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Maria Sklodowska Curie

Lead: Winner of two Nobel prizes, the French physicist Marie Curie, born Maria Sklodowska near Warsaw, Poland, helped advance the understanding of radioactive substances.

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: Learning was a lifetime passion for Marie Curie. Her parents lived and taught in a private school and as a child she demonstrated a remarkable memory in academic matters but hers was not a purely

abstract scholarship. During Maria's childhood, her native Poland could not be found on the maps of eastern Europe. For centuries Polish territory had been parceled out to hostile neighbors and in 1863, due to an abortive revolt, Poland had become little more than a Russian province. The Polish language was suppressed. As a teenager she took part in the secret nationalist "free university" where she taught the Polish language to women workers.

In 1891 Maria went to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. There she led the primitive existence of an independent student, winning first rank in both physics and mathematics. In the Spring of 1894 she met Pierre

Curie. Their marriage and professional partnership led to important scientific discoveries. In 1896 Henri Becquerel described the phenomenon that Marie later termed "radioactivity." Working with Pierre, in the summer of 1898 Marie isolated the substance polonium, which she named for her native land, and later, more importantly, radium. In 1903, with Becquerel, they were awarded the Nobel Prize for physics in honor of their discovery of radioactivity.

Despite the birth of two daughters, she continued her research, and though the accidental death of Pierre in 1906 was a bitter blow, she pursued the scientific work they had begun together and succeeded him at the

Sorbonne. She was the first woman to teach there. In 1911 Marie received a second Nobel Prize, this time in Chemistry, in honor of her isolation of polonium and radium.

In the years following World War I, under her inspiration, the Radium Institute at the University of Paris became an important center of world research on radioactive substances, and Marie directed her own work to the use of these for medical purposes. Even her death was a testimony of sorts to the power of the substances she had unleashed. Marie Curie died in 1934 of leukemia caused in part by her long exposure to radiation.

**At the University of Richmond, this
is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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