

**Image 1.** The cover of the January 1948 issue of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* featured a prize poster in a competition won by then Rhode Island School of Design student Adolph L. Jeff. The Providence Medical Association seal depicts Roger Williams and a companion being greeted by Native Americans. Entwined are the “formalized serpents of Aesculapius.”

In the article, “The Providence Medical Association 1848-1948,” written by the Journal’s editorial board and editor-in-chief, **ROLAND HAMMOND, MD**; **JOHN E. DONLEY, MD**, and **PETER PINEO CHASE, MD**, they report the first meeting to plan the Association was held on Jan. 31, 1848, in the office of **DR. HENRY W. RIVERS**, (**Images 2,3**). Its stated purpose was to foster mutual recognition and fellowship, elevate the standard of medical education, cultivate and advance science, and contribute to the medical literature.

In the ensuing weeks, a Constitution, committees, and bylaws were drafted. Several months later, in March 1848, the first officers were elected: **DR. S. AUGUSTUS ARNOLD**, president; **DR. LEWIS L. MILLER**, vice president; **DR. LEWIS W. CLIFFORD**, treasurer; and **DR. J.W.C. ELY**, secretary. The Association was comprised of physicians and surgeons in Providence, and Fellows of the Rhode Island Medical Society. However, it was stipulated “no proprietor or vendor of any patent or secret remedy or medicine nor any empirical or irregular practitioner, should be admitted.”

During 1848, the Association met in the rooms of the Franklin Society in the basement of the Athenaeum on North Main Street (**Image 4**). In 1905, the organization moved to Rhode Island Hall at Brown, and in 1912 to the Rhode Island Medical

## 1948: Providence Medical Association Celebrates Centennial

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RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

The cover of the January 1948 issue of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* is a graphic introduction to the Centennial of the Providence Medical Association (**Image 1**). Photos and articles inside the issue offer a comprehensive review of the organization’s history and, by extension, the State’s medical landscape, from pre-Civil War days to post-World War II.



**Images 2,3.** The first meeting of the Providence Medical Association was held in this building, located at the corner of Canal and North Court Streets, on Jan. 31, 1848, in the office of **Dr. Henry W. Rivers**. (arrow points to entry).



Society Library. The January 1948 issue contains minutes of the early Association meetings, establishment of fee schedules, and ensuing amendments, such as:

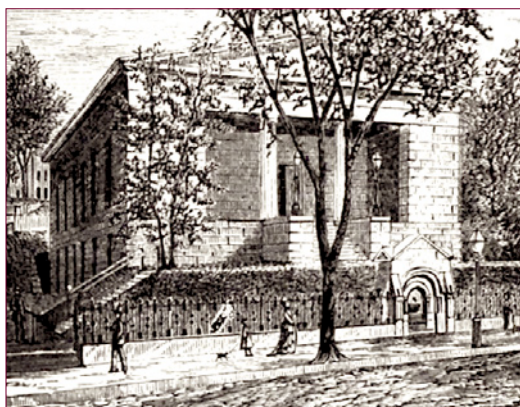
*“The following amendment to Section 1 Article VI – of fees – was proposed by Dr. Armington – “For advice at physician’s, according to the importance of the case and time occupied, 50 cents to \$5.00.”*

Readers of the 1948 articles also get an overview of the health issues facing Providence. During its first year, members of the Association delivered case reports and wrote papers on the prevalence of dysentery, cholera, typhoid,

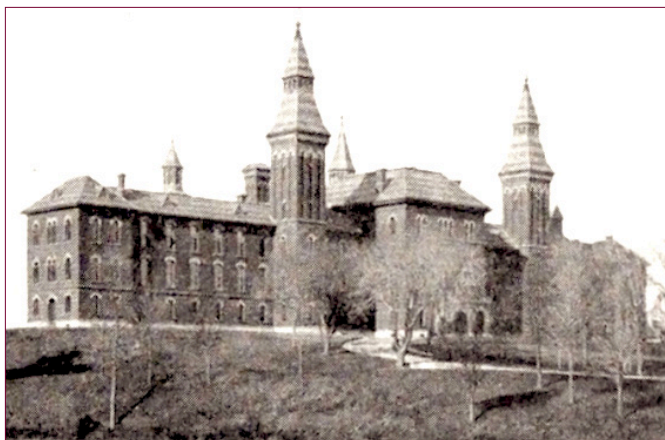
whooping cough, influenza, and the introduction of ether as an anesthetic, as well as the need for more adequate hospital facilities in the city. Through the leadership and philanthropic efforts of decades of Association members, and other medical societies and entities, hospitals were established in Providence. (**Images 5,6**).

In 1898, 50 years after its founding, the Association was thriving, as indicated in this statement issued at the time, “We Are Healthy and Strong”:

*“To safeguard the public health has always been our first intention and will continue to be our*



**Image 4.** During 1848, the Association met in the rooms of the Franklin Society in the basement of the Athenaeum on North Main Street.



**Image 5.** Rhode Island Hospital, founded in the mid-1860s.

*purpose as we enter our second century of service to our community. We are healthy and strong. May we never forget our mission to cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always."*

The Centennial article also notes the emergence of subspecialties in the 1890s, and the formation of the *Providence Medical Journal*, precursor to the *Rhode Island Medical Journal*.

### Centennial celebrations

At its Centennial celebrations in 1948, a plethora of events were held, including a mock consultation of a century prior (**Image 7**). Among the list of attendees at the Centennial, note is given of the oldest living member of the Association, **MARGARET S. HARDMAN, MD**, (1856–1952), a Providence native who began practicing in Rhode Island in 1905, and who was examining physician for the Pawtucket and Providence YWCAs. She was also a member of the Rhode Island Medical Society, the American Women's Medical Society and worked on the national level on housing issues in urban communities. An editorial in the 1948 issue recognized Dr. Hardman and other women physicians of the era:

*"To our loyal women physicians in Rhode Island, headed by Dr. Margaret Hardman, who was honored at the recent Providence Medical Association Centennial for her distinguished service as the oldest living member of that society, the Journal points with great pride."*

**GUY W. WELLS, MD**, who served as president of the Association in 1947, spoke on the accomplishments of the organization for a century, in an article titled "The Pattern Was Established." The following is an excerpt of his remarks:

*"We have taken an active interest in economic questions so far as they concern the patients' ability to secure medical attention. Like the first meetings of this organization and nearly all other similar groups of the time, we have been engaged in minimum fee schedules for the low-income groups and are even now about to launch an insurance program for their protection. Cash sickness benefits and the Workmen's*



**Image 6.** St. Joseph's Hospital, established in 1892.

*Compensation Act have both received a good deal of attention and study from us.*

*"One wonders what subjects will engage this Association in 2048. It would be impossible to predict. May we humbly hope and strive to make our efforts sufficiently valuable to excite their admiration as have the Founders of the Providence Medical Association own our admiration.*

*"And now if these records still exist one hundred years from now, let us extend to the readers of them our sincerest good wishes for their success."*

These words capture the legacy of the Association, whose founders first met on a winter's eve in a small office in Providence 176 years ago. It would also be the final remarks of Dr. Wells (1891–1948), who passed away several months later, in June 1948. ❖



**Image 7.** A consultation as it might have appeared in 1848 was recreated at the Centennial celebration on Jan. 31, 1948. Dr. G. Edward Crane (the patient) is viewed, left to right, by Dr. J. Merrill Gibson, Dr. Alex M. Burgess, Jr., Dr. John C. Ham, and Dr. Anthony Corvese.

**Editor's note:** The following is a link to the January 1948 issue: <https://archive.org/details/rhodeislandmedic31unse/page/n3/mode/2up>