One of the true pioneers in the medical illustration world, Ruth Coleman Wakerlin dedicated her working life to raising awareness of the profession, to innovate, and broaden the educational process for students, and to encourage diversity within the AMI. She fought to elevate the standards in medical illustration curricula. A tireless supporter of the Association of Medical Illustrators, she approached our work in a truly multi-disciplinary way. Ruth inspired her colleagues and students, and to encourage diversity within the AMI. She approached the profession in the eyes of institutional administrators.

**Ruth Coleman** was born in 1917 in Chicago, IL. Unlike most of the students at her time, she pursued a major in chemistry, received a BA (major in chemistry, minor in biology) from Wellesley College in Massachusetts in 1939. Ruth completed a teaching apprenticeship at the Shady Hill School in Cambridge, MA, then taught for 2 years at the Park School for Boys in Indianapolis, IN, while simultaneously taking classes at the John Herron School of Art in Indianapolis and the Art Institute of Chicago. With her strong interdisciplinary background in science, art, and teaching, Ruth was offered places as both a student and a medical advisor to the American Heart Association. While raising her children, she balanced the demands of parenthood with professional project duties working as an independent medical illustrator. From 1966 to 1974, Ruth worked as a medical illustrator at the University of Missouri in Columbia, where she expanded her academic credentials to include a master's degree in science, and didactic medical sculpture.

In 1952, she married Dr. George Wakerlin, who became a well-known specialist in internal medicine and a medical advisor to the American Heart Association. While raising her children, she balanced the demands of parenthood with professional project duties working as an independent medical illustrator. From 1966 to 1974, Ruth worked as a medical illustrator at the University of Missouri in Columbia, where she expanded her academic credentials to include a master's degree in science, and didactic medical sculpture.

In 1974, after a nationwide search, Ruth was recruited to the University of California at San Francisco, where she took over as manager of the Medical Illustration and Graphics Service, with the additional provision that the person would fulfill the educational mission to develop a new medical illustration program based on the one started by Ralph Steen some years earlier. Ruth became the 4th director (1974-1988) of the medical illustration program. This program was the first and only academic medical illustration program to be offered on the west coast of the US. In addition to elevating the service unit, Ruth cultivated a small, more informal certificate program into a fully accredited curriculum. As a tenured associate professor in the School of Medicine, Ruth developed the graduate program in medical illustration using the Medical and Biological Illustration Program at the University of Michigan as a model. Ruth remarked, “In my opinion, it was the strongest, most successful program at the time.”

In 1979, Ruth was appointed to develop the medical illustration program at the University of California, San Francisco, and the program ended. Since then, her two passions were her family and her art. She traveled all over the world, continuing her love of watercolor and oil painting, and teaching others around the world.

**Shaping the AMI**

Prior to the official establishment of the emergent AMI in 1945, when Ruth was a medical illustrator at the University of Illinois in Chicago Medical Illustration program, AMI’s first president Tom Jones asked her to develop the guidelines document for the organization. Ruth undertook the task, and remembered: “I was a student with Tom Jones when the founding group met in Chicago in 1945. My memories are still vivid. Before the meeting, he asked me if I knew anything about drafting constitutions for professional organizations. My father was secretary of the Institute of Medicine in Chicago, and he brought home a copy of the Institute’s constitution and bylaws. We sat in a meeting, drafting a document that Tom Jones presented to his fellow medical illustrators at the Chicago meeting. Although they thoroughly debated every clause in the draft, they eventually adopted it as the constitution and bylaws of the Association of Medical Illustrators.”

She served the AMI generously for nearly 50 years in many capacities, among them Board Chair and President.

**To me, diversity among members is important because the wealth and depth of shared experience can benefit all. . . Working with other specialists, we gain the enriched experience that collaboration brings.**

**Post-retirement—always teaching and learning**

Ruth retired from the University of California in 1988, and the program ended. Since then, her two passions were her family and her art. She traveled all over the world, continuing her love of watercolor and oil painting, and teaching others around the world.

The San Francisco Graduate program lasted for a little more than a decade. Although it wasn’t the biggest, or the best endowed, or the most prolific in terms of numbers of students graduated, it was indeed a grand experiment, conceived and guided by a visionary director, who taught us all to be consummate problem-solvers, and to make a real difference in medical education and learning.