

= Boston Society for Medical Improvement =

The Boston Society for Medical Improvement was an elite medical society based in Boston , Massachusetts . It was established in 1828 for the purposes of " the cultivation of confidence and good feeling between members of the profession ; the eliciting and imparting of information upon the different branches of medical science ; and the establishment of a Museum and Library of Pathological Anatomy " and continued to hold regular meetings until at least 1917 .

= = Founding and organization = =

The Society was established February 19 , 1828 by John P. Spooner . By @-@ laws were established at a founding meeting of eleven members , and the first regular meeting was held on March 10 . Within a year the Society had grown to 25 members .

Meetings were held on the second and fourth Mondays of each month , originally in Spooner 's home . Usually a member 's reading of a paper was followed by discussion of recent cases of either special interest or on which the attending physician wished the opinion of his colleagues . There were frequent presentations of remarkable tissues and organs obtained during post @-@ mortems , or unusual specimens found in nature , those of particular interest being added to the " Cabinet " of the Society .

The Society 's original officers were a committee of four and a secretary , who made up the " Prudential Committee " , as well as a librarian and a cabinet keeper . These offices were filled once a year by vote at the first meeting in January . Members were admitted twice a year , in April and October , with only practicing physicians from Boston being eligible .

= = History = =

During its first year the Society 's Anatomical Cabinet was established , and several members collaborated to combine the New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery and the Boston Medical Intelligencer into the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal ( now the New England Journal of Medicine ) . The Society 's expenses in the first year were \$ 7 @. @ 50 .

In 1830 , after resolving to publish their transactions and to have a standing committee , the Society moved to a room on Washington Street , rented for an annual fee of \$ 25 . In 1833 The Medical Magazine published a piece praising the Society and encouraging the formation of similar organizations .

The Society limited its membership to Boston 's medical elite . In 1835 a number ineligible physicians ( mostly younger , less established members of the profession ) formed a competing organization , the Boston Society for Medical Observation . By 1838 , when the Society was incorporated , membership had grown to 35 , with approximately 25 attending any given meeting . Around 1840 the Society relocated once again , to Tremont Row . Until 1840 the Society often held anniversary celebrations ( frequently including the presentation of an original poem by member Oliver Wendell Holmes ) but after that date they became increasingly rare .

Sometime during the summer of 1842 J.B.S. Jackson " asked the opinion of the Society as to the contagion of puerperal fever and the probability of physicians communicating it from one patient to another " following the death of a physician who had treated an infected woman , and the subsequent infection of the patients he had treated in the interim . This piqued the interest of Holmes , who , after a period of research , presented his essay , " The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever " , to the Society on February 13 , 1843 ; it was later published at the Society 's request in the April issue of the New England Quarterly Journal of Medicine and Surgery .

On November 10 , 1849 , Henry Jacob Bigelow presented Phineas Gage to the Society , between the cases of a stalagmite " remarkable for its singular resemblance to a petrified penis " and a child cured of a swollen ankle by a Dr. Strong .

By 1853 , the number of members had grown to 60 . The Society 's medical collections were donated to the Warren Anatomical Museum around 1870 , while its library was absorbed into the

Boston Medical Library in 1875 . Membership had grown again by 1876 , reaching 79 regular members . In 1878 the Society moved to a building on Boylston Street , the former home of Samuel Gridley Howe , after it was purchased by the Boston Medical Library Association .

By 1880 , however , the Society , total membership 99 , had begun to go into a period of slight decline . The office of President was instituted as part of an attempt to stem this decline ; the first president was James H. White . On November 19 , 1890 , the Society held a special meeting in honor of Henry J. Bigelow , who had recently died .

The Boston Society for Medical Observation was merged into the Society for Medical Improvement in 1894 . In 1901 , James Gregory Mumford published The Story of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement in the March issue of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal .

In 1905 the members of the Society tendered a proposal to the Boston Medical Library to disband : the proposal was rejected , however , both by the library and by vote at the next meeting . By this time the Society had reduced its meetings to an annual occurrence , and it was generally viewed as " undesirable " to have them more often , due to the fact that the Medical Library and the Suffolk District Medical Society had begun to hold joint sessions . The last record of the Society comes from 1917 .

= = Collection = =

The Society had an expansive Anatomical Cabinet , begun in 1828 , the year of its founding . It included a number of specimens from the War of 1812 , which had been acquired by the Society from Dr. S. D. Townsend and Charles H. Stedman of the Chelsea Naval Hospital . It also included a number of Chinese paintings of medical cases donated by Robert William Hooper . By 1840 , the cabinet was estimated to contain around 600 specimens . Beginning in 1831 the Cabinet was curated by J.B.S. Jackson ( also curator of the Warren Anatomical Museum from 1847 on ) . The two were merged around 1870 , and Jackson continued his work until his death in 1879 .

The curator was tasked with keeping a catalog and a case history of each specimen in the cabinet . Jackson published two descriptions of the collection in 1847 : A Descriptive Catalogue of the Anatomical Museum of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement , and later that year A Descriptive Catalogue of the Monstrosities in the Cabinet of the Boston Society of Medical Improvement , which focused solely on the anatomical oddities from the cabinet . Both books were abridged versions of the complete catalog . In the first volume , the specimens of the cabinet were divided into fifteen sections : healthy bones , diseased bones , soft parts about the bones , heart and blood vessels , organs of sense , vocal and respiratory organs , alimentary canal , organs accessory to the alimentary canal , urinary organs , female organs of generation , male organs of generation , utero @-@ gestation , monstrosities , and parasites .

= = Locations = =

When it was first formed , the Society held its meetings at the houses of its members . It then set up a regular establishment over a chemist 's shop on Washington Street . Some years later , it relocated again to Tremont Row , over another chemist 's shop , before moving to Temple Place . When its library was moved to the Boston Medical Library on Boylston Street , the Society relocated there . By 1901 it had moved to Fenway .

= = Notable members = =

Henry Jacob Bigelow  
Jacob Bigelow  
Henry Ingersoll Bowditch  
Thomas Dwight  
John Dix Fisher  
Augustus Addison Gould

Richard Hodges  
Oliver Wendell Holmes , Sr.  
Charles Thomas Jackson  
J.B.S. Jackson  
Nathaniel B. Shurtleff  
Nathan Ryno Smith  
David Humphreys Storer  
Jeffries Wyman