

# Bessie Olive Cole

1883–1971, BALTIMORE COUNTY

*Tonight we honor one who has achieved many unique distinctions.  
She was one of the first women to graduate from the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy;  
First woman to receive a law degree from the School of Law at the University of Maryland;  
First woman to be Acting Dean of our School of Pharmacy;  
First woman to hold a full professorship at the School of Pharmacy;  
First woman Honorary President of Maryland Pharmaceutical Association;  
First woman Honorary President of Alumni Association, School of Pharmacy; and  
First woman to receive the Alumni Medal.  
Hail to the lady of many firsts—the first lady of Pharmacy in Maryland.*

—FRANCIS S. BALASSONE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
PRESENTATION OF THE ALUMNI MEDAL TO BESSIE OLIVE COLE IN 1953

Bessie Olive Cole dedicated her life to pharmacy education at the University of Maryland. As a teacher, she was exacting, considerate, tolerant, and understanding. She sought to make the classroom and laboratory an endless source of inspiration. Her success is evident in her students' accomplishments and the respect her name commands still today (Balassone 712).

Cole's distinguished career as a pharmacist began quite by chance. While a Baltimore Business College student, Cole simultaneously worked for a pharmaceutical company (Stevenson 75). The job motivated her to study pharmacy. After her graduation in 1903, she continued working in the pharmaceutical industry while she pursued a degree at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. She earned her doctorate in 1913 with the highest average in the class.

Although pharmacology satisfied Cole, it was not enough. She wanted to teach. By 1920, Cole became a faculty member at the School of Pharmacy at the University of Maryland, and soon after, the secretary of the faculty of the School of Pharmacy, a position she would hold until her retirement in 1953. During those years, the school became her home, and its people her family. Colleagues often noted, "...if there's anything you want to know about the School of Pharmacy of the University of Maryland, Dr. B. Olive Cole can tell you" (Stevenson 76).

Cole pursued her own education with the same vigor she used to educate others. She saw learning as the key not only to expanding knowledge but also to discovering new challenges and developing new skills. The status quo did not satisfy Cole for long. Determined never to be intellectually limited, at one time or another she studied English, history, or economics at Johns Hopkins University. Her love of learning also led her to enroll in the University of Maryland School of Law in 1920, the first class to admit women. By the time she graduated, she had become a specialist in pharmaceutical law.

*"Hail to the lady of many firsts—the first lady of Pharmacy in Maryland."*

By 1928, Cole was an appointed associate professor of economics and pharmaceutical law and later became the first woman to hold a full professorship at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy; in fact, she was the first woman to be a full professor of pharmacy in the United States. Many publications in professional journals followed, as did numerous speaking engagements. She was an active member of the Maryland Pharmaceutical Association and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy. Indeed, Cole filled her life with her work.

Cole's contributions remain a vital part of the history of the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. In her honor, the Maryland Pharmaceutical Association in Baltimore now houses the Dr. B. Olive Cole Museum. Other tributes followed her retirement, validating Bessie Cole as Maryland's first lady of pharmacy (Allen). ❀



COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, SCHOOL OF PHARMACY

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W O M E N

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ACHIEVEMENT

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IN MARYLAND

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HISTORY

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*Carolyn B. Stegman*

*Edited by Suzanne Nida Seibert*