

**THE SOUTH END DISPENSARY AND HOSPITAL  
(1893 - ca.1924)**

**Records, 1911 - 1923**

**Charities Collection - CC 5**

1 manuscript container	Processed March 1993 by Richard S. Carroll
5 linear inches	Supervising Archivists:
Accession numbers: 88.011, 88.025	Megan Sniffin-Marinoff and Peter Carini

**ACQUISITION:** The records were donated to the Simmons College Archives by Donald W. Moreland. He was a member of the Advisory Board of the Simmons College School of Social Work and Executive Director of the Family Service Association of Greater Boston, an affiliate. Moreland was also a collector of social welfare books, manuscripts, and pamphlets.

**ACCESS:** Unrestricted.

**COPYRIGHT:** Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be discussed with the College Archivist.

**APPRAISAL NOTE:** Duplicate copies of fundraising appeals were discarded. Replies to the appeals were sampled. All substantive responses were retained in the collection.

**CORPORATE HISTORY:**

The South End Dispensary and Hospital (1893-ca.1924)

The Dispensary was established in 1893 "to help the sick, the poor, and the homeless."<sup>1</sup> Located originally at 53 Dover Street (and later at 2A Milford Street), it provided "continuous medical and surgical care"<sup>2</sup> to residents of the South End of Boston.

The Dispensary apparently issued few annual reports (of extreme brevity). Statements for 1916 and 1917 reported an average of more than 1500 charitable cases annually, with house and office visits averaging 2,000 to 3,000 a year. No statistics were provided on types of patients or method of treatment. Financial figures reported only broad categories of expense at \$2,000 to \$3,000 annually.

The staff consisted of the Superintendent (Dr. Freeman Lowell) and his wife, listed for a period as an officer of the agency, who apparently performed only housekeeping duties.

Care was free, except for patients who could pay \$1.00. Approximately 75% or more of annual income came from gifts, with 25% from patient fees.

## NOTES

1. See Lowell's appeal of December 16, 1918, in Series II (Fundraising Appeals and Materials).
2. See 1918 Annual Statement in Series II.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:**

### Freeman L. Lowell (1871-1924)

A native of West Kennebunk, Maine, Freeman Lamprey Lowell (Harvard College 1894, Harvard Medical School 1900) was Superintendent of the Dispensary from 1906 to his death in 1924. After receiving his medical degree, Dr. Lowell served as a house officer at Cambridge Hospital, and from 1901 to 1905 as bacteriologist to the Somerville Board of Health. Thereafter he practiced briefly in Harwich, returning to Boston (after the death of his first wife) when he took over at the Dispensary.

Dr. Lowell, in fact, was the Dispensary, which he ran at his home on Milford Street. A skilled fundraiser, he wrote brief letters stressing his work with the sick poor. Many leading Boston residents contributed (See partial list under Fundraising Appeals and Materials). His principal fundraising pamphlet, entitled "The Little Doctor Around the Corner," was a Dickensian write-up on the slums of the South End and its needy denizens. In seeking broader support from fellow Harvard alumni, he began adding a postscript extending greetings "to the noble old class of ..." and filling in the appropriate class year.<sup>1</sup> The President of the Harvard Alumni Association wrote to him, asking him to end this confusing salutation, since many alumni assumed he was a classmate.<sup>2</sup>

The Associated Charities and the Boston Chamber of Commerce refused to support him because the Clinic lacked "a responsible board of directors"<sup>3</sup> and issued an "annual report which does not report."<sup>4</sup> The State Department of Health refused to license the Dispensary until 1919, noting earlier that the "and Hospital" was untrue, and the Dispensary had not shown that its operation "will be for the public benefit."<sup>5</sup>

In 1918, Dr. Lowell enrolled in the ROTC. Shortly thereafter, he had a nervous breakdown and developed cardiac problems. He ended up serving as a draft registrar and as Assistant to the Medical Examiner of the local draft board. His obituary notice states that, after several years of poor health, he died February 21, 1924 in a private hospital in Arlington.<sup>6</sup> The last correspondence in his file was dated December 1923. Since he was a one-man band, presumably the Dispensary died with him.

Donald Moreland, a collector of literature on local charities and the donor of these records, states that "I believe this was a phony charity conducted by a man with the right name at the time (Lowell)."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, with no individual patient records and no independent board to supervise the clinic, there is little evidence whether Dr. Lowell did or did not actually operate a full-time dispensary. One classmate who visited him found him in bed at mid-day (rather than seeing patients), but that was apparently due to Dr. Lowell's stated policy of night calls at all hours. A few letters concern what he did for patients at the Dispensary or other hospitals.

If he was indeed operating "a phony charity," his annual income of \$2,000 to \$3000 was no great bonanza, even early in the century. During his tenure, The Bay State Dispensary in the North End was charged with failing to account for thousands of dollars raised, and for sale or misuse of drugs, food and other gifts in kind. The available records do not show any such charge against Lowell.

His correspondence --particularly his "noble old class" trick-- reveals that he was an amiable rogue. Whether he was a fraud cannot be determined.

#### NOTES

1. For a modified version of this salutation, see three letters of December 15, 1915, in Series II.
2. See his letter of January 28, 1913, in Series II.
3. See their letter of March 3, 1910 in Series III. (Applications to Agencies).
4. See the Chamber's Current Affairs of December 24, 1917, The Bureau of Investigation (page 3 column 2) in Series III.
5. See the Department's letter of August 15, 1919, in Series III.
6. The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal 190 (January - June, 1924): 438.
7. Information maintained in the Archives' control files for this collection.

#### **SCOPE AND CONTENT:**

The South Boston Dispensary papers constitute 2.5 linear inches, and contain correspondence of Dr. Freeman Lowell (its Superintendent) with potential donors, his Harvard class, and the media (as well as some medical correspondence). It also contains

samples of his fundraising letters and materials, applications to philanthropic and health agencies, clippings, and a drawing and photo of Dr. Lowell while in ROTC.

The bulk of the collection is found in the correspondence and the applications, and covers the years from 1911 to 1923, or most of the period during which Dr. Lowell was Superintendent.

The collection may be of interest to researchers studying Boston charities in the early years of the 20th century, and particularly the era of small unsupervised neighborhood dispensaries, often staffed by a single physician. As a sidelight, Dr. Lowell's "ingenious" fundraising techniques could be of interest to small agencies.

Some aspects of local interest in this collection are the number of leading Bostonians who supported the Dispensary, the actions of the Associated Charities of Boston and the Chamber of Commerce who refused to support the agency, and Lowell's long struggle to secure licensure by the State Department of Health.

### SERIES OUTLINE

I. Correspondence	
	A. Fundraising correspondence, 1911-1921 B. Harvard class correspondence, 1915-1921 C. Correspondence with the Media, 1912- n.d. D. Medical correspondence, 1913-1920
II. Fundraising appeals and materials, 1913-1920	
III. Applications to Agencies, 1910-1923	
IV. Clipping file, 1913-1919	
V. Drawing and photograph, ca. 1918	

### CONTAINER LIST

BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS
<b>SERIES I: CORRESPONDENCE</b>		
1	1	Fundraising correspondence, 1911-1921, n.d.
	2	Harvard class correspondence, 1915-1921
	3	Correspondence with the Media, 1912-n.d.
	4	Medical correspondence, 1913-1920
	5	<b>SERIES II Fundraising appeals and materials, 1913-1920</b>
	6	<b>SERIES III Applications to Agencies, 1910-1923</b>
	7	<b>SERIES IV Clipping file, 1913-1919</b>
	8	<b>SERIES V Drawing and photograph, ca. 1918</b>

