

THE RX CHRONICLE

HISTORICAL EVENT

JULY 2020

SPECIALS

Alice Augusta Ball – Developer of the Ball Method

The first woman and first African American to earn a master's degree from the University of Hawai'i (known as College of Hawai'i in 1915), Alice Ball developed an injectable form of the active agents in chaulmoogra oil, which was used for 20 years to treat Hansen's disease (aka leprosy).

Born in Seattle in 1892, Ball moved with her family to O'ahu in 1903 to accompany the ailing J. P. Ball Sr., her grandfather and a famous abolitionist and photographer. Her family moved back to Washington shortly after his death in 1904, and she continued her high school and undergraduate studies there, earning a pharmaceutical chemistry degree in 1912 and a bachelor's degree in pharmacy in 1914 from the University of Washington.

Ball's master's thesis, *The Chemical Constituents of the Active Principle of the Ava Root*, is still a part of the holdings in UH Manoa's Hamilton Library. It focused on her research extracting the active ingredients from the ava (kava) root.

Hearing of her chemical skills, a U.S. public health officer asked her to try her technique on chaulmoogra oil, which had been used for centuries to treat Hansen's disease but with unreliable results.

Ball isolated the active agents from the oil, a chemical extraction process that had thwarted researchers for years. It became known as the Ball Method. With the new treatment, no new patients were banished to Hawai'i's Kalaupapa colony between 1919 and 1923, and for the first time some Kalaupapa patients were released.

Unfortunately, Ball did not live to see the results of her research. She returned to Seattle in 1916 after becoming ill and passed away on Dec. 31 at age 24. © 2020 University of Hawai'i

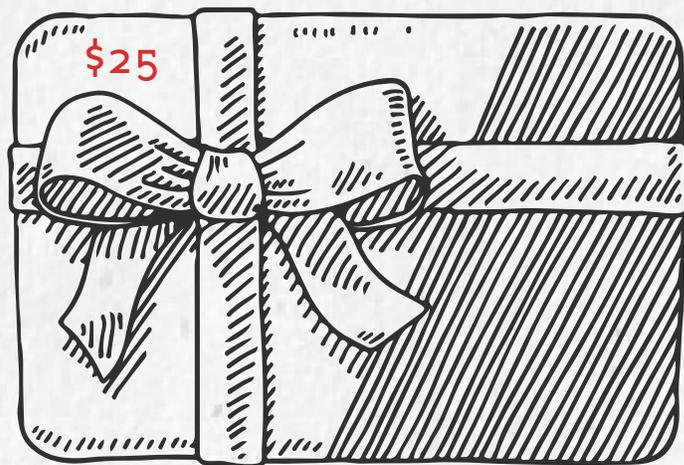


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