

Dr. Gail M. Dack Biography



Dr. Gail M. Dack, Ph.D & M.D. - Class of 1918 - b. 1900 - d. ?

From the EHS Yearbook the Maroon: Band, Decoration Committee for Eager Heart, Committee for Baccalaureate.

He was an internationally recognized authority on food-borne diseases. Gail M. Dack was for many years a professor of bacteriology at the University of Chicago and from 1946 to 1966, when he retired, the director of its Food Research Institute.

Dr. Dack graduated from Elgin High School in 1918 and received his bachelor's degree in 1922 from the University of Illinois, a Ph.D in 1927 from the University of Chicago and an M.D., also from Chicago in 1933.

He has served as a consultant for the Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Public Health Service, the U.S. Army and the National Research Institute, where he also served as chairman.

The theory that food poisoning was due to bacterial toxin was advanced in the early 1880's, but was difficult to prove, because many laboratory animals are not affected by the toxins. The "ptomaine" theory that products of protein break down, such as spoiled meat, were responsible for food poisoning tended to prevail. The assumption led people to believe food that smells, looks and tastes all right was safe.

The Elgin bacteriologist is the author of a definitive text, "Food Poisoning," first published in 1949.

Late in 1929 Dr. Dack and associates at the University of Chicago rediscovered the role of staphylococci in food poisoning, by acting as human guinea pigs in their own experiment. It proved that most cases of food poisoning are due to bacterial toxin. Eleven people had eaten slices of two Christmas cakes and all had become violently ill. What was left of the cakes was brought to the university lab for analysis. Dr. Dack became acutely ill for five hours after he drank a veal broth containing the toxin found in the cake., but the test led to the discrediting of the ptomaine theory.

In the mid 20th Century, the guru of food poisoning was professor Gail M. Dack at the University of Chicago. Dr. Dack was a protégé of Professor E.O. Jordan, who in 1917 published a 107-page book entitled Food Poisoning. Dr. Dack took over the book and published his first version of Food Poisoning in 1943. In 1949 and 1956, subsequent editions appeared in which certain truisms became apparent.

He was named the recipient of the 1956 Babcock-Hart award conferred by the Institute of Food Technologists. He received this award as the result of his outstanding work done in the field of good research and technology.

He was awarded the Pasteur Award in 1957 (established in 1948 to publicly recognize individuals who have made significant and outstanding contributions in the field of microbiology). Eligibility was not limited to members of ISM or to Illinois residents.

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