

# Stowe & Gullen

*Cobourg's Victoria College played an important part in the Town's mid-history and also in the development of education in Ontario and Canada. We have chosen to tell the story here of two women associated with Victoria College in minor ways, but who played a major part in the Canadian story.*



Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

## Emily Stowe

The year was 1852 and young Emily Howard Jennings, just 21, presented herself for registration at Cobourg's famous Victoria College. **She was refused, for she was a woman.**

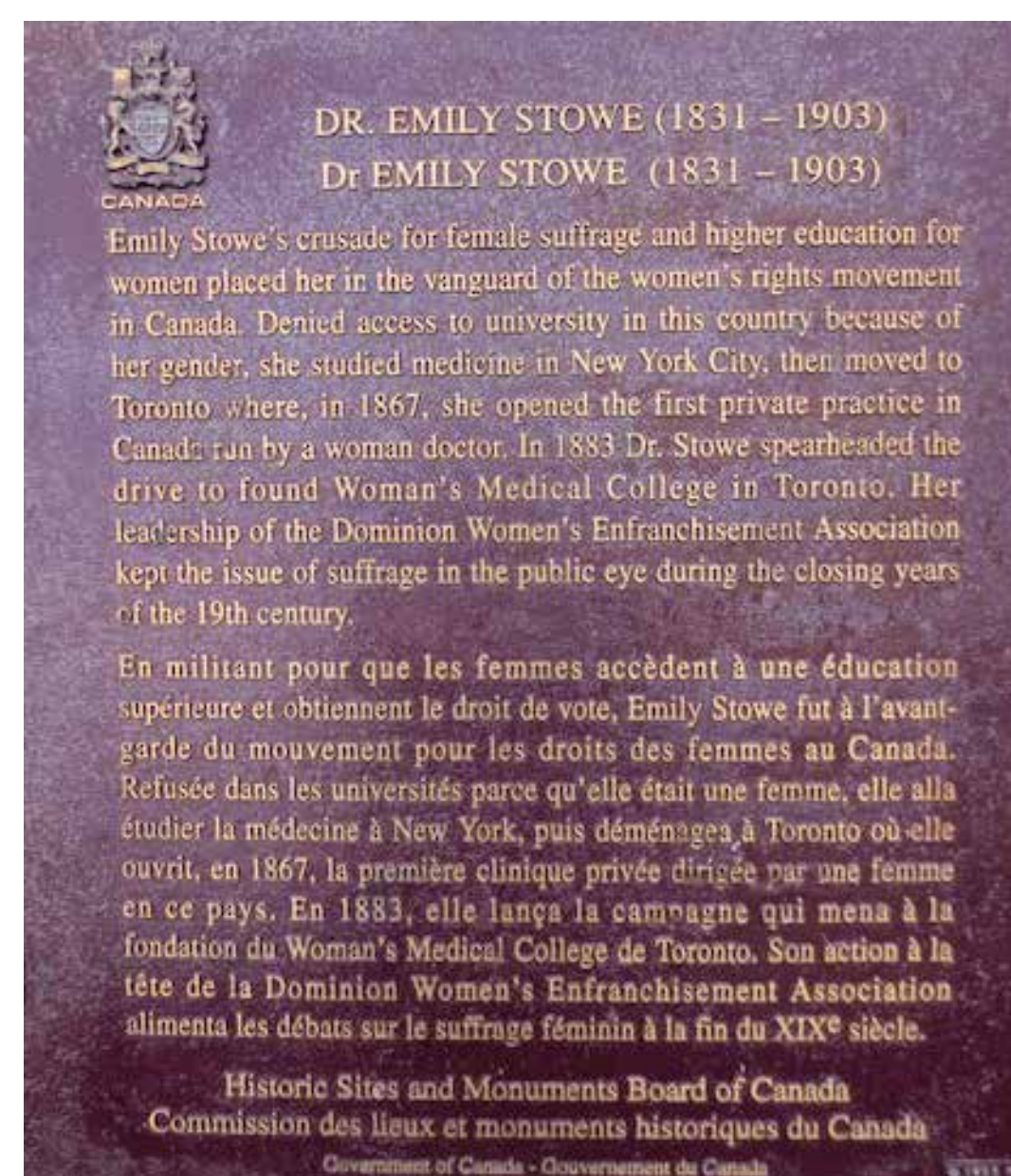
Undeterred, Emily applied to Egerton Ryerson's Normal School of Upper Canada. Here she was accepted, graduated with first class honours, moved to Brantford, and became the **first woman principal** of a public school in Canada West (Ontario).

In 1856 she married John Stowe, and that might well have signalled the end of her professional career. But John developed tuberculosis shortly after the birth of their third child, renewing in Emily an earlier interest in herbal remedies and homeopathic medicine. Emily Stowe left teaching and **decided to become a doctor.**

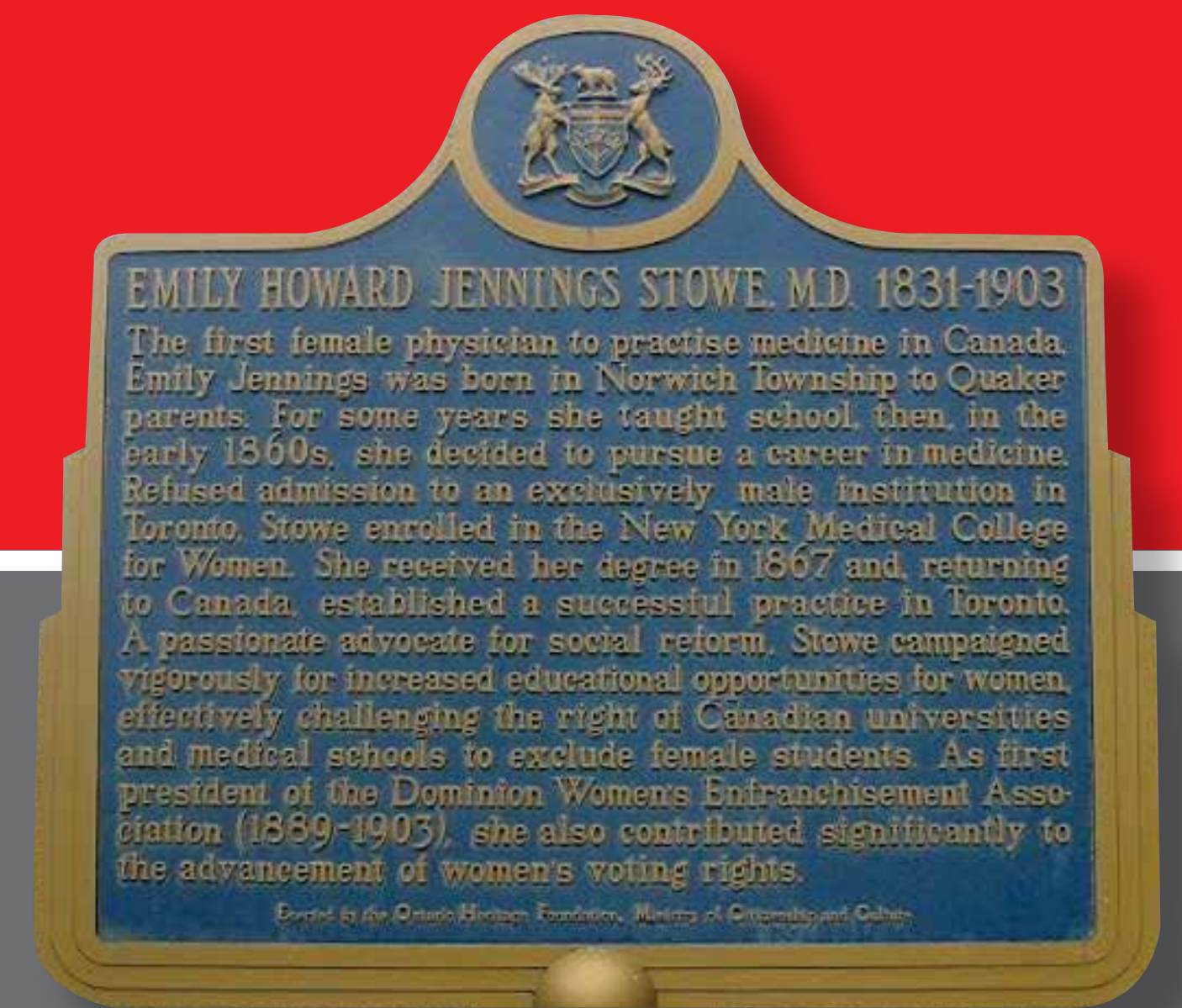
But once again her gender was against her as the Toronto School of Medicine rejected her application for admission. In the words of its Vice President, *"The doors of the University are not open to women and I trust they never will be."*

This time Emily went to the United States and graduated from the homeopathic New York Medical College for Women. She returned to Canada and in **1867 opened a medical practice on Richmond Street in Toronto.** She gained some local prominence through public lectures on women's health and maintained a steady clientele through newspaper advertisements.

In 1870, the president of the Toronto School of Medicine granted special permission to Emily and fellow student Jenny Kidd Trout to attend classes, a requirement for medical practitioners with foreign licenses. Faced with **hostility from both the male faculty and students**, Emily refused to take the oral and written exams and left the school, continuing to practice without a licence.



Stowe Plaque at Women's College Hospital - Photo by Alan L. Brown



Stowe Plaque, Norwich Ontario  
Photo by Alan L. Brown

Finally, on July 16, 1880, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario granted **Emily a licence to practice medicine**, based on her experience with homeopathic medicine since 1850. This licence made her the second female licenced physician in Canada, after Jenny Kidd Trout.

In 1876, Emily founded the Toronto Women's Literary Club, which was later renamed the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association and campaigned for improved working conditions for women. In 1883, the efforts of the Suffrage Association led to the creation of the **Women's Medical College.**

Emily Stowe died in 1903 at the age of 71, fourteen years before Canadian women were granted the right to vote in 1917.