



The Founding of the MGH

At the turn of the 19th century Boston did not have public hospital. The city found itself lagging behind New York and Philadelphia, who had already established hospitals of their own. The wealthy upper class could afford to have doctors visit them at home when they fell ill and, if necessary, the middle class could find the means to afford

doctors as well. There was a marine hospital in the city but only sailors were treated there. This left the poor of Boston with no place to go when they were sick.

There had been a desire in the city to build a hospital for some time. The Hon. William Phillips, father of the Lt. Governor William Phillips, bequeathed \$5,000 to the city for the founding of a hospital in 1797, but it would be more than a decade before any real discussion of building a hospital took place. In March 1810, Rev. John Bartlett, who ran the city's Almshouse, reached out to two of the most prominent doctors in Boston -- Dr. John Collins Warren and Dr. James Jackson. He charged them with the task of writing and circulating a letter asking their friends, many of whom were wealthy members of the Boston community, to support establishing a hospital where everyone would be treated. The Circular Letter, as it would come to be known, was written and distributed on August 20, 1810.

The response was more than the three men could have hoped. On February 25, 1811 a charter was granted by the Massachusetts State Legislature for the Massachusetts General Hospital. The hospital was to provide for the sick of Boston and to educate the community on proper health standards. This was to be a hospital where no one would be denied treatment, regardless of their ability to pay. This would also be a place for teaching new doctors and so a relationship with the young Harvard Medical School was forged and still exists today. The generosity of their many friends and business associates proved the need for such an institution, and fund raising continued throughout the year.

Unfortunately the War of 1812 impeded fundraising, and it would be five years before land was found on which to build the hospital. Finally on July 4, 1818 the cornerstone of the Bulfinch building was laid and in 1821 Bartlett, Warren, and Jackson's dreams were finally realized with the admittance of the hospital's first patient in September.