Evans, Alice Catherine

Alice Catherine Evans (1881–1975)

Alice Catherine Evans was born in Neath, Pennsylvania. Since she could not afford college, Evans, like many other early women scientists, began her career as a teacher (during that time one could become a teacher after high school as Evans did). But in 1909, she received her BS in bacteriology from Cornell University and in 1910, her MS from the University of Wisconsin. She never did earn her Ph.D., which caused a delay in the acceptance of her research findings on brucellosis and milk—male scientists and milk manufacturers found it hard to believe a woman without a degree. Evans began her federal civil service career in 1910 with the USDA in Wisconsin. In 1913 she moved east to Washington, D.C., to work in the newly completed laboratories of the USDA Dairy Division. During her time in the division her research in a particular species of bacteria played a pivotal role in the recognition of brucellosis as a significant public health problem and in the acceptance of the need to pasteurize milk. In 1918, wanting to aid in the war effort, Evans inquired of the Hygienic Laboratory whether her services might be of use in connection with the war effort. She learned that a position in bacteriology was open in the Laboratory, and Evans was accepted for the job. She joined a team working to improve the serum treatment for epidemic meningitis. Evans retired in 1945 from the National Institute (later Institutes) of Health. Never one to back down on her beliefs, Evans protested in 1966, at the age of 85, that the disclaimer of communist affiliation on the Medicare application violated her right of free speech. In January 1967, the Department of Justice conceded that this provision was unconstitutional, and it was never enforced. She died in Virginia at the age of 94. In 1963 she wrote her Memoirs.

Alice Catherine Evans National Institutes of Health