

**MEDICAL CENTER ARCHIVES  
OF  
NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN/WEILL CORNELL**

**1300 York Avenue # 34  
New York, NY 10065**

**Finding Aid To  
THE RECORDS OF THE HOUSE OF RELIEF,  
NEW YORK HOSPITAL**

**Dates of Records:  
1875-1919**

**129.5 Linear Inches  
(10 Boxes)**

**Finding Aid Prepared By:  
Christel Haesicke  
Intern  
November 2012**

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## PROVENANCE:

There is little information regarding the provenance of this collection. The records most likely came from various administrative offices in the New York Hospital. The two copies of *Scientific American* (December 22, 1894) were donated by Neal Flomenbaum, M.D. in November 2011.

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## ADMINISTRATIVE/BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

The House of Relief served as an emergency hospital in lower Manhattan from 1875-1919, operated and managed by the New York Hospital Board of Governors. Its mission was to be accessible to the poor, affording them “gratuitous treatment of cases resulting from accident or acute and sudden illness.” Several events led up to its founding.

When the first New York Hospital site closed in 1870, its Board of Governors considered a number of sites for building a new hospital. They also discussed establishing an interim facility, a “House of Relief,” for acute and emergency cases. Following the closing of the Park Hospital in 1875, the densely populated lower part of Manhattan was without provision for accident and acute care patients.

In 1875 the New York Hospital Board of Governors was granted permission to lease a vacated police station, located at 160 Chambers Street. Possession of the building was taken on July 1, 1875, and the premises were quickly converted into a hospital and ambulance station. Alterations included the installation of hot water pipes, an elevator, and the addition of a kitchen on the top floor. Beds were added on the second to fifth floors to accommodate up to twenty-six patients, and a horse-drawn ambulance was acquired. The hospital opened for patients on July 5, 1875.

The New York Hospital Board of Governors appointed medical staff, who worked without compensation. Dr. Gurdon Buck served as Chief Surgeon until 1876, when the Board of Governors appointed Dr. William T. Bull as Attending Surgeon.

During Dr. Bull’s years at the House of Relief, an average of 150 patients was treated daily, many of whom required surgical intervention. In 1877 the outpatient department was expanded. Many of the minor surgeries were subsequently performed in the Dispensary. Upon Dr. Bull’s resignation in 1888, the Board appointed Dr. Lewis A. Stimson, whose staff included Assistant Surgeon Dr. Charles T. Parker and in 1893, Assistant Physician Lewis A. Conner. Dr. Conner, an experienced pathologist, appealed to the Board for a microscope and laboratory, resulting in a state-of-the-art clinical and bacteriological laboratory at the House of Relief.

In 1891 the Board of Governors formed a Special Committee, which included Hermann H. Cammann, that was authorized to purchase a site on which a new hospital was to be built. In 1892 property was bought at 67-69 Hudson Street, and the architectural firm J.

C. Cady & Co. was selected to design the building. The transfer of patients from the House of Relief on Chambers Street to Hudson Street took place on November 1, 1894, and the building was completed on March 5, 1895. The Chambers Street building was returned to New York City, after which it served as a fire station.

The New York Hospital Board of Governors wanted the new House of Relief to be a "model hospital for emergency cases," having three distinct functions. It was to provide emergency treatment for accident and sunstroke cases, dispense medicines (free of charge to a great extent), and to provide treatment for patients who could not be sent away to their homes or to other hospitals.

The new hospital site was considered ideal because it had streets on three sides (Hudson, Jay, and Staple) affording "free circulation of air." Dr. Stimson personally designed the arrangements of the surgical rooms. Antisepsis was a primary consideration throughout.

The building was five stories high. A second horse-drawn ambulance was acquired. The ambulance stable was in the basement. Special features of the hospital included isolation rooms, a sunstroke ward (with rolling baths and an electric lift) and an open-air garden on the roof. The hospital had in-patient facilities for thirty-five people.

The ambulance stable in the basement proved to be unfortunate because its emanating odors were "frequently distributed through the house." In 1907 construction of an annex, the "Laundry and Stable Building," began. It was located at the corner of Staple and Jay Streets, connected to the hospital by a second-story pedestrian bridge which contained pipes for steam and hot water. The annex was completed by 1908.

The open-air garden on the roof was converted to a ward for sunstroke victims and opened on December 13, 1911. It had a roof with skylights, and sides that closed in bad weather. The open-air ward accommodated ten patients, and had linen, pantry, kitchenette, and toilet facilities.

The House of Relief flourished under the direction and operation of Drs. Bull and Stimson. Other distinguished physicians included Lewis A. Conner, William S. Halsted, Charles T. Parker, and Robert F. Weir.

In 1918, the House of Relief was given to the U.S. Navy for hospitalizing their personnel. The dispensary and ambulance service were discontinued and the wards closed to civilians. The House of Relief was permanently closed on May 1, 1919, and the property was sold to the U.S. government.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Berntsen, Carl A. Jr., MD (1997). *A History of Medical Care in New York City: The Principal Founders of Cornell University Medical College*. Unpublished.

Flomenbaum, Neal, MD (October 2011). Everything Old is New Again. *EMERGENCY MEDICINE: The Practice Journal for Emergency Physicians*, p. 5.

Larrabee, Eric (1971). *The Benevolent and Necessary Institution*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc.

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## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:

This collection is divided into three series: Historical (1875-1919), Administrative (1875-1919), and Patient Records (1895-1919).

### **Series I: Historical, 1875-1919 (Boxes 1-2)**

This series tells a great deal about the history of House of Relief, portraying a vivid picture of its operation. It contains scholarly articles, anecdotal reports, cartoons and caricatures.

The series includes a scrapbook of clippings from local newspapers relating to both House of Relief facilities (Chambers Street and Hudson Street). The folders are arranged by subject and then chronologically. In addition, an issue of the *Scientific American* features an in-depth cover story about the opening of the House of Relief on Hudson Street, that includes eight engravings showing different areas.

### **Series II: Administrative, 1875-1919 (Boxes 3-4)**

This series contains records pertaining to the administration and management of the House of Relief under the charge of New York Hospital's Board of Governors. Regulations, decisions, and activities are documented in the minutes of various committees, arranged in chronological order.

Minutes of the Board of Governors House of Relief Visiting Committee meetings are of particular interest. This committee regularly observed and recorded the hospital's condition and operation on a professional level, and reports included patient statistics in the "House Surgeon's Weekly Report." Volume I records that a committee of six governors was placed in charge of all aspects of operation of the House of Relief, and documents the change in name from "House of Relief Committee" to "Visiting Committee" on August 9, 1876. Volume II includes recommendations to replace the House of Relief on Chambers Street with a new building.

In addition, records relating to plans for and construction of the new House of Relief on Hudson Street, as well as for the annex, are included, arranged in chronological order and by committee. They include costs associated therewith, records relating to administration, and payroll statistics for personnel employed.

Specifications prepared by the architectural firm J. C. Cady & Co. for the construction of the Hudson Street building consist of written descriptions and charts (no drawings) relating to all aspects of construction - such as carpentry, masonry, and wiring.

Records relating to the construction of the annex of the House of Relief, the "Laundry & Stable Building", consist mainly of communication of the Chairman of the Building Committee, Hermann H. Cammann, with general contractors Robertson & Potter and Geo. Vassar's Son & Co., Inc. They include correspondence, estimates, modifications, and revisions.

### **Series III: Patient Records, 1895-1919 (Boxes 5-10)**

This series consists entirely of patient information. Access is protected under the HIPAA Privacy Rule.

The Autopsy Books contain pathological findings. The Records of Admissions and Discharges include the following for each patient: name; address; date and time of admission; age; birthplace; religion; time in the city and in the U.S.; occupation; manner received; where assigned; whether cost/fee is free, paid by the patient, or the city; diagnosis; result; date of discharge; and remarks.

The Autopsy Books and the Records of Admissions and Discharges are each arranged by and contain entries in chronological order.

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### **ACCESS RESTRICTIONS:**

This collection is open to researchers. Records that contain patient information are protected under the federal HIPAA Privacy Rule. For access to these records, researchers must complete the form ["Research Access to Protected Health Information."](#)

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### **PREFERRED CITATION:**

Item Name or Identification, Date; Box #, Folder #; Records of the House of Relief, New York Hospital, 1875-1919 (Medical Center Archives of NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell, New York, NY).

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**RELATED MATERIAL:**

New York Hospital, Board of Governors, Committee on Site for the House of Relief and Temporary Accommodation of the Hospital: Minutes (pages 17-31), 1872-1875. This volume is bound and shelved with minutes of other committees of the Board of Governors.

There is additional information in the New York Hospital, Board of Governors records.

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**BOX AND FOLDER LIST:**
**Box 1: Series I, Historical, 1875-1919**

<b>Folder:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
1	Scrapbook : House of Relief, Chambers Street, 1875-1886
2	Scrapbook : The Ambulance Service, circa 1883-1896
3	Scrapbook : House of Relief, Chambers Street, Cartoon, January 28, 1892
4	Scrapbook: House of Relief, Chambers Street, Article, September 23, 1894
5-12	Scrapbook : Newspaper clippings, circa 1882-1895
13	Scrapbook : Newspaper clippings, undated
14	Scrapbook : House of Relief, Hudson Street, Opening, 1894
15	Scrapbook : Article: House of Relief, Hudson Street, Sunstroke Treatment, 1896, 1903
16	Scrapbook: House of Relief, Hudson Street, "Casey and the Ambulance Doc," Article with Cartoon, November 15, 1896
17-18	Scrapbook: Newspaper clippings, 1896-1919
19-20	Scrapbook: Newspaper clippings, undated

**Box 2: Series I, Historical, 1875-1919**

<b>Folder:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
1	<i>Scientific American</i> , 71(25), December 22, 1894
2	<i>Scientific American</i> , 71(25), December 22, 1894, Copy 2

**Box 3: Series II, Administrative, 1875-1919**

<b>Volume:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
1	New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Visiting Committee: Minutes, Volume I, 1875-1878

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| 2 | New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Visiting Committee: Minutes, Volume II, 1878-1881  |
| 3 | New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Visiting Committee: Minutes, Volume III, 1881-1883 |
| 4 | New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Visiting Committee: Minutes, Volume IV, 1883-1886  |
| 5 | New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Visiting Committee: Minutes, Volume V, 1886-1888   |

**Box 4: Series II, Administrative, 1875-1919**

- | <b>Folder:</b> | <b>Description:</b>   |
|----------------|---|
| 1              | Specifications for the House of Relief: Corner of Hudson and Jay Streets, New York, circa 1890  |
| 2              | New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Building Committee: Minutes, 1891-1895   |
| 3              | New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Building Committee: Correspondence & Estimates Relative to the Construction of the Annex, 1905-1907, undated |
| 4              | New York Hospital, Board of Governors, House of Relief Inspecting Committee: Minutes, 1896-1910   |
| 5              | House of Relief Payroll Ledger, 1897-1919   |

**Boxes 5-8: Series III, Patient Records, 1895-1919 (Restricted)**

- | <b>Volume:</b> | <b>Description:</b>  |
|----------------|--|
| 1              | New York Hospital, House of Relief Autopsy Book, Volume I, 1895-1900   |
| 2              | New York Hospital, House of Relief Autopsy Book, Volume II, 1900-1903  |
| 3              | New York Hospital, House of Relief Autopsy Book, Volume III, 1903-1905 |
| 4              | New York Hospital, House of Relief Autopsy Book, Volume IV, 1906       |

**Boxes 9-10: Series III, Patient Records, 1895-1919 (Restricted)**

- | <b>Volume:</b> | <b>Description:</b>   |
|----------------|---|
| 1              | New York Hospital, House of Relief: Record of Admissions and Discharges, Volume I, 1915-1916  |
| 2              | New York Hospital, House of Relief: Record of Admissions and Discharges, Volume II, 1916-1919 |