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She's a Bombshell—at 76

Closeup
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By WAMBLY BALD

"I am just a simple individual. There is nothing spectacular about me."

Dr. Florence R. Sabin, Colorado's hard-hitting health crusader who was visiting here, said that with an air of impatience, as if anxious to shoo the reporter away.

It was only when she spoke of public health programs that her severe manner softened a little.

Then one saw that here was firmness, objectivity, especially when she began: "The whole health drive is just like this. . .". And as she pressed one fist into the palm of her other hand and talked on, very quietly and very gravely, one became aware of her rocklike force and the square cut of her jaw.

"I tried to take health out of politics in Colorado," she was saying, impersonally, as if reading a scientific paper to a committee.

And here was the woman whom Colorado's new governor, Lee Knous, had called "an atom bomb" and "a dynamo."

Stirred Colorado to Need Of Public Health Reform

In appearance, the eminent health crusader and scientist has the homespun look of somebody's grandma rocking on the back porch.

She is small and pudgy, very simply dressed, and her grey hair is combed back from a very high forehead. From behind her spectacles her widely-spaced eyes peer at you keenly, as if in judgment.

Honored during this New York visit—she received the American Woman's Assn. Medal for Eminent Achievement—Dr. Sabin adds this award to a score given her during her 40-year career of research on the lymphatics, the blood cells and vessels, bone marrow, and tuberculosis.

"Colorado's health programs needed an overhauling," she was saying.

She came out of retirement to attend to that "overhauling" herself in 1944 when she was 73!

And she really crusaded. She stumped the state, motoring with her teams on speaking tours in every town and hamlet. She buttonholed businessmen,

made life miserable for politicians, got the press interested in Colorado's need for health reform.

Operating as chairman of a Postwar Planning Committee, she labored with untiring energy to convince Coloradans that their disease and death rates were a disgrace. She became so prominent in her campaigning that office seekers who ducked the health issue went down in defeat.

Through her efforts it was shown that Colorado, thought of as a health resort, had a deplorable record, with inadequate health protection from milk and water pollution. And investigators learned that tuberculosis was rife among the state's own population, with only 574 hospital beds available for citizens of Colorado.

The Bills Went Through—She 'Had to Fight'

This busy old woman's indictments rang out while office holders scurried to improve the situation. She saw to it that progressive public health bills were adopted recently by the Colorado legislature.

"I had to fight," she said in her matter-of-fact way, although there occasionally was a perceptible twinkle in her grey-green eyes.

The sturdy old woman often stumped the state in snow and rain.

Just last November she was scheduled to speak at Sterling, 125 miles from her Denver home. A health official urged her to stay home because eight inches of snow lay on the ground. She snapped back at him: "Meet me at nine, and don't forget your rubbers."

Dr. Sabin, who comes from old Vermont stock that settled in Denver, was the first woman

member of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, the first woman professor at Johns Hopkins University, and the first woman elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

Her career is an example of the difficulties that have beset women of science. Graduated from Smith in 1893, she taught mathematics for three years to earn the money to enter the Johns Hopkins Medical School. In 1900, upon receiving her medical degree, she found no research fellowships open to women. Finally a group of Baltimore women raised the sum necessary for her fellowship. After a long career of research and teaching, she retired from the staff of the Rockefeller Institute in 1938.

Dr. Sabin froze when asked about herself, but she was persuaded to thaw just a little.

Still Ready to Tackle A Good Broiled Steak

In Denver she lives with her sister, a retired school teacher. She never smokes, but she will accept a cocktail once in a while. She eats heartily, likes broiled steaks, but she's not much of a cook.

She drinks two cups of black coffee in the morning, without cream or sugar, and two glasses of milk a day. She gets seven hours' sleep, and says she feels fine.

Dr. Sabin admitted that she actually does sit and rock on her back porch, now and then, but she prefers motoring out to the country.

"I used to take long walks and swim, but I'm getting a little on in years for that," she said. "I have even given up bridge and knitting."

In reading and music, her taste runs to the classics generally. But she considers Will Rogers' humor "wonderful" and she enjoys hearing some of the moderns, such as Geršwin.

Governor and Mayor Are "Wonderful People"

She doesn't care for movies, but she enjoys the theatre, and she snoke of the summer group



DR. FLORENCE H. SABIN, hard-hitting crusader. Post Photo by Calvacca

at Elich Gardens back in Denver who were "fine actors."

Dr. Sabin enjoys most of all discussions with friends on what she termed "searching questions"—either in public health or in politics. She did not comment on politics beyond saying that the governor of Colorado and the mayor of Denver were "wonderful people" and sincerely interested now in public health.

The crusading scientist considers her work far from done

She spoke of mass surveys on a grand scale needed to fight tuberculosis, educational programs that will make the public understand health hazards. In Colorado, and throughout the nation.

"New York State," she declared, "has a tradition of able men in its Health Dept. But its members lack the funds to do adequate work. More hospital beds, more personnel are needed badly. We must get all open, contagious cases into hospitals."

She would never, she said very quietly, stop fighting.