital.

She is a member of the Business and Professional Women's Club of Passaic, the New Jersey Women's Medical Association, Academy of Medicine of Northern New Jersey and Essex County Medical Society.

Her hobbies are walking, reading and travel, the latter having taken her from Canada to Puerto Rico and from California to Europe.

(Tomorrow—Miss Marjorie Colton)

Miss Walkersdorfer Bride Of Joseph P. Szott At

50 Passaic Girls

Parascandola had left the PHS since authoring the article, and it appeared that the Office of the PHS Historian had closed, leaving me with little recourse but to contact him wherever he'd landed. I discovered that he's now an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland.

He promptly responded to my e-mailed query and confirmed that the PHS historian position had gone unfilled after his departure. Some documents from Ellis Island still survived at the Archives and possibly the Department of Homeland Security, he told me, but they contained little to no information pertaining specifically to individuals who worked on the island.

Both he and Moreno suggested that Dr. Rose's personnel record might hold some information, if it could be located. Paperwork related to former Public Health Service employees is held in the National Personnel Records Center of the National Archives in St. Louis. As luck would have it, that branch of the archives was undergoing

reorganization and wasn't accepting requests for documents for another few months. I sent an inquiry nonetheless, figuring that at least I'd have a place in line once they reopened.

Surprisingly, I got a response before the stated reopening date. Archivists had located Dr. Rose's file; I could either come to St. Louis to view it, or pay to have a copy sent to me. The $25 photocopy charge was much less expensive than airfare to Missouri, so I sent a check and hoped to receive a mountain of paperwork in return. After about a week, I started looking for a fat manila envelope in my mailbox, feeling like a high-school senior waiting to hear good news from her first-choice college.

The documentation arrived in a big manila envelope, but not a fat one. Enclosed were copies of Dr. Rose's letter of resignation from the Public Health Service and subsequent official letters up the line to the Surgeon General and Department of Treasury, an official letter of separation from Treasury, and a "Confidential Efficiency Report." All were dated November 1922.

It wasn't much, but a few key facts stood out from the bureaucratic language:

- Dr. Rose's stated reason for resignation was an intention to return to private practice.
- A notation from the Chief Medical Officer at Ellis Island revealed that Dr. Rose had been informed that her annual salary was about to be increased to $3000.
- During her last several months at Ellis Island, she worked in the line inspection section of the station, as well as on the mental examination board.
- Her reviewer said she was well suited for service in psychiatry.

"Dr Faughnan had a splendid record for many years but during last few months of her stay seemed to get quite discontented and strongly feministic."

The efficiency report was the most revealing of the documents, though it covered just five months of her eight-year tenure. Perhaps indicating the general mindset of the medical staff, Surgeon in Charge W.C. Billings deemed her work satisfactory, though when asked if he would want to have her as an assistant during emergencies, he said no. In the space allocated for an explanation, he wrote that he "would not care for any woman on epidemic work because of exhaustive character of the work." The refusal, it seems, was not directly aimed at Dr. Rose; it was a reflection of the perceived shortcomings of her gender.

Most telling was Billings' summary estimate of her performance. "Dr Faughnan had a splendid record for many years but during last few

months of her stay seemed to get quite discontented and strongly feministic."

From these scraps of information, I could make a few educated guesses about her tenure at Ellis Island. It's likely that her unhappiness at work stemmed from bumping her head against a very thick glass ceiling. Apparently she had been relegated to line duty for her entire tenure. Prevented by regulation from taking the same career path as her male counterparts, she may have attempted to lobby her superiors to change the rules. Then, given their opinion of her "feministic" approach to work, they weren't willing to risk advocating a policy change for a deserving professional. Instead, they attempted to placate her with a raise.

Certainly after eight years of perfectly serviceable work on the inspection and diagnostic side of the island, Dr. Rose must have been frustrated not to have the opportunity to treat ailing immigrants. By that time, she was 49 years old, a physician for 12 years and likely seeing younger and less tenured male doctors being promoted above her.

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With the Ellis Island side of the story appearing to reach a frustrating conclusion, I directed my energy to the chapters of Dr. Rose's professional life preceding and following her work with the Public Health Service.

First there was the issue of her education. The first medical school she attended, the Woman's Medical College of Baltimore, closed after she graduated in 1910. According to research done by Nancy Bramucci for the online resource *Medicine in Maryland,* the small school was insufficiently equipped and relied on the resourcefulness of its faculty.

Dr. Rose seems to have used her internship to more than make up for any deficiencies in her Baltimore education. Founded in 1850, the Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia was the world's first institution established to train women in medicine and grant MD degrees. It merged with three other schools in 1970 to become part of Hahnemann University and subsequently affiliated with Drexel School of Medicine.

Brief mentions in the school's student publication *The Esculapian* confirm that Dr. Rose received a thorough education despite an acute case of tonsillitis which interrupted her work. In her year there, she rose from intern to senior resident, with a focus on maternity care.

Finding information on her post-Ellis work at the New York Lying-In and Post Graduate Hospital was more difficult. The hospital became the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department of the present day NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center in 1932. An inquiry to the medical center archivist revealed only that Dr. Rose had

received a student diploma in 1922. No further information was available on what courses she might have completed or how her work was assessed by her instructors or peers.

That left her own facility, the Passaic Private Hospital. The postcard Mrs. Stuart had scanned for me included a description of the services: "Ideal facilities for the care of invalids, chronic and convalescent cases, medical or surgical. Trained nursing day and night. Home cooking. Private, semi-private and ward cases at reduced rates, which include all ordinary expenses. Special diets, massage, colonic irrigations, ultra-violet light, etc. No contagious or tubercular cases accepted. Established 1925. Under State License. By Bus or Erie R.R. 45 min. from New York City. R.C. Faughnan, M.D., Resident Physician."

The fact that she'd had her initials printed on the card, rather than her full name, may have been a concession to the realities of the medical profession at the time. Women doctors often found it difficult to attract patients in private practice, leading many to opt for work in the public sector. And as she'd learned at Ellis Island, even a government job wouldn't guarantee the opportunity to exercise the full breadth of her skills.

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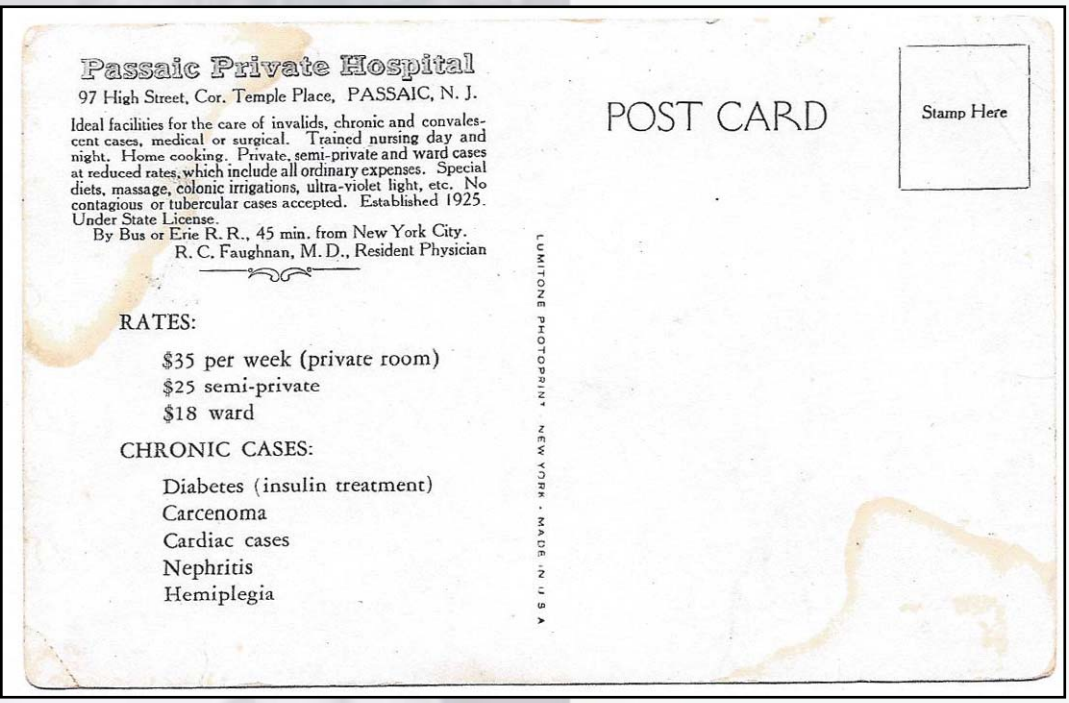
According to the *Passaic Herald-News* article, Dr. Rose had renovated a large house to accommodate Passaic Private Hospital's 12 beds and the necessities required for the provided care. The postcard photo portrayed it as a Victorian style dwelling with a wrap-around porch and large yard. Might the building still be there, even if it had ceased to serve as a healthcare facility?

I could have easily jumped in the car to see, but I was enjoying the path of discovery too much to get an immediate answer. First I wanted to learn more about Dr. Rose's hospital from contemporary sources. I reached out to the staff at the Passaic County Historical Society library at Lambert Castle in Paterson to see what they might be able to tell me.

Volunteer researcher Carole Natoli enthusiastically responded to my e-mail request, telling me she'd do an initial search before my visit.



When I arrived a week later, she informed me that the only information she could find was about the Passaic General Hospital. She'd done some additional research on the term "Rose Faughnan" and wanted to show me an article she'd found online. In the kind of serendipity that writers both hope for and fear, the article was my *Hidden New Jersey* feature. We laughed, but it quickly became clear to me that I could be the first person to have recognized the historical import of Dr. Rose and her hospital.

I explored the library shelves for a few hours, attempting to find any mention of the hospital or Dr. Rose in a series of directories and bulletins. The search came up empty, except for an advertisement in the June 1940 *Passaic County Medical Society Bulletin.* Though shedding no additional light, the listing at least proved that the hospital had been a going concern well after the *Herald-News* article was published. Natoli suggested that Passaic City Historian Mark Auerbach might be a good source of information, given that his focus was substantially narrower than the more Paterson-based county collection.

Before I made that call, I wanted to see the building and come to my own conclusions. Visiting the property would give me a better frame of context and perhaps raise more questions for Auerbach. I punched the address—97 High Street—into my GPS and headed to Passaic, camera in tow.

Most of the houses on the street shared a similar architectural style to the hospital, though their wooden clapboards have been covered with aluminum or vinyl siding. I drove down the block slowly, watching the numbers approach 97. Then there was nothing but a grassy corner lot where Dr. Rose's hospital and home had once stood. The only indication a building had been there was an old concrete walk that stopped several feet into the property. Disappointed, I walked the path and turned to the street, trying to picture what Dr. Rose might have seen from her porch as a new patient arrived.

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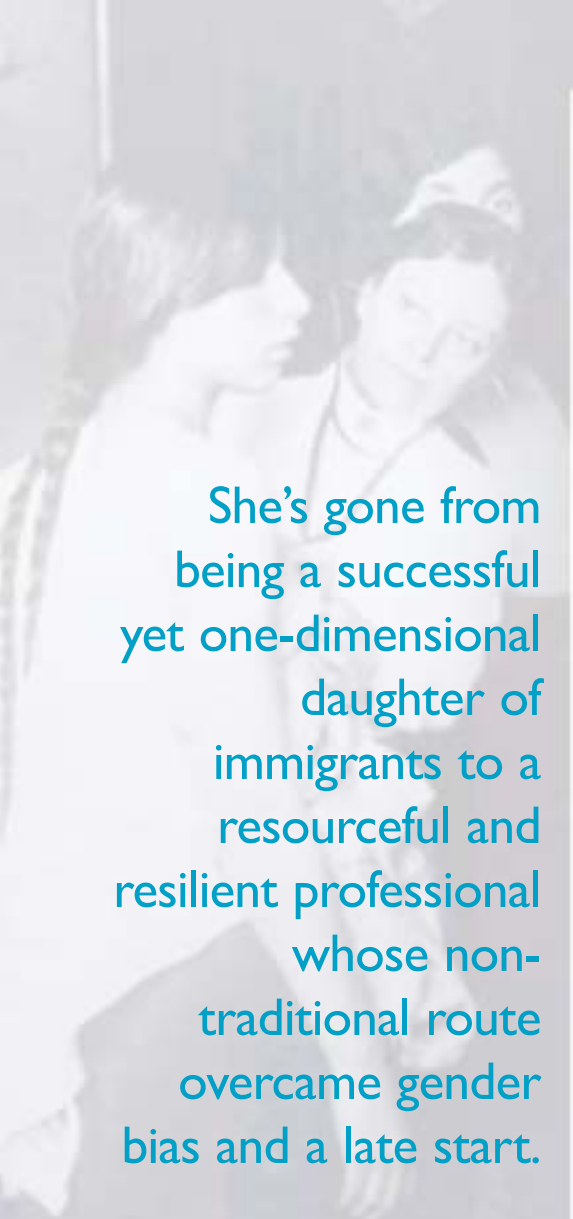
To my relief, Auerbach was well aware of the existence of Passaic



She's gone from being a successful yet one-dimensional daughter of immigrants to a resourceful and resilient professional whose non-traditional route overcame gender bias and a late start.

Private Hospital when I contacted him a few days later. In fact, within the past year he'd received a call from someone seeking information because she'd been born there. He confirmed that at the time that Dr. Rose had arrived, the city was suffering from an extreme lack of hospital beds. Passaic Beth Israel was founded in 1927 to relieve some of that need, but opportunities still abounded for small facilities like Dr. Rose's, which focused on convalescence, maternity and non-acute care.

As for the building itself, Auerbach said it had been torn down within the past ten years. He was unaware of what became of the hospital or what purpose the building had taken on after Dr. Rose's death, but suggested that tax records could offer some answers.

So the story stands, at least for now. My research has reached several dead ends, but other paths have opened for more detailed exploration in the future. Through sheer serendipity I've been fortunate to glean Dr. Rose's strengths and tenacity from publicly available sources and family members who recall her with fondness and respect.

My portrait of Dr. Rose Faughnan may only be partially completed, but she's become much more than the name and title I found when looking for an Ellis Island human interest story. She's gone from being a successful yet one-dimensional daughter of immigrants to a resourceful and resilient professional whose non-traditional route overcame gender bias and a late start.

Her American dream was delayed and possibly diverted, but not diminished.

Susan Kaufmann is a writer and storyteller with interests in history and historic preservation. A volunteer interpretive guide at Ellis Island, she's also served as a docent at Thomas Edison National Historical Park in West Orange, NJ. Her website, Hidden New Jersey, focuses on the state's lesser-known historical locations, events and people, as well as its environmental gems. While she's not wandering the state in search of fascinating stories, Kaufmann makes a living as a business writer and communications consultant.

Check out Hidden New Jersey at **www.hiddennj.com .**