



## BOSTON MEDICAL *Library*

Although Harvard University, the oldest institution of higher education in the United States, was established in 1636, it was not until 1782 that the Harvard Medical School (HMS) was born. By the turn of the century, Boston was becoming one of the leading centers of medical education and research in the United States. The Massachusetts Medical Society, the oldest continuously operating medical society in the United States, was incorporated in 1781 and has been dedicated to the advancement of medicine and the learning of physicians.

Dr. John Collins Warren, son of Dr. John Warren who was instrumental in HMS' creation and was one of its initial three faculty members, and Dr. James Jackson along with others incorporated the first Boston Medical Library (BML) in 1805 to facilitate Boston physicians' (numbering around 70) learning. In 1811, they helped charter the Massachusetts General Hospital and also established the parent of *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM), the longest continuously published medical journal in the US. The BML has, since 1901, housed the editorial offices of this foremost journal and that of the leading orthopedic journal, the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, to facilitate access to the BML's rich contemporary and historic collections. To this day, the NEJM is housed at the Countway Library and donates its journals and books it receives to the BML. By 1810, HMS moved across the Charles River to Boston and in 1816 authorized the creation of its own library- the Harvard Medical Library (HML). It used the Boylston Library prior to that.

By July 1816, the BML—after just over a decade in existence—was facing inadequate funding, staffing and space at Amos Smith's apothecary shop. The collection held over 500 titles and was some 2,000 volumes in size. Harvard's new building on Mason Street had room for a library of 3,000 volumes. Union of the two seemed like an ideal arrangement. An agreement to administer the two libraries in concert was formalized in 1819, but it was dissolved soon. Ironically, 150 years later, the BML would also join forces with HML to form the largest academic biomedical library in the country.

Boston Medical Library partnered then with the Boston Athenaeum, one of the oldest and most distinguished independent libraries and cultural institutions in the United States, founded in 1807. On May 3, 1826, the Trustees of the Boston Medical Library entered into an agreement to add their holdings to the Athenaeum's. The BML collection filled some seventy shelves in the Pearl Street building. Financial records of the Athenaeum indicate additional funds were contributed and books and journals purchased sporadically and bound out of the Medical Library's account until 1843.

Over the course of the ensuing years, as the move toward scientific medicine promoted an explosive growth of medical literature, physicians perceived a need for a separate library to serve the Boston community. In 1875, Dr. James Read Chadwick formally organized a new Boston Medical Library to collect books, pamphlets, and medical



periodicals and make this material accessible to the practicing physician. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes served as the Library's first president and was one of its foremost advocates. Through the personal efforts of Dr. Chadwick, the BML's collection grew through fund raising and acquisitions but also and more importantly through active targeted solicitations and donations which continue to date. The donations include precious books, ephemera, paintings and other works of art and collectibles- making the BML collections not only a contemporary and historic library but also a veritable museum. In 1896, the Trustees of the Boston Athenaeum discontinued their medical department and deposited these books with the Boston Medical Library. Among these were the surviving books of the first Boston Medical Library. In 1905, the Boston Public Library (BPL), founded in 1848, by an act of the Great and General Court of Massachusetts and the first large free municipal library in the United States deposited its extensive medical collection into the BML. In 1947, the BML became the Library for the Massachusetts Medical Society and also archives its rich records. In 1966, the Cambridge Public Library transferred its medical collection to the BML.

Today, the Boston Medical Library is a physicians' not-for-profit membership organization incorporated "to be a Library for the dissemination of medical knowledge, the promotion of medical education and scholarship, and the preservation and celebration of medical history, and thereby to advance the quality of health and healthcare of the people." It serves as a resource for the medical school faculties and students of Harvard Medical School, Boston University Medical School, Tufts University School of Medicine, the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The BML continues its unique role of serving the learning needs of the practicing physician and endeavors to find the best way to serve these in the ever changing environment. Besides its large 'museum' collection, the BML printed material consists of over 135,500 book volumes of rare books, 35,000 BML book volumes on the 3rd floor, 85,000 BML book volumes at the depository, 120,000 BML journal volumes on L2, and 36,000 BML journal volumes on L1. The Countway Fellowships provided by the Boston Medical Library encourages scholarship using the rich collection.



In order to avail of economies by eliminating duplication of material and services, enrich the overall collection and obviate the need for HML users having to go to the BML at the Fenway for their material, Harvard University and the BML entered into a formal agreement in 1960 to combine the HML and BML's staff, services, and collections into one modern biomedical library facility. A 1958 gift by Miss Sanda Countway enabled the construction of a new library in memory of her brother, Francis A. Countway, the former president of Lever Brothers, Inc. to house the combined collection. The Countway Library opened in 1965 and ranks as one of the largest medical libraries in the world. The Library's Center for the History of Medicine houses one of the world's premier collections in the history of medicine. The alliance of HML, a premier academic medical library, with BML, a prestigious free standing medical library for the practicing physician, provides unrivalled partnership for pursuit of excellence and innovation in library service, research, outreach and leadership. The 21<sup>st</sup> century's explosions in medical technology and knowledge and impending revolutions in learning, particularly adult life-long learning of physicians and other health care professionals along with the burgeoning medical knowledge needs of the entire spectrum from the faculty, student, the researcher and the practicing physician to the public, the patient and all disciplines involved in health care and its delivery poses challenges and presents opportunities which the combined partnership of the Countway Library embraces.

## **COLLECTIONS**

We find that many of the answers to today's questions in clinical medicine can be found in the experiences of the past, whether a 17th century description of anorexia nervosa or 20th century data concerning the use of penicillin to control rheumatic fever. The Boston Medical Library's collection of ancient and rare medical literature allows one an unrivaled opportunity to visit medicine's past and present. The chance to locate and examine under one roof a collection of medical literature that ranges from the Middle Ages to the age of space exploration is equaled by few medical libraries in the world.



Thanks to the stewardship of James Reed Chadwick, the physician responsible for the revival of the BML in the 1870's, and succeeding librarians, the Library



now contains an outstanding collection of portraits of famous Massachusetts physicians, including works by Gilbert Stuart, Benjamin Greenleaf, Rembrandt Peale, and other notable American artists. The renowned BML painting by Robert C. Hinckley of the first use of ether anesthesia at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1846 adorns the Countway's main rotunda. The Library's periodical collection, now generally acknowledged as one of the best and most complete in the world, was also created during Chadwick's

tenure and contains medical titles ranging from the earliest 17th century periodicals to issues newly off the press. The BML's first rare book collection was a collection on the subject of placenta previa donated in 1875 by William Read, a Boston physician. It became the nucleus of the Library's significant collection on obstetrics, one of the most extensive in the world. In 1888 the Library received Dr. Holmes' collection of 1,200 volumes, including many rare, ancient, and valuable works in anatomy.

One of the most remarkable of the Library's collection is its holdings of incunabula, the largest collection of rare 15th century medical printings in any medical library in the world. The Library's Solomon M. Hyams Collection of Hebrew Medical Literature, a collection of medical Judaica endowed in 1930, allowed the Boston Medical Library to acquire many early Hebrew manuscripts and books from Europe during the rise of Nazism, when many of them would have otherwise perished. The Boston Medical Library now preserves 5 percent of all pre-1600 Hebrew manuscripts in America, as well as a fine collection of books and incunabula written by Jewish physicians or concerning Jewish medicine.



As one of the great treasure houses of the world for old, rare, and historical medical literature, the Boston Medical Library contains large and significant collections of books, and frequently, manuscripts on almost every medical specialty. The Library's holdings are especially rich in:

- Anatomy, surgery (including an outstanding collection of anatomical atlases and visual works), artistic anatomy (anatomical texts and atlases for the use of artists)
- Plastic surgery, physiology, chemistry, anesthesia, radiology, obstetrics and gynecology, neurology and psychiatry
- Herbals and medical botany, as well as pharmacy and materia medica
- Dentistry, and
- 15th - 19th century European books, English medical literature of all ages, and medical books issued in America between 1668 and 1870.



The library's holdings of early English medical literature caused a recent researcher from England to exclaim, "You have all of the English medical titles I haven't been able to find in England. Letting a scholar loose in your library is like letting a child loose in a candy store with a thousand dollar bill!"

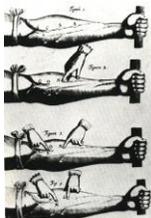
The Boston Medical Library also houses:

- One of the largest collections of medically related manuscripts in America used by scholars worldwide
- The Storer Collection of Medical Numismatics, the world's largest assemblage of medical coins, medals, and similar artifacts
- A choice collection of early instruments and other medical artifacts
- A significant collection of medical portraits and iconography, including approximately 80,000 portraits, photographs and prints of physicians and medical scientists of all ages, plus medical scenes, antique medical prints, and medical caricatures and satires.



THE MEDICAL REPOSITORY published by Samuel Latham Mitchell in 1797 is considered to be the first periodical in the United States with medicine as its central theme. It provided the American physician with the first regular publication of medical news.

A chloroform inhaler illustrated in John Snow's ON CHLOROFORM AND OTHER ANAESTHETICS (1858). Snow, the first specialist in anaesthesiology, delivered Queen Victoria of two children with the aid of chloroform in 1853 and 1857.



This image shows the valves in the veins of the arm as depicted in William Harvey's DE MOTU CORDIS (1628). Harvey pointed the way to the reform of physiology and medicine by describing the functions of the heart and blood vessels.

Hippocrates, who flourished during the 4th century BC, is shown on a bronze medal in the Storer collection. Hippocrates is credited with bringing the concepts of scientific spirit and ethical ideals to Greek medicine and this to Western medicine. Also depicted on this coin is the staff of Aesculapius, a rod entwined by a snake. the staff frequently appeared in ancient representations of Aesculapius, the god of medicine. It is still considered the symbol of medicine and is currently used as the official emblem of the American Medical Association.

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