

Dr. Victoria Ernst, the Real Estate Tycoon

There is a new street in Bridgewater named after Dr. Victoria Sarah Ernst, Bridgewater's first female doctor, and real estate baron.

Born in Bridgewater in 1856, Victoria was determined to become a medical doctor, a career considered unsuitable for women at that time. Teaching locally and living at home to save money for medical school, not once but twice her father's jewelry store was lost due to fire, and Victoria handed over her savings to help her father rebuild. She persevered however, and finally after fifteen years, Victoria Ernst was off to Dalhousie Medical College in Halifax, graduating in 1900 at the age of forty-three.

Dr. Ernst returned to Bridgewater and set up her own practice (women were not allowed to practice at the hospital) specializing in women's health. With teaching still in her blood, she even set up women's classes on Sunday evenings where a variety of medical and religious topics were taught and discussed.

Victoria never married, but she did adopt three sons. She also developed a passion for real estate, buying up one property at a time, until she owned the largest number of residential properties in Bridgewater!

"She was a wise woman who wasted nothing" said a Mr. Aitkens Green, "She was a doctor but she was a miser. If a carpenter went in to fix up a building, she went behind him and picked up the nails and straightened them out and made him use them over again."

Mervin Knox said, "I don't know how she made her money. During the depression she would get those people to do anything at all to pay their rent. She was quite a woman. She must have owned one-quarter of Bridgewater. She was Bridgewater."

Even in death Dr. Ernst cared for others. At her death in 1940 at age 85, her last will and testament was published in its entirety in the Bridgewater Bulletin. She left her tenants the houses they were renting. She gave homes to her children and her nieces and nephews. She left a house to a family who had taken in and cared for an orphan girl. She left properties to the Lutheran Church, the Salvation Army and the Dawson Memorial Hospital, and of course many local charities benefited from her final act of generosity.

Dr. Victoria Ernst left her imprint on her students, fellow classmates, patients, family, tenants and the less fortunate of Bridgewater. Her passion and determination make her an inspiration to all. At the recommendation of the Bridgewater Heritage Advisory Committee, in 2008 the Town of Bridgewater acknowledged Victoria Ernst with a street named Dr. Ernst Court.