



A Brief History of the Rhode Island Medical Society Library Building
1909 – 1912

Sarah Brooke Stevens

1909

392 members; dues \$5.00 per year

House of Delegates, May 19, 1909 at 253 Washington Street, Providence¹

- A Building Committee was appointed by FB Fuller, MD, President
- Dr. Hersey, Chair of the Committee on the Library, reports that the Society's library is rapidly outgrowing space "generously provided" by the Providence Public Library. It will soon be necessary to secure a building for the Society's use. The building must be brick or cement, fireproof, and about \$100,000 will be needed. To aid in securing this sum, it was suggested that each Fellow, when paying his annual dues, give something extra as a special contribution to the Building Fund.

Ninety-eighth Annual Meeting held June 1, 1909 at the Masonic Temple, Providence²

- ❖ Dr. J.C. Rutherford presented an oil painting of William Harvey. This portrait was painted by Dr. Rutherford's father in 1882 from an old print. Harvey was born in 1578 and was physician to James I and court physician to Charles I. He discovered circulation. This portrait hangs in the current offices of RIMS.

1910

384 members; dues \$5.00 per year

Editorial from the Providence Medical Journal, July 1910, "The Proposed Medical Library"

- Notice is received from the officers of the Providence Public Library (PPL) that RIMS library space, 30,000 volumes and one-fifth of the PPL building, is needed for other purposes. RIMS collection will need to move at the end of two years.
- The House of Delegates-appointed committee made the following suggestions:
 - The HOD should appoint a committee consisting of the Building Committee, Treasurer, Librarian, Chair of the Library Committee, and two additional fellows to formulate a plan for providing suitable accommodation for the library in a building to be devoted to the Society's interests and uses.
 - This committee has the power to select and purchase a suitable site.
 - The committee will be given power to delegate sub-committees.
 - The HOD authorizes the Treasurer of RIMS to procure a release from present obligations from the Chase Wiggin Fund so that it may be devoted to the general purposes of the Society.
 - An appeal will be made to all Fellows that in their testamentary bequests the needs of the Society should be considered.
- "Pursuant to this [report]", a suitable site was purchased. "[The] organization of a library calls for a systematic effort on the part of the entire body of practicing physicians...[The] physicians of this city need a meeting place of their own for their medical societies, such as other large cities have provided in their medical libraries. That would be a small source of revenue."

House of Delegates Meeting, May 17, 1910, 253 Washington Street, Providence

- Several meetings were held by the Building Committee; most of the work had been done in conjunction with the Ways and Means Committee. It was resolved that the Building Committee be given approval to select and purchase a suitable site. The resolution passed.

Council Meeting, May 31, 1910, Masonic Temple, Providence

- The Council approved the sum of \$7482.50 to buy a site for the building.

Annual Address, May 31, 1910, by Eugene Kingman, MD, President

- Dr. Kingman put forward two great needs of the Society: a home, and money.
- A home would include a meeting hall and a library, which has outgrown space at PPL. Rent currently paid for use of outside halls and rent that would need to be paid to the Providence Public Library would make a sum sufficient to pay for interest on a mortgage.
- Additional, sufficient means would allow for an audience room, salaried librarian, research, etc. The amount needed would be too large to be raised only from members of RIMS, and an endowment must come chiefly from the public.
- “Is it too much...to foretell that in two years we will celebrate our Centennial in our own building, and that our one hundred and fiftieth anniversary will find us in possession of a well-appointed library and pathological building, with an ample bank account and future before us of great promise?”

Special Meeting of HOD, June 16, 1910, 253 Washington Street, Providence

- Building committee reports that a building site has been purchased on the corner of Hayes and Francis Streets.
- The building fund is insufficient to pay for it.
- It was voted that the trustees of the printing fund be authorized to pay the Treasurer a sum not exceeding \$4000.
- A Council meeting followed the HOD, the \$4000 appropriation was approved.

Editorial from the Providence Medical Journal, September 1910, “A New Home for the Rhode Island Medical Society”

- Dream of having a library and home of our own “seems likely to be realized”.
- The Building Committee has purchased a tract of land of 8,000 square feet. The selection was not an easy task: land in the centre of the city with easy access was prohibitive in price. “It was good fortune to find a location so admirably situated as this.”
- Ample opportunity will be afforded members to see and criticize the plans before they are finally adopted.

Editorial, Providence Medical Journal, November 1910

- ❖ John Hay Library at Brown University completed and occupied.

Committee Report to House of Delegates, November 10, 1910, 253 Washington Street, Providence

- Funding to include transfer of funds from the wills of late members; balance of funds from printing, building and library funds. If necessary the Society authorized the issuance of certain bonds.
- Sub-committee on Plans presented a set of plans designed by Mssrs. Clark, Howe & Homer; reported that the building could be erected at an approximate cost of \$40,000.
- These two reports were accepted and voted to recommend to the HOD.
- Trustees of the Rhode Island Medical Society Building appointed and duties and powers outlined, which included funding, contracting, and constructing the building.
- These trustees shall have full control of the building until completed.
- They shall make a report and an account of all expenditures of money at each quarterly meeting of the HOD and Society.

1911

387 members; dues \$5.00 per year

Editorial from the Providence Medical Journal, March 1911, "The Medical Library"

- It is hoped that Fellows will donate a large proportion of the needed money. When the building is ready to be furnished, perhaps select a "Donation Day" and each Fellow contribute one-half of the day's cash income for this purpose.
- The plan for a permanent home for the Society has been talked of for nearly 50 years. The centennial anniversary in 1912 is the most fitting time for the completion and occupancy of the new Library Building.
- [There will be] "no dome on the Medical Society Building. It will not by position... dominate over the city... But it will dominate over the medical minds of this State. It will be a force in emphasizing medicine as a profession and not as a business. With the present vogue of decrying the doctor, it is timely that such a forcible and dignified demonstration of a united and progressive profession is to be made."

House of Delegates Meeting held May 24, 1911, 253 Washington Street, Providence

- The Trustees of the Rhode Island Medical Society Building reported as follows:
 - Plans were prepared by the architects, Messrs. Clarke, Howe & Homer. By a vote taken May 2, 1911, the Building Committee awarded the contract to the lowest bidder, William Williams, for the sum of \$31,342. The estimated cost of heating, lighting, and architects' fees brings the total cost of the building up to \$36,131.
 - The Trustees had at their disposal, if necessary, funds voted to their use by the Society, about \$15,000. There had been received in pledges to date \$11,760, and there was a probable addition to this of \$3,500, making a total of about \$30,000.
 - It was proposed to proceed with the erection of the building, "which will be fireproofed in every particular, to provide for the library", but at the time not install the steel stack, which would cost an additional \$5,000. If necessary money was not raised by subscriptions before its completion, a mortgage would be placed on the building to cover the deficit.
 - The Trustees said that "support accorded to them by members of the Society who have its interests at heart has been very generous". One hundred twelve members residing [in Providence] have subscribed over \$12,000; few who have been personally seen have declined to give at least a small sum. It is expected that enough encouragement will be received from the remaining 250 men, residing both in Providence and outside the city, to assure building this home for the Society.
 - The corner-stone will be laid on Thursday, June 1, [1911].
 - It was voted to appoint a Committee on the Centenary of the Rhode Island Medical Society. This committee will be made up of: A Committee on Ways and Means; A Committee on Program and Entertainment; and A Committee of Arrangements. The Centenary Committee will be delegated the preparation of plans for the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Society.

The Laying of the Corner-Stone of the Library Building, June 1, 1911

- Dr. Frank L. Day, for the Trustees of the Rhode Island Medical Society Building, presided at the laying of the corner-stone. Here are highlights from his address:
 - “A century ago a wave of desire for increased facilities for medical education and study swept over New England....Rhode Island doctors ...obtained from the Legislature a charter for a Medical Society. There were forty-nine charter members...The first meeting was held in Providence, April 22, 1812.
 - “It is improbable that it was accidental that the founding of this Society followed by one year the establishment of a medical department at Brown University. That department existed from 1811 to 1828 and graduated eighty-seven doctors.
 - “Seven State Medical Societies antedate ours: New Jersey, 1766; Massachusetts, 1781; Delaware, 1789; New Hampshire, 1791; Connecticut, 1792; Maryland, 1799; New York, 1807.
 - “For over 30 years, we and our honored predecessors have talked of [establishing a library]...the first tangible expression...was in 1882, when the late Mrs. T.P. Shepard...contributed \$500, thereby inaugurating a ‘Building Fund.’ In 1887...the charter of the Rhode Island Medical Society was so amended as to allow it to hold real estate up to \$100,000, and since then a building committee has been appointed annually.
- Corner-Stone Exercises
 - “At 5:30 o’clock those who attended the annual meeting and others gathered at the plot of land owned by the Society at the corner of Francis and Hayes Streets, where the foundation of the library is being laid.”
 - In attendance were the Rt. Rev. James DeWolf Perry, Jr.; Governor Pothier; Mayor Henry Fletcher (City of Providence); Mr. H.L. Koopman of the John Hay Library; Dr. Frederick C. Shattuck of Harvard University; Dr. John M. Peters, Superintendent of Rhode Island Hospital.
 - Dr. Peters, chair of the sub-committee on construction, “reported the contents of the box [being laid inside the cornerstone] as follows:
 - First number, Transactions Rhode Island Medical Society
 - Last number, Transactions Rhode Island Medical Society
 - List of Fellows, June 1, 1911, Rhode Island
 - Charter, Constitution, and Bylaws, Rhode Island Medical Society
 - Providence Medical Journal, May 1911
 - Monthly Bulletin for January, 1911, of Rhode Island State Board of Health
 - Reports of Rhode Island Hospital, 1910; St. Joseph’s Hospital, 1910; Newport Hospital, 1910; Memorial Hospital, Pawtucket; Woonsocket Hospital; Butler Hospital, 1910; Providence Lying-In Hospital; roster of Providence City Hospital; Providence Journal, Evening Bulletin, Providence Tribune, Providence News, June 1, 1911; coins of date 1911; program of this meeting.
 - Dr. Day “accompanied the laying of the corner-stone with the following words: I hold it a distinguished privilege to be designated to lay the corner stone of this noble building. May it serve, long and well, the uses of this ancient Society; promoting mutual respect and sympathy among its Fellows; keeping alive the faithful, honored and distinguished dead of many generations; aiding the diligent and intelligent search after true knowledge of all that makes for the good of mankind.”

Annual Address, June 1, 1911, by G. Alder Blumer, MD, "A Plea for the Medical Library"

- Referenced annual address made by Dr. George D. Hersey, in 1900, "The Medical Library as a Factor in Medical Progress" and made remarks about libraries in Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Medical Society's collection, as well as libraries generally.
- Summarized process of approving and financing the New Medical Library Building.

House of Delegates Meeting held November 29, 1911, 253 Washington Street, Providence

- Bylaws were amended regarding duties and make up of the Committee on the Library
- A financial report was presented by the Trustees of the RI Medical Society Library Building. A total subscription list was \$20,950; there are in the Society about 160 Fellows who have not yet contributed to the fund.
- Summary of Financial Statement:
 - \$21,933.00 in receipts, comprised of transferred funds, pledges, interest, societies, and outside sources
 - \$50,864.20 total cost of the building, including contractor, builder, architects, surveyor, land, heating and wiring, stack, furnishing, legal services, and title guarantee company
 - \$30,491.00 balance due; \$15,972 will be realized by cash on hand and pledges
 - \$14,519.00 deficit to be realized
 - In the opinion of the Trustees, \$10,000 can be raised by a mortgage, but the balance of \$4,500 must be raised before June 1912.
- The Building Committee "urge[s]...most earnestly the importance of an immediate subscription to the fund [so] that when the building is completed every Fellow of this society may feel a personal ownership in it and realize that he helped to make possible a structure which will be for all time a memorial to the Medical Profession and an object of civic interest to every Rhode Islander."

1912

426 members; dues \$5.00 per year

Editorial from the Providence Medical Journal, March 1912, "The Medical Library Building"

- List of some 214 individual subscribers to the Building Fund

Providence Medical Journal, May 1912, "Announcement and Program of the One Hundredth Annual Meeting of the Rhode Island Medical Society"

- The Centennial celebration of the Rhode Island Medical Society will be held in Providence on Wednesday and Thursday, June 12 and 13, 1912 with the following program of exercises:
Wednesday June 12
 - Outing at Rocky Point. Steamer Squantum will leave pier at 10:00 am
 - 11:00 am – Entertainment will include ball game, wrestling match, round robin, motion pictures
 - 1:00 pm – Rhode Island Shore Dinner
 - 3:00 pm – Siesta
 - 3:30 pm – Depart Rocky Point, arriving in Providence at 4:30 pm
 - 8:30 pm – Formal opening of the new Rhode island Medical Society Library and reception to invited guests. Music and refreshments*Thursday, June 13*
 - Automobile tour of Providence and vicinity for delegates and invited guests, luncheon at Wannamoisett CC
 - 3:00 pm – Annual Meeting of the Rhode Island Medical Society

- 3:30 pm – Address, Dr. Abram Jacobi, President AMA
- 4:15 pm – Annual Address, President FT Rogers
- 4:45 pm – Delivery of the keys of the new Rhode Island Medical Society Library to the Society
- 5:00 pm – Induction of new officers
- Following adjournment the building will be open to the general public for inspection

Quarterly Meeting, March 7, 1912, Rhode Island Hall, Brown University

- The President announced “elaborate preparation for the centennial celebration” (see program announcement, above)
- “On Wednesday evening, the Library will be opened by a reception. This affair will be left to a sub-committee, including a number of ladies...it will be one of the features of the celebration...the building will not be opened to the public at large until the following morning.”
- On Thursday, there will be a banquet at the Eloise. “As an innovation, the ladies will be invited to this banquet.”
- “Full details...will be mailed to each member...[it only needs] the cooperation of all the members and the public to insure the success of what will be a unique function in medical and State history.”

Centennial celebration, June 12 and 13, 1912

- See program announcement, above, for events and venues
- State medical societies represented were Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Connecticut
- More than 400 persons, who included in that number prominent State and city officials, officers of Brown University, leaders in many charitable organizations, were present at the informal reception when the Society opened its new library on Francis Street.

Annual Meeting, June 13, 1912

- The one hundred and first annual meeting and the first session held in the new building was held on Thursday, June 13, 1912, in Assembly Hall, Rhode Island Medical Society Library Building at 3:30 pm. Dr. FT Rogers, President, presided.
- A letter of congratulations from the Connecticut Medical Society was read. Dr. Abraham Jacobi delivered the centennial oration, and Dr. Rogers delivered the annual address.
- Dr. Rogers delivered the keys and turned the new building over to the Society, through the incoming President, Dr. Alexander Briggs. Among his remarks:
 - “We begin a new century of medical life with the dreams of our forefathers...realized in this new and magnificent edifice devoted to the medical profession of this State.
 - “I ask pardon for the members of this Society for the annoying factor that I have introduced...by my insistent begging for funds...Someone had to do it, and the President during the centennial year was the goat.
 - Dr. Rogers, on behalf of the Trustees, gave thanks to the Society, Mrs. Gustav Radeke, who assisted in financing the stack, and the Trustees of RI Hospital, who furnished the auditorium; many other acknowledgments were made.
 - Dr. Rogers presented the keys and the trowel which laid the cornerstone to the Chair of the Building Committee, Dr. Peters. Dr. Peters gave remarks on behalf of the Building Committee, recognizing the work of Dr. Rogers and the Treasurer, Dr. Risk. The acceptance of the office of President and of the building by Dr. Briggs closed the meeting.

A Note on Locations:

¹ 253 Washington Street was located opposite and a bit west of the First Universalist Church, which was built in 1872. It does not exist today.

² References to the “Masonic Temple” do *not* refer to the building that is adjacent to 106 Francis Street. According to Mr. Wyman Hallstrom, III, District Deputy, Grand Master-Metro District, there were three meeting places:

“At least two of these buildings, and maybe all three, are still in existence and are in Downtown. The first that I know of was the meeting place of St John’s Lodge #1 in Providence in the colonial days. It is the old Market Building on South Main St, that is now owned by RISD as far as I know. I believe the market was downstairs and the upper floor was added to accommodate the lodge.

”The second, more recent meeting place was in use up until at least the 60’s, and that was 128 Dorrance St. It is a large brick building on the corner of Dorrance and Pine St.

“The third building, only just brought to my attention via the Grand Secretary, is a building on Benefit Street. (No specific information at this time.)”

Source Materials: Providence Medical Journal, Vols. 10, 11, 12, 13 (1909 – 1912)