

THE WIDOWS' SOCIETY IN BOSTON

Records, 1876-1993 (with gaps)

Charities Collection - CC 020

2 boxes	Processed March 1998 by Stephanie Manansala
10 linear inches	Supervising Archivist: Joan Gearin
Accession number: 1998.006	

ACQUISITION: In 1911 the Boston Children's Aid Society gave its entire library to the Simmons College School of Social Work Library. This library included the annual reports of many local and international welfare and charitable organizations. With the passage of time this collection took on historical significance and in 1991 it was transferred to the Simmons College Archives.

As part of donations in 1988 and 1989, Donald Moreland, a local social worker and collector of social work history, gave the Simmons College Archives a large number of annual reports, pamphlets and other materials related to various welfare and charitable organizations. Because neither of these donations is a discrete collection, the materials transferred in 1991 from the School of Social Work Library and related materials donated by Donald Moreland were combined to form the Charities Collection. The Simmons College Archives Charities Collection consists of numerous small collections. Accession numbers for the individual collections are assigned during processing.

ACCESS: Unrestricted.

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

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY:

The Widows' Society in Boston was founded in 1816 by Mehitabel (Mrs. Jonathan) Amory, with a sum of \$850.63, and incorporated on June 12, 1828. The purpose of the Society was to aid "poor, infirm, aged widows and single women of good character".¹ The name of the organization was originally simply "The Widows' Society". It first appeared as "The Widows' Society in Boston" in the 1919 Annual Report. Requirements for residency, age, and race were adopted and revised through the years. It is worth noting that at one time, the members of the Society voted that "persons of color are not candidates for admission to the list of beneficiaries".² It is not clear when this policy was

¹ *The Widows' Society Centennial Report, 1916* (Boston: Thomas Todd Co.) p.36.

² *The Widows' Society Annual Report, 1900* (Boston: Beacon Press) p.15.

officially changed. The Widows' Society in Boston is still an active charitable organization today (March 1998).

From its inception, the members of the Society met each year on the second Wednesday in December to choose a new Board of Managers, which then met once quarterly throughout the next year to conduct business. The Board consisted of three Directresses, a Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, and a committee of Visitors, whose numbers varied from year to year. Each Visitor was assigned a group of beneficiaries to call on and disburse cash to at least twice every three months. The Visitors also submitted names and addresses of potential beneficiaries to the Board for approval at the quarterly meetings. Occasionally, the Society would sell craft items (knitting, needlework, etc.) which the elderly women had made, returning all the money to them.

The Society was funded by memberships, donations, legacies, and other gifts as well as interest income from savings, stocks, and bonds. In the early 1890's an "emergency fund" was established to provide beneficiaries with lump sums of money in times of need. Other organizations which contributed funds to the Society include the Austin Fund and the Society of Bible Readers.³

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:

The majority of the collection consists of annual reports, for the years 1875- 1993 (with gaps); bulk dates are from 1889-1969 (with gaps). Of special note is the "Centennial Report" issued for 1916 in place of the usual annual report for that year; it has been organized chronologically with the rest of the annual reports. Reports from numerous years are missing. It is not clear exactly what happened to the reports for years prior to 1875, but as early as 1916, Secretary Susan M. Loring noted that "the records of the Society between the years 1838 and 1876 are lost".⁴

The collection also includes two specially issued booklets containing the Society's Constitution and by-laws, a letter regarding Society Annual Reports, and a subscription/donation card with matching envelope.

SERIES LISTING:

I.	Annual Reports
II.	Constitutions
III.	Correspondence

SERIES DESCRIPTION:

³ *The Widows' Society Centennial Report, 1916* (Boston: Thomas Todd Co.) p.5.

⁴ *The Widows' Society Centennial Report, 1916* (Boston: Thomas Todd Co.) p.5. Loring is probably referring to the annual reports for the years 1838 through 1874 inclusive, since the annual report for 1875 (which is dated 1876) is present in this collection.

SERIES I: Annual Reports, 1876-1969 (with gaps) and 1987-1993 (with gaps)

The annual reports generally consist of the same information from year to year, some reports being more extensive than others. This information usually includes lists of officers, visitors, Society members, a short address from the secretary, the treasurer's report, lists of Society assets (stocks, bonds, cash, etc.), Society by-laws, and rules for Visitors. In 1916 the Society issued a special Centennial Report which contains all this information plus a breakdown of finances for the previous one hundred years, an address by Reverend William Appleton Lawrence, and complete lists of all officers, visitors, life members, subscribers, and donors since 1816.

SERIES II: Constitutions, 1874 and 1908

These copies of the Society's Constitution were issued as separate booklets in 1874 and 1908. They include the Constitution, Rules, and a copy of the Act of Incorporation of 1828. The 1908 edition also includes a section regarding various Society committees.

SERIES III: Correspondence, 1905

This folder contains a short letter, dated June 27, 1905, to Charles W. Butwell Esq., stating that "Mrs. Loring asks me to send you some reports of the Widows [sic] Society". The signature is unclear, but the note appears to have been written by Thekla Andrew. It is also unclear what association the writer had with the Widows' Society. In the folder as well is a card intended to be returned with a donation; the matching envelope is pre-printed with the address of Mrs. William Caleb Loring of Boston.

CONTAINER LIST:

(* indicates 2 copies)

BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS
		Series I. Annual Reports
1	1	1876, 1884, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1894, 1897, 1899
	2	1900, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906
	3	1907, 1908*, 1909 (5 copies)
	4	1910, 1911*, 1912*, 1913, 1914, 1915*
	5	1916, 1917 (4 copies), 1918, 1919, 1920
	6	1921, 1922*, 1923, 1924*, 1925*
	7	1926*, 1927, 1928*, 1929, 1930, 1931
	8	1932*, 1933, 1934*, 1935*, 1936*, 1937, 1938, 1939*, 1940*
2	1	1941*, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946*, 1947, 1948*, 1949
	2	1950, 1951*, 1952*, 1953*, 1954*, 1955*, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959
	3	1960, 1961, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1969
	4	1987, 1990, 1992, 1993
	5	Series II. Constitutions (1874 and 1909
	6	Series III. Correspondence