

The Life and Times of Dora Solosko, M.Cp. (1921)



Dora Solosko in 1933.

A man's search for information about his alumna grandmother has opened a window onto some of the issues faced and rewards reaped by a female podiatrist in the early decades of the twentieth century.

John Bernhard's inquiry about his grandmother, **Dora Solosko**, a member of the Class of 1921, led to an email exchange that revealed a great deal about her and about early graduates of the College.

He wrote: "My grandmother came from Latvia in 1912 with her family. The family valued education but couldn't afford to send her to NYCPM. I am not sure how she could afford it. However, after reading NYCPM's 100th history book, I suspect that through the school's spirit of generosity she found a way. She was the first in the family to obtain a post-secondary education. She was a very proud graduate of NYCPM [then called the First Institute of Podiatry].

"The NYCPM education it gave her was priceless - especially in a time when women had few opportunities for a medical career. Her financial independence as a professional podiatrist allowed her to divorce her first husband in the mid-1920s and then ten years later support her family during the Depression."

Mr. Bernhard attached a scan of a 1923 *New York Times* article (photo) about his grandmother that says something about the societal views of both the profession and the status of women in podiatry – and medicine and society – at that time.

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GIRL CHIROPODIST IN COURT.

Patient Says She Has No Right to Use Title "Doctor."

In adjourning the case of Dora Solosko, 23, a chiropodist of 273 Eighth Avenue, who was in court on the complaint of Sergio C. Acquirra of 333 West Twenty-first Street that she was practising without a license, Magistrate Charles A. Oberwager said yesterday morning in Jefferson Market Court that he hoped that the day would come when the Legislature would "prohibit organ grinders from using the title 'professor' and 'doctor'."

"Why should a man who is cutting toe-nails have the right to the title of doctor," he said, "when that word signifies that a man has had an education in some college or university, and that he has received not only some doctor's degree but also either the degree of Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science?"

Acquirra testified that he had applied to Miss Solosko for treatment of a sore foot last Saturday and that the sign on her door read "Dr. D. Solosko, Chiropodist." The fact that she had treated his foot while using the name "doctor" was illegal, according to Acquirra. Magistrate Oberwager said that he would grant an adjournment until Friday morning and requested District Attorney John N. Flood to look into the case to see if there were any grounds for prosecution.

John C. Dyer, attorney for the Podic Society of the State of New York, who appeared for Miss Solosko, said that the law authorized chiropodists to prefix their names with "doctor" as long as the word "chiropodist" followed.

1923 New York Times article

He writes: "On a related postscript, after the *New York Times* story, my grandmother's practice on 23rd Street between 8th and 9th Avenues flourished throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, she met my grandfather in April 1935 when he sought her medical opinion. He had just returned from a business trip in Europe and was in New York briefly before returning home to New Orleans.

"In a whirlwind romance my grandmother within three months had moved down to New Orleans, opened an office, and married my grandfather in October 1935. A year later my father was born. She continued to practice her entire life and was much sought after for both her professional ability and generosity. Everyone received the same quality of care regardless of their ability to pay. You can imagine how during the Depression folks came to count on her. And I can now see how NYCPM's mission to help others reinforced the goodness that was my grandmother's nature."