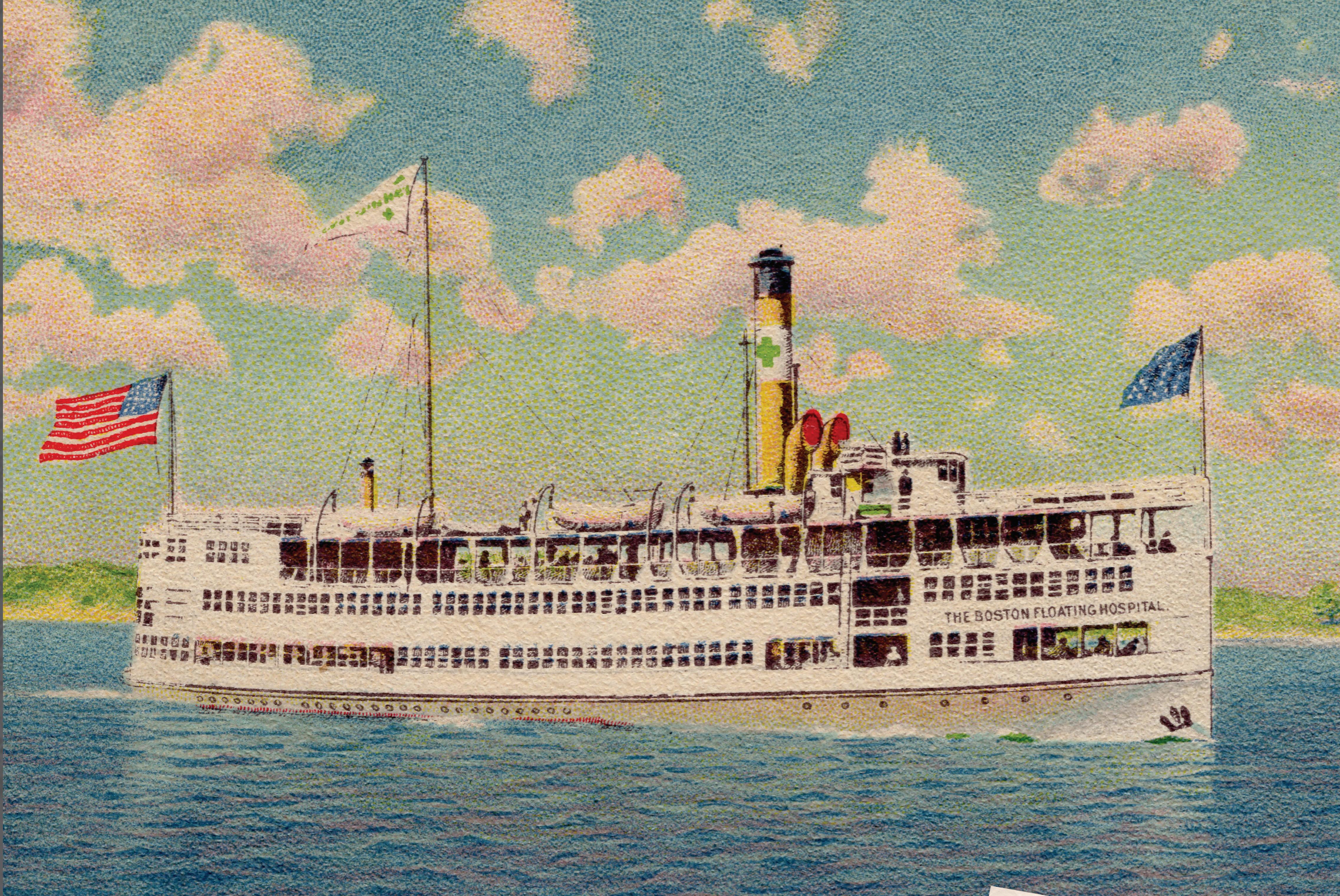




North End



BOSTON
PARKS &
RECREATION
Martin J. Walsh, Mayor



PRECIOUS CARGO ON BOARD

In the late 1800s, summers brought a heartbreaking spike in the number of children who died, especially in Boston's congested, poor neighborhoods. Few medicines existed at the time, but people believed sea air could help restore health. Social activists seized on the idea and solicited charitable gifts. In 1894, a barge pulled by tugs—the first Boston Floating Hospital—began taking mothers and their sick little ones on day trips around Boston Harbor.

Thousands of children benefited from fresh air, nutritious food, and compassionate medical care. The sickest patients could stay overnight on the vessel. Soon demand exceeded capacity, and fundraising began for a custom built ship. In 1906, the new *Boston Floating Hospital* began its daily summer trips from North Pier—located here.

Then in June 1927, a fire destroyed the beloved ship. It would not be replaced. Childhood ailments had changed thanks to medical advances, and the decision was made that children would be best served at a land-based Floating Hospital for Children. It exists today as part of Tufts Medical Center.

TOP The 170-foot-long Boston Floating Hospital pictured on this postcard, was the first vessel built in the U.S. specifically to serve as a hospital ship. It included four decks, one with six wards for up to 100 permanent patients and a top deck for 150-200 day patients.

BOTTOM LEFT IMAGE
In the 1920s, with life-threatening intestinal diseases under better control, Floating Hospital shifted its focus to treating rickets with heliotherapy — exposure to the sun.

BOTTOM MIDDLE An average of 200 children and their mothers boarded the Boston Floating Hospital every day it sailed, July through mid-September. Staff encouraged mothers to participate in their child's care on board and taught safe food preparation and hygiene. Mothers of children on the permanent wards could be on board every day the vessel sailed.

BOTTOM RIGHT IMAGES

Thousands of compassionate donors ensured that the Floating Hospital sailed from 1894 to 1927 at no charge to families. Individuals could sponsor a trip, pay for essentials like cribs, or make gifts to help cover staff salaries and the ship's operating expenses. Boston's newspapers often published lists of donors and stories about fundraising events.

Care on board the Floating Hospital was free, but each child needed a ticket issued by a doctor. To prevent infecting others, no one with a contagious disease was allowed to board.

~ All images courtesy of Tufts Medical Center Archives