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Gift links Dartmouth-Hitchcock's past and future

By KATE VILLARS

As the first woman to be appointed a full professor at Dartmouth Medical School and the first female member of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Clinic, Dr. E. Elizabeth “Betty” French continued a family legacy in medicine at Dartmouth. Her father, Dr. Harry Tapley French, was a professor of anatomy at DMS and a founding member of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Clinic in 1927, and her two brothers, Arthur and Rowland, were both DMS graduates.

Now, 18 years after Betty French’s death, an extraordinary \$4-million gift to Dartmouth-Hitchcock from the estate of her husband, the late Edward Connery Lathem, honors the memory of his wife and her commitment to medical education and research while advancing the future of medicine through translational research. The gift links Dartmouth-Hitchcock’s history with its aspirations as an institution that today is on the forefront of transforming health care.

French initially trained as a medical technologist at Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital’s School of Medical Technology before earning her M.D. and a master’s of surgery at McGill University in 1950. Trained as a pathologist, French returned to Hanover in

1957 to become director of the Clinical Diagnostic Laboratories at MHMH and begin what would be a 30-year tenure as director of the School of Medical Technology. That same year, she and Edward Connery Lathem were wed, attended by Lathem’s good friend, the poet Robert Frost, as best man.

Lathem, a 1951 graduate of Dartmouth College and a member of Dartmouth’s library staff, went on to become the College’s head librarian and dean of libraries. He was also a writer, editor, and counselor to Dartmouth presidents beginning with Ernest Martin Hopkins and continuing through James Wright, and he held a number of administrative offices at the College. Lathem is perhaps best known for his volume *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, first published in 1969, which remains the standard edition of Frost’s verse, and he edited or coedited a number of other volumes of his friend’s poetry and prose, as well as scores of other books.

The Lathem gift has funded two endowments that will accelerate translational clinical research at Dartmouth-Hitchcock by providing a perpetual source of funding where it is needed most: the training of postdoctoral fellows in cross-disciplinary translational research and the support of innovative, interdisciplinary pilot research by promising junior faculty and clinicians. Translational research seeks to



The late Elizabeth French (above, left, in 1983) spent her career teaching and practicing pathology at Dartmouth-Hitchcock; the institution will benefit from a recent bequest from her husband, Edward Connery Lathem (below, left, in 1965).



move basic science findings quickly and efficiently into medical practice, and thus into meaningful improvements in health and health care.

“Dartmouth Medical School has a rich history of very strong biomedical basic science,” says DMS dean Dr. Wiley Souba. “At the same time, Dartmouth-Hitchcock is one of the more innovative medical enterprises in the

country in terms of focusing on outcomes, quality, and comparative effectiveness. By bridging those two, we have the ability to be on the cutting edge of transforming health care in this country.”

Postdoctoral training

Upon French’s retirement in 1986, she and her husband established the Dr. E. Elizabeth French Fund for Laboratory

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DARTMOUTH COLLEGE ARCHIVES

ADRIAN BOUCHARD

Giving is at the core of the human condition.

—Ted Forstmann, U.S. financier and philanthropist

Medicine (a.k.a. “Betty’s Fund”), an endowment at Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital to support training and research in clinical pathology. Their generous gifts to this fund over the years have now been augmented by a portion of the Lathem estate gift. As a result, “Betty’s Fund” can now truly realize its original vision—expanding educational and scholarly activities in pathology—by supporting the training of postdoctoral fellows within the Pathology Translational Research Program (PTRP).

Established in 2006, Dartmouth-Hitchcock’s nationally recognized PTRP plays a central role in the translation of basic science research to patient care across the medical center, fostering collaborative research efforts and providing valuable training experiences for young research scientists. “Pathology has a behind-the-

scenes—but really vital—contribution to improving clinical outcomes and patient care,” explains Dr. Alan Schned, the department’s acting chair. “The PTRP generates a tremendous amount of translational research activity involving pathology and other disci-

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plines, and it brings together the expertise to initiate and validate new tests that can then be brought into the clinical arena. Our patients should have confidence that the pathology contribution to their care is state-of-the-art. Betty’s Fund provides valuable support for our work.”

Pilot projects

A second endowment created by the Lathem gift will support

collaborative, cross-disciplinary translational research pilot projects through Dartmouth-Hitchcock’s MITRA program (Methodology and Technology Innovation for Translational Research Awards). Pilot studies such as those funded by MITRA are a

critical bridge between promising preliminary results and the development of enough supporting data to allow an investigator to compete for a larger federal research grant. MITRA targets this seed money to innovative projects led by cross-disciplinary teams of junior and established investigators.

Typically, pilot studies are heavily reliant on institutional support and grants. In fact, the initial round of MITRA awards in 2009 was funded by Dartmouth-Hitchcock. The new endowment secures a permanent source of private funding for this critically important program.

“This remarkable gift allows us to capitalize on the strong collaborative spirit that’s a hallmark of Dartmouth-Hitchcock and nurture the talent of our trainees and junior faculty,” says Dartmouth-Hitchcock copresident Nancy Formella. “Ultimately, the impact of this gift will extend far beyond our own patients. We are truly grateful to the Lathems for their generosity.”

Honoring the Bloughs

Barbara Blough and her late husband, Foster, have given almost four decades of service to DMS and DH—from Barbara’s tenure as DMS’s first director of alumni affairs to the couple’s years as DH volunteers. Their dedication was recognized with the 2010 Outstanding Community Ambassador Award. In addition, a DHMC conference room has been named for Barbara Blough.

Thanking our donors

Donors to DH and DMS gathered in September to celebrate their part in advancing medical education, research, patient care, and community health. The 160 attendees at the annual Appreciation Reception heard about innovative cross-disciplinary collaborations in medicine and engineering from Norris Cotton Cancer Center director Mark Israel, M.D., and Keith Paulsen, Ph.D., a professor of engineering.



JON GILBERT FOX



Computational geneticist Jason Moore led a study—titled “The Developing Infant: Mapping the Microbiome in Health and Disease”—that was funded in 2009 by the MITRA program, which the Lathem bequest has now endowed.