
6-1-1988

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Recommended Citation

Slusser, Cathy Bayless (1988) "The Birth of an Infant Society: The Hillsborough County Medical Association, 1895-1899," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol10/iss1/3>

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THE BIRTH OF AN INFANT SOCIETY: THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, 1895-1899

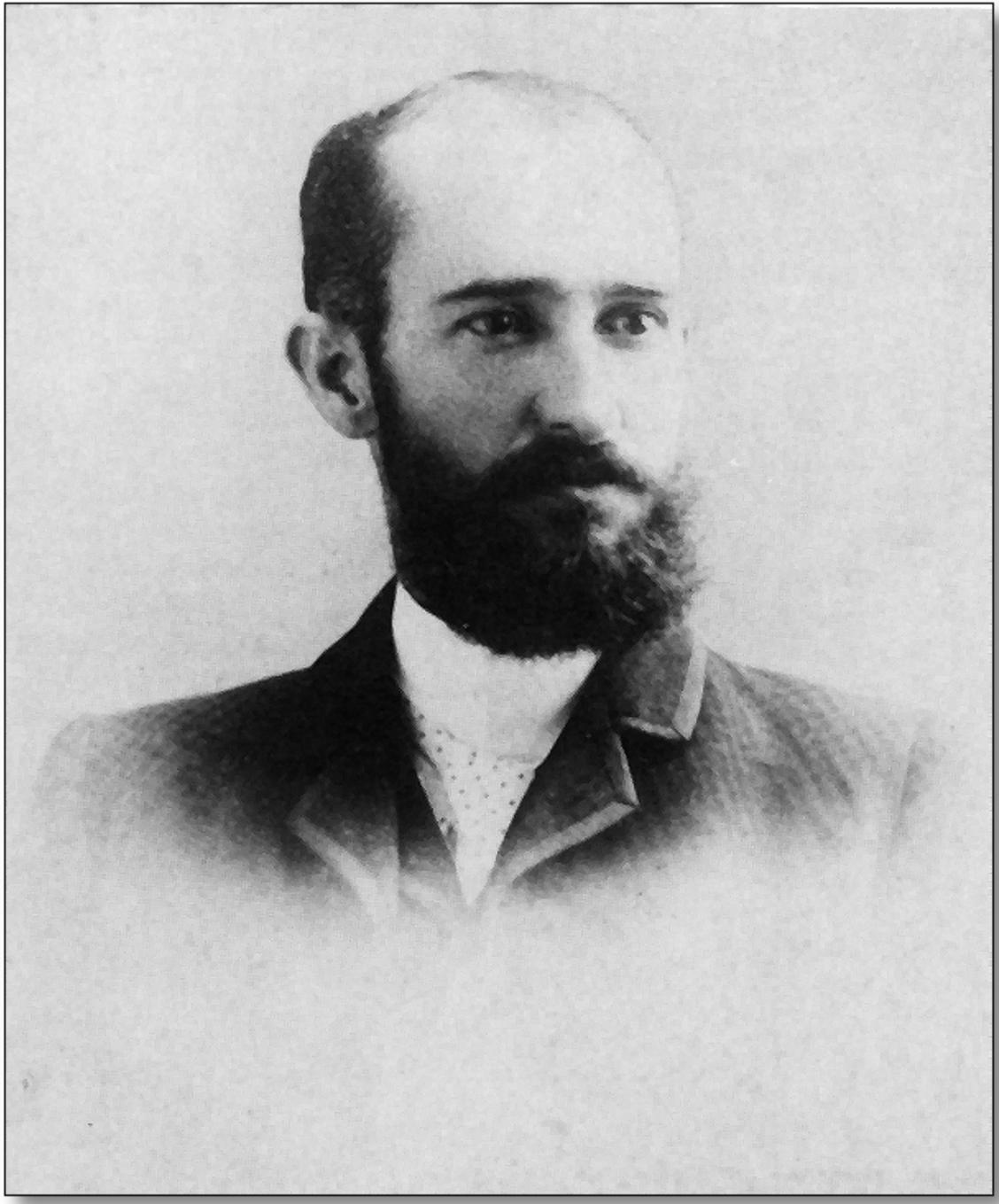
by Cathy Bayless Slusser

On the evening of September 3, 1895, twelve men made their way from various parts of Hillsborough County to downtown Tampa. Their methods of transportation varied. Some sailed on boats while others rode on streetcars or in horse-drawn carriages. Arriving singly or in small groups, they hurried past Cass and Tyler Streets towards a lighted second floor window at 218 Franklin Street and climbed a flight of stairs that carried them to a small office situated over the Bay Pharmacy. Led by Doctors B. G. Abernethy and W. P. Lawrence, they agreed to construct an organization of physicians with the purpose of promoting the advancement of medical science and unity among its members.¹

The men quickly formed a temporary organization to conduct the business at hand. Elected as interim president, Dr. Lawrence took charge of the meeting while Dr. Louis Sims Oppenheimer acted as secretary. The physicians named their organization the Hillsborough County Medical Society (HCMS) and declared it a permanent association. After holding a second election, Dr. Lawrence relinquished his short-lived presidency to Dr. Abernethy who, along with his fellow officers, accepted responsibility for governing the newly established organization until the end of the year.²

At their first meeting, the physicians realized that they needed a constitution and by-laws and a set of qualifications for prospective members. The written guidelines would give their society strength and establish its respectability. At the suggestion of Dr. Leslie W. Weedon, Dr. Abernethy appointed two committees designed to accomplish these objectives. The Committee on Constitution and By-laws consisted of Drs. Weedon, Lawrence, Beard and Jones. With Dr. Weedon serving as chairman, the committee members agreed to draft a constitution and by-laws before the next week's meetings. Dr. Weedon also figured prominently on the Committee on Credentials. Along with Drs. Symmes and Lawrence, he formed a panel to establish admission standards and screen prospective members. The society's president charged both committees to report on their efforts at a meeting scheduled for the following week.³

As Dr. Abernethy adjourned the inaugural meeting and the doctors returned to their homes, the founders of the HCMS congratulated themselves on a good beginning and reflected on the events that initiated this first meeting. Designed to meet the physicians' needs on national, state, local and individual levels, the organizational meeting of the HCMS culminated several decades of medical professionalization and followed the establishment of the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1848, the Florida Medical Association in 1874 and the South Florida Medical Society in the 1870s.



Dr. Leslie W. Weedon, 1896.

Photograph courtesy of the Hillsborough County Medical Association.

Physicians in Hillsborough County had long tried to organize in an effort to solve the public health problems of disease and poor sanitation brought on by primitive conditions and rapid growth. Individually or in small groups, they had led the fight for public health officers, a

An advertisement for Dr. Weedon's Drug Store, from the *Tampa City Directory*, 1899.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

dependable water supply, indoor plumbing and paved streets. They also worked to establish a quarantine hospital for use in times of epidemic.

In addition, the physicians hoped to improve their own working conditions and standard of living. The Tampa physician's practice was a demanding one. On call twenty-four hours a day, he never knew when a knock on his door would take him from his bed to serve a patient. Scheduled office hours varied. Dr. Louis S. Oppenheimer remained in his office from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., while Drs. B.G. Abernethy and W.P. Lawrence were available from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.⁴ Doctors often worked around-the-clock during periods of epidemic which occurred regularly. Prevention and control of such diseases as malaria, yellow fever, measles, influenza and diphtheria occurred slowly and with a great deal of patience. During this period, although epidemics were a common event, they still caused panic among residents. Accidents were also routine, and physicians never knew when their skills might be needed to treat injuries caused by runaway horses, overturned railroad cars or gunshot wounds. To reach their patients, they frequently had to travel several miles on horseback or in a horse-drawn carriage, which was often made more uncomfortable by driving rain or hot, muggy weather. Tampa physicians complained that they did not receive adequate compensation for their work. As in many agricultural areas, payment was often in goods or services.

As early as 1859, Tampa physicians attempted to organize in an effort to solve this financial problem. On June 16 of that year, five Tampa doctors, S.B. Todd, John P. Crichton, W.A. Lively, Sheldon Stringer and Franklin Branch, met at Branch's office to discuss establishing a minimum fee schedule. At that meeting, the doctors agreed to charge specific rates for their services. Only two excuses exempted physicians from asking for the set rate. They could reduce the bill if the patient could not pay or had been under their care for a long time.⁵ By restricting physicians to certain prices, the doctors hoped to reduce competition and raise their incomes.

However, some doctors still sought other means to augment their incomes. For example, Drs. Abernethy, Lawrence and Oppenheimer advertised in the newspapers, an approach also employed by salesmen of patent medicines. Restrained by their desire to make their occupation more respectable and professional, physicians rejected the flashy methods of the patent medicine industry and limited their ads to small blocks of space that merely stated their names, office hours and the location of their homes and offices. Nevertheless, these small announcements, which sometimes included a physician's medical speciality, were found side-by-side with the flamboyant promises made by purveyors of patent medicines.⁶

Physicians also relied on other sources of income to support themselves and their family. Dr. John P. Wall served as associate editor of the *Sunland Tribune* in 1878, and later became editor of the paper. Dr. Weedon owned the Ybor Drug Company, and Franklin Branch also operated a drug store. Drs. Abernethy and Lawrence owned a large orange grove in Lee County, sixty miles

south of Fort Myers.⁷ Tampa physicians learned that the practice of medicine did not automatically guarantee prosperity and the art of healing could occasionally bring conflict and discouragement.

To relieve some of these problems and enhance their profession, Hillsborough County physicians formed their medical association in 1895. They felt handicapped by a variety of difficulties. Patent medicine merchants competed with doctors for their business. Epidemics, low quality medical education and questionable procedures made sickness and death winners in many battles. While the city grew furiously and some sanitary improvements were made, medicine tried desperately to keep up with the expansion. Individual efforts had made small and unsteady progress, and the physicians labored to take charge of their profession.

Evidence of success lay all around them. Tampa, with a population of 10,000, was on the road towards advancement and modernization. The city had established a department of health and made a start in forming a public health system. The Florida Medical Association (FMA) had fought successfully for a State Board of Health and influenced legislators to fund it. The AMA had mounted a national campaign to raise professional standards and medical treatment. Scientific advances were curbing the fear of epidemics and enabled doctors to prevent and cure illnesses more effectively. Physicians such as Dr. John Wall showed what dedicated and civic-minded doctors could accomplish. After his death on April 18, 1895, while speaking to the annual meeting of the FMA, the physicians of Tampa were ready to carry on his work. Five months later, they founded the Hillsborough County Medical Society for the purpose of promoting medical science and harmony among medical men.⁸

The initial group consisted of eighteen members with Dr. B.G. Abernethy as president.⁹ However, the HCMS denied membership to two men, because they did not meet the standards of the group. From society minutes it is unclear why the committee rejected Dr. Hiram J. Hampton. Most likely, Dr. Hampton had graduated from an irregular institution and used unconventional healing practices. As a result, other doctors probably viewed Dr. Hampton's later popularity among Tampa residents with dismay. In March 1898, the *Tampa Weekly Tribune* reported that Dr. Hampton's sanitarium in Tampa Heights was so successful that he contemplated constructing an addition to his building that would increase its size by at least one-half.¹⁰

The second man rejected by the society, Dr. Frederick N. Weightnovel, had a reputation as a radical. Russian-born, he had been banished from his native country for advocating violent revolution. A large man with a massive chest and shoulder-length hair, Dr. Weightnovel sold patent medicines guaranteed to restore manhood or cure female complaints. His favorite advertising technique was to float on his back in the bay or the river while eating dinner from a plate placed on his chest or smoking cigarettes and reading a newspaper. When a crowd gathered to watch his performance, he took advantage of the opportunity to peddle his wares.¹¹

Though these antics were fairly harmless, Dr. Weightnovel's other activities resulted in three costly encounters with the law. In 1883, the War Department had abandoned the area known as Fort Brooke, once a military reservation, and opened the land adjacent to Tampa to homesteaders. Dr. Weightnovel recruited a group of squatters and attempted to form a utopian, socialist community there. Naming his settlement Moscow, Dr. Weightnovel claimed the

Dr. + Hampton's + Sanitarium,
FOR THE CURE OF
CANCER, RUPTURE, SCROFULA and Kindred
DISEASES, and all cases requiring
SURGICAL ATTENTION.
NO MERCURY USED IN THIS INSTITUTION.
TAPE WORN POSITIVELY REMOVED.



" Nothing Succeeds Like Success. "

HAVING been located at the corner of Florida and Eighth streets two years, and during the time performed a number of major operations, none of them rare, **WITHOUT A SINGLE DEATH OR BAD RESULT IN ANY WAY.** enables me to say without boasting that **SUCCESS CROWNS** my undertaking. The house has been well fitted with patients and conveniences in advance of the whole for accommodation. **THE ONLY INSTITUTE IN TAMPA** where the sick can get first-class medical aid, food, board and lodging at the same price per day that most physicians charge for one visit and writing a prescription. I will be found at my office ready to serve the people from 9 a. m. to 12 m., and from 7 to 8 p. m., unless out on a case of emergency. In the afternoon I will be out and attending calls in the city.

Consultation at my office free. After examining patients I cheerfully give my opinion and cost of treatment. Respectfully,

Telephone Call No. 50. **Hiram J. Hampton, M. D.**

An advertisement for Dr. Hampton's Sanitarium, from the *Tampa City Directory, 1899.*

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

property for himself and his followers, but local police used force to remove them from the area. Later, Dr. Weightnovel founded the Tampa Free Love Society, a group of young Tampa men who met in secret supposedly to participate in orgies. The club decided to hold a parade and a banquet at the Hotel Habana. Unfortunately for Dr. Weightnovel, the windows of the Hotel Habana's banquet room reached from ceiling to floor and offered a view of the waitresses serving in the nude. The police raided the banquet and took Dr. Weightnovel and his colleagues to jail. Finally, Dr. Weightnovel opened a hospital in a two-story building in the Fort Brooke area on Whiting Street between Franklin and Tampa Streets. He treated mainly Tampa prostitutes and performed abortions. When a girl died there after an illegal operation, Dr. Weightnovel once again went to jail. This time, he was indicted by the grand jury. Dr. Weightnovel died shortly after that, and most Tampans believed he poisoned himself.¹²

While the members of the HCMS rejected Hampton and Weightnovel, the group admitted some honorary members. "In recognition of their attainments in medicine and their services to the state," the society voted to accept Dr. Joseph Yates Porter and Dr. John Guiteras as honorary HCMS members. Dr. Porter, a native of Key West, served as the state's first health officer, while Dr. Guiteras was a professor of medicine in Philadelphia. Several months later, the group also awarded Dr. Robert D. Murray, a surgeon in the United States Army from Key West, with an honorary membership.¹³ Such appointments increased the visibility and influence of the association.

Not satisfied merely with swelling their ranks, the members of the society spent part of their second meeting adopting the organization's constitution and by-laws. The original constitution and by-laws were hand written and included in the HCMS minute book, where they can be found today. According to the regulations, the group's meetings were to be held on the first Tuesday of every month. The president could hold additional meetings as needed. In order for business to take place, a quorum of six had to be present.¹⁴ The program for each meeting included committee reports, election of new members and a scientific presentation followed by discussion. The president appointed speakers who agreed to talk for about ten minutes on a given subject. Election of officers occurred at the first meeting of every year, and they served for one year. If for any reason an officer did not finish his full term, the president appointed someone in his place. The president also had the right to establish ad hoc committees to handle society matters. These committees usually dissolved upon completion of their work, but the Committee on Credentials was appointed yearly.

Members of the society could recommend physicians for membership. The Committee on Credentials screened candidates and reported on them in a general meeting where members voted their approval or disapproval. New members paid an initiation fee of two dollars, and all members paid annual dues. Members promised to conduct themselves in a professional manner, and if they did not, charges could be brought against them before the general membership.

Backed by an organized medical society, the physicians struggled to improve their standing in the community. They spent most of the period from 1895 to 1897 advancing public health, vying for control of the Emergency Hospital, battling irregular practitioners and overseeing the professional conduct of fellow members.

Society efforts to gain control over Tampa's Emergency Hospital began with an attempt to exclude homeopathic physicians who used treatments that regular physicians considered questionable and even dangerous. On September 18, 1895, medical society members met and passed a resolution pledging to refrain from practicing at the Emergency Hospital until its managers barred homeopathic physicians from working there. The organized physicians also demanded that a nurse trained in homeopathic medicine be dismissed from her job at the hospital.¹⁵ At a meeting on October 1, Dr. Weedon reported to his colleagues on his appearance before the county commissioners. He had explained to the officials the problem of allowing irregular practitioners to work at the hospital and asked the commissioners to give the HCMS control of the facility. They agreed, and the society accepted responsibility for the institution. President Abernethy appointed Drs. Weedon, Lawrence and Jones to the Hospital Board with the authority to manage the institution. Society members agreed to serve on the hospital staff on a monthly rotational basis. Drs. Douglass, Bird and Oppenheimer formed a committee to draft a letter to the Emergency Hospital's Board of Lady Managers informing them of the change and requesting their continued services as volunteers but under a new name, the Ladies' Auxiliary Hospital Board. The physicians invited the women to a meeting on October 3 to discuss the situation.¹⁶

However, the women did not receive the news with pleasure. Angry over the usurpation of their power and upset that neither the county commissioners nor the HCMS had consulted them in the matter, they refused to cooperate with the medical society. In a letter published in the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, the women answered the physicians' request with a resounding "No!" The women responded that the action of the commissioners and the society had relieved them of any financial responsibilities and that they would turn over the entire operation of the Emergency Hospital to the HCMS. The women announced their intention to pay off immediately the nurses and matrons and dismiss them from their positions. In a sharp rebuke of previous county commissioners' refusal to aid the Emergency Hospital, the women concluded, "We congratulate you on having succeeded in doing what we failed to do – namely in getting the commissioners to assume the financial responsibility of the institution."¹⁷

The physicians did not lose hope of winning the women's help. On October 4, the members of the HCMS hospital committee resolved to meet with the female managers and affirmed their desire to settle "the unhappy differences that had risen between the managers and the physicians."¹⁸ A compromise was reached, and the women reorganized themselves as the Auxiliary Board of the Lady Managers. By the end of October, they had begun a fundraising campaign and appealed to Tampa residents for aid in caring for the indigent sick and carrying out the work of the Emergency Hospital. Mrs. Douglass, the wife of Dr. J.W. Douglass, served as president and Mrs. W.D. Lewis as treasurer. In December, Mrs. Lewis appeared before the medical society and asked it to specify the exact duties of the hospital employees. This action showed that the women had finally accepted the HCMS's tight control over the Emergency Hospital. In January 1896, outgoing president Dr. B.G. Abernethy reported the progress made by the HCMS in managing the hospital. Though the society "received it full of sick and without funds," Tampa's poor and ill were being cared for, and every bed was occupied nearly all the time.¹⁹

The medical society's hard won prize did not come without its headaches. Mrs. Lewis's request for guidelines did not go unheeded, and the society began a three-month effort to establish a set of procedures to govern the hospital. At a meeting in January 1896, the physicians discussed hospital laws and made suggestions for improving the operation of the facility. The Hospital Board of Directors reported on its efforts to manage the hospital and noted some personnel problems. Society members agreed that if employees needed to be fired, the situation would be handled by the attending physician and the matron. Any disagreement would be settled by the Hospital Board. Physicians also approved a decision that fees collected from paying patients would go into the hospital fund. The newly elected society president, Dr. Leslie Weedon, appointed Drs. Bird, Pettey and Oppenheimer to draft a set of laws for governing the hospital and to report at a special meeting the following week.²⁰

The committee presented a set of rules at the next meeting and won the society's approval. However, the new regulations did not completely solve the problem. At the regular meeting in February 1896, the doctors again discussed the code and generally believed that it was inadequate. A second committee of Drs. Abernethy and Oppenheimer agreed to remodel the rules. At a meeting the following evening, the society amended and adopted the second set of laws and decided to consult with the Auxiliary Board of Lady Managers. At the March meeting, the regulations were again adjusted. Finally, after three months of experimentation and discussion, the association achieved a set of workable guidelines for the hospital. Though physicians sometimes had to be reminded of their hospital responsibilities when they neglected their duties, the institution ran smoothly and continued to aid the needy. Evidence of the hospital's success can be seen in Dr. Abernethy's proposal in July 1896 to enlarge the charity wards of the facility and the board's agreement to visit the hospital and discuss the necessary alterations with the Auxiliary Board of Lady Managers.²¹

Members of the HCMS viewed their control of the Emergency Hospital as only one way to help improve public health. Another means of aid lay in offering assistance in time of epidemic. Their first opportunity to act as a group came in the summer of 1896 when an outbreak of smallpox threatened Tampa residents. Led by Dr. Weedon, the society agreed that its members would vaccinate free of charge anyone who visited a physician's office during regular office hours and was unable to pay for the vaccinations. Published in the *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, the resolution stated that the physicians recognized their responsibilities as "guardians of public health and [that] the first duty of physicians [was] one of prevention."²² Dr. Weedon even went one step further than the resolution required and announced his decision to vaccinate anyone for free. The *Tampa Weekly Tribune* complimented the doctor on his generosity and hoped the other physicians would "follow his commendable example."²³ Epidemics hit hardest in the summer, and in 1897 the physicians made plans to deal with an outbreak of typhoid by recommending that the city establish a pest-house to help contain the disease and improve sanitary conditions.²⁴

The physicians learned how to deal with such situations through one of their organization's efforts to advance medical science – the monthly scientific lecture. Every meeting did not include a presentation, due to a lengthy business session or the unavailability of a speaker, but a great deal of discussion usually followed when a physician did read a paper. One such lively interchange, in response to a paper entitled "Erysipelas: Its Causes, Diagnosis and Complications," required two pages of minutes to be recorded. Other presentations covered diseases such

as typhoid, malaria, jaundice, dysentery, autotoxemia and tetanus. In addition to the formal scientific presentations, HCMS meetings allowed Tampa physicians to discuss their cases with their colleagues and share opinions and experiences.²⁵

Although the HCMS generally fulfilled its goal of advancing medical science, the organization only partially succeeded in securing harmony among its members. While society meetings afforded time for medical men from different parts of the county to become acquainted, conflicting opinions concerning professional conduct frequently caused dissension within the group. In a few cases, members preferred charges of unprofessional conduct against a colleague. A committee was then formed to investigate the accusations and make a recommendation to the entire society. In the period between December 1896 and July 1897, three such incidents occurred.

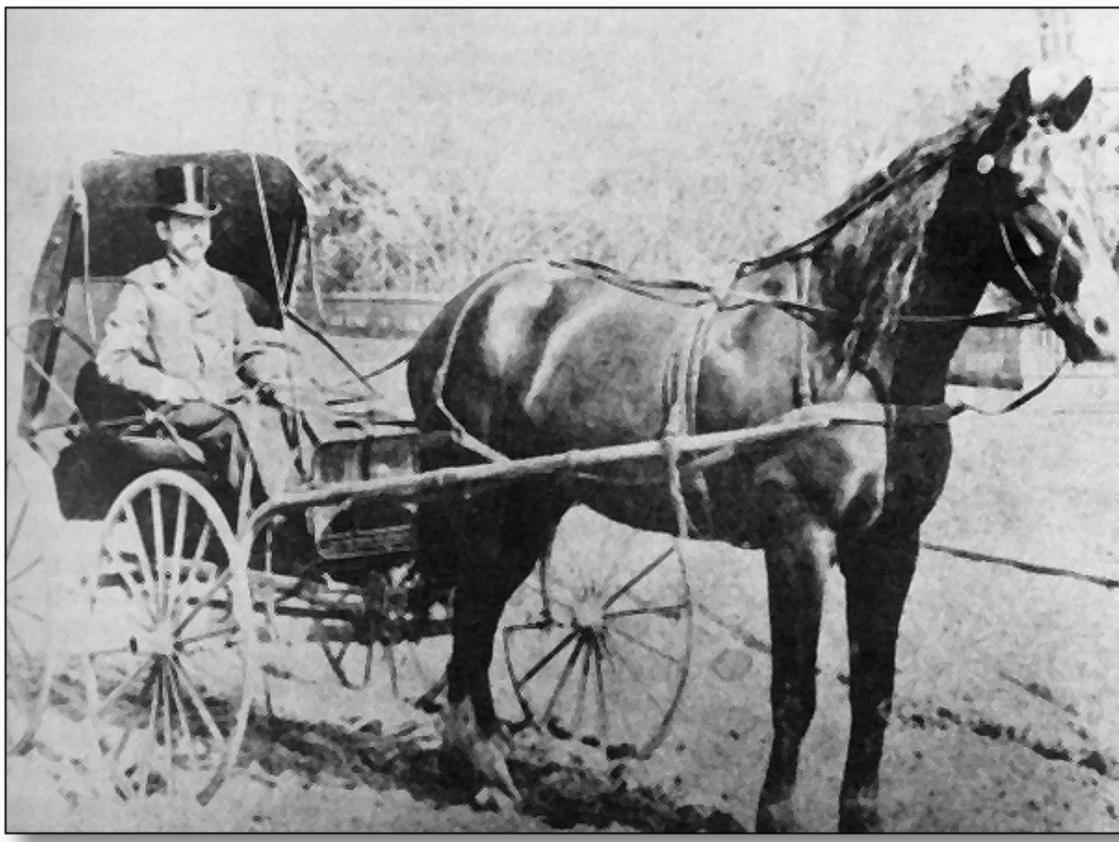
The first conflict arose in November 1896 between Louis S. Oppenheimer and Dr. Laura Reading. The latter probably had come to Tampa in the fall of 1895, when the earliest advertisement of her office location and hours appeared. In July of the following summer, a proposal went to the Committee on Credentials that Dr. Reading be admitted to membership in the society. Because low attendance at several summer meetings prevented business from being conducted, the committee's recommendation was not made known for several months. However, before Dr. Reading's membership could be put to a vote, an angry confrontation occurred between Dr. Reading and Dr. Oppenheimer that clouded the issue of her qualifications.²⁶

On November 17, 1896, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that Oppenheimer conducted South Florida's first laparotomy, the surgical section of the abdominal wall. This operation performed on a young woman at the Emergency Hospital earned elaborate praise for Dr. Oppenheimer from the newspaper. "The people of Tampa should feel proud to know that they have such a skilled physician as Dr. Oppenheimer," the *Tribune* remarked.²⁷

In Dr. Reading's opinion, however, the newspaper's praise of Oppenheimer was totally unjustified. In a letter to the *Tribune*, she claimed that two months earlier, on September 17, she had successfully performed a hysterectomy by both vaginal and abdominal section. As a result, Dr. Reading declared, the distinction of completing the first laparotomy in south Florida belonged to her. She further criticized Oppenheimer for seeking publicity. Insisting that since her arrival in Tampa she had performed many operations, Reading concluded that "no physician of any standing ever keeps Raring advertisements of all they do in the paper."²⁸ This attack stung Dr. Oppenheimer, whose surgical activities frequently appeared in the newspaper.

Despite this public outburst, the Committee on Credentials recommended that Dr. Reading be admitted to the society at the December meeting. Nevertheless, her disparaging comments about Dr. Oppenheimer angered some society members. One of them, Dr. G.H. Altree, requested that Dr. Reading leave the room while the group discussed her case and voted on her application. When this motion failed to pass, Dr. Altree left the meeting in disgust and did not return that evening. Finally, the society agreed to admit Dr. Reading to the group.²⁹

Secure in her new position, Dr. Reading immediately continued her attack on Dr. Oppenheimer and presented formal charges against him before the society. Drs. Jones, Bartlett and Lawrence



Dr. L.S. Oppenheimer,

Photograph from the Tampa Historical Society's *Sunland Tribune*, November, 1977.

agreed to investigate the accusation before the next society meeting. After collecting and examining evidence in the case, the committee reported at the January 1897 meeting that Dr. Oppenheimer was guilty of unprofessional conduct. Dr. Reading was surprised when the group also found her guilty of the same charge. The committee, with only Dr. Lawrence dissenting, recommended that both physicians be expelled from the society.³⁰

Drs. Oppenheimer and Reading were both afforded the opportunity to respond formally to the charges. Calling the incident a misunderstanding, Dr. Oppenheimer denied the accusation and asked for time to reply. The society agreed to give him one week to prepare a defense. At Dr. Altree's insistence, a new committee of Drs. Westmoreland, Joses and Bize was formed to investigate further charges against Dr. Reading.³¹

At a meeting held the next week, the society disposed of the matter. Dr. Reading did not attend the meeting but sent a note stating her refusal to remain in the society. The doctors agreed to drop the charges against her. The hearing on Dr. Oppenheimer's case addressed the original charges brought against him. The newspaper article had claimed that Dr. Oppenheimer

performed the operation with Drs. Bize, Snavely, Bartlett, Bird and Cuervo assisting. Apparently, these physicians resented being relegated to a subordinate position. Despite Dr. Oppenheimer's presentation of a witness and certified affidavits in his attempt to prove his innocence, the group found him guilty of unprofessional and unethical conduct. After apologizing to his colleagues, Dr. Oppenheimer escaped with a light punishment, receiving only a reprimand.³²

However, the matter did not remain closed for long. Though Dr. Reading continued to boycott society meetings, her name remained on its rolls. At the July 1897 meeting, a committee recommended that she be expelled from the society. A problem arose when the physicians realized that the two-thirds membership needed to vote for expulsion was not present, so they settled for indefinite suspension.³³

At the same meeting, the physicians questioned Dr. Oppenheimer about a recent article in the paper naming him as physician for an accident victim. Dr. Oppenheimer apologized to the group for quotes made by him about the accident and asserted that he had not known he was talking to a reporter until the conversation ended. At that time, Dr. Oppenheimer asked that his name not appear in print, but the reporter refused. Though some physicians, including Dr. Abernethy, believed the explanation adequate, others, led by Dr. Weedon, continued to object to the public statements. Dr. Oppenheimer agreed to hand in his resignation from the society on the condition that the group would not file formal charges against him. Upon agreement, he broke ties with the association.³⁴

In both these cases, the two controversial physicians dropped from the HCMS but remained in the public limelight. The following year, the *Tampa Weekly Tribune* commented that Dr. Reading won "new laurels every day. As a practitioner she [was] a big success and her. . . successful treatment of a daughter of a Cuban general [would] forever stamp her as a most skilled physician."³⁵ Stories of Dr. Oppenheimer's skills also appeared frequently in the local papers.

With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Tampa physicians shifted away from internal divisions and concentrated on military activities. As one historian noted, "During the mid-1890s, Tampa people paid little attention to ordinary events. What really captured their attention was the gallant fight being waged by Cuban insurgents to win their freedom from their Spanish rulers."³⁶ Tampans had good reasons to be interested in the war. Since the 1880s, a large number of Cubans had flocked to the cigar city, and they actively supported the struggle for independence of their homeland.

From an economic standpoint, Tampa residents foresaw the benefits that the war could bring to whatever Florida city the government chose to serve as an embarkation port for troops and supplies. A campaign began to convince the War Department that Tampa offered the best facilities in the state. Dr. Oppenheimer participated in this effort by writing a pamphlet, entitled "The West Coast of Florida as a Health Resort." Using figures to show that for its size Tampa was the healthiest city in the United States, Dr. Oppenheimer praised the city's climate and superb drinking water. The public relations campaign succeeded, and soon government agents arrived in the area to sound the harbor, organize transportation facilities and order supplies.³⁷

With the declaration of war on April 24, 1898, troops soon began flooding into the area. Housed in camps at Port Tampa, DeSoto Park, Tampa Heights, Palmetto Beach and Ybor City, more than 30,000 soldiers called Tampa home for approximately two months. On pay days, Tampa merchants earned large profits, as did the owners of gambling parlors, saloons and houses of prostitution. Along with millions of dollars spent by the army for supplies, the war also brought new residents. Some of the troops found Tampa so inviting that they remained after the war along with merchants and businessmen who had been attracted to the area by the lure of riches. Though the war in Cuba lasted only a few months, it continued to benefit Tampa for many years.³⁸

The war affected Tampa physicians as well. A few doctors, mostly Cubans such as Dr. B.S. Leonardi, joined the volunteers bound for the fighting in Cuba. Most of their colleagues remained in Tampa to battle medical problems on the homefront. With the influx of so many people, all the physicians were needed to treat the diseases brought by the arrivals or caused by overcrowding. Improper planning caused much of the sickness. When troops disembarked from the railroad cars at Ybor City, they found no food or drink to relieve them after a long train ride. They marched to camps at Tampa Heights before finding relief. Hungry and dehydrated and wearing wool uniforms, half of the soldiers suffered from heat stroke. Poor sanitation in the camps contaminated water supplies and caused dysentery and other diseases which spread to civilians. Heavy summer rains produced outbreaks of malaria. Though the army brought its own physicians to deal with the troops' medical needs, civilian doctors helped when they could.³⁹

Although the society minutes from September 1897 to 1901 are lost, newspaper articles make it clear that despite disruptions caused by the war, the HCMS physicians did hold some meetings. The doctors could not elect new officers until April 1899, however. Probably the lack of a quorum at meetings caused the delay. Finally, when elections did take place, the group chose Dr. J.T. Green as president, Dr. U.S. Bird as vice-president, and Dr. L.A. Bize as secretary.

During 1899, life returned to normal, disease abated and the physicians were able to concentrate on routine matters. On April 11, 1899, a successful benefit concert was held for the Emergency Hospital. Dr. Abernethy traveled to British Honduras where he bought 300 acres and planned to organize a colony for the purpose of raising bananas. Dr. Oppenheimer entertained his brother who visited the area from Boston, and Dr. J.H. Mills made one of the first two purchases of an automobile in Tampa, paying \$1,800 for the latest improved model.⁴⁰ Times were improving for the Tampa physicians. Five years after creation of their organization, HCMS members could look with pleasure on their first steps at improving both their standing in the community and the health of county residents. Reflecting on their recent accomplishments, Tampa physicians faced a new century with enthusiasm.

¹ The men at this first meeting were Doctors Beard, Jones, Pettey, Snavely, Symmes, U.S. Bird, Hiram Hampton, Louis Sims Oppenheimer, Leslie Weedon and Frederick N. Weightnovel. Minutes of the Hillsborough Medical Society and the Hillsborough County Medical Association (hereafter referred to as HCMA Minutes), September 3, 1895; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September 4, 1895; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, November 28, 1895.

² Weedon served as vice-president, Oppenheimer as secretary-treasurer, and Bird as corresponding secretary. HCMA Minutes, September 3, 1895. The Hillsborough County Medical Society later changed its name to the Hillsborough County Medical Association, the name it still carries.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 10, 1895, November 29, 1895.

⁵ Donald B. McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, Vol. 1 (Tampa, Florida: Southern Publishing Company, n.d.), 34.

⁶ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 10, 1895, November 28, 1895; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, October 31, 1895.

⁷ James M. Ingram, "John Perry Wall: A Man for All Seasons," *Journal of the Florida Medical Association*, 53 (1966): 713; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, October 31, November 7, 1895.

⁸ Ingram, "John Perry Wall," 716.

⁹ The HCMS members were Doctors Abernethy, Bird, Beard, Jones, Lawrence, Oppenheimer, Pettey, Snavelly, Symmes, Weedon, W.E. Narton, Mendoza, Douglass, Barnett, Bartlett, Nafeno, and Olin S. White. HCMA Minutes, September 10, 1895.

¹⁰ Ibid.; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, March 31, 1898.

¹¹ McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, 46-47; Gloria Jahoda, *River of the Golden Ibis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 198-99.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ HCMA Minutes, September 10, 1895; March 3, 1896.

¹⁴ This quorum was not rigidly upheld, however, because the smallest group ever present at the meeting convened on May 5, 1896, when five of the twenty-four members attended that meeting. HCMA Minutes, May 5, 1896.

¹⁵ *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, September 19, 1895.

¹⁶ HCMA Minutes, October 1, 1895; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 3, 1895.

¹⁷ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 3, 1895.

¹⁸ Ibid., October 4, 1895.

¹⁹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 8, 1895; HCMA Minutes, December 2, 1895.

²⁰ HCMA Minutes, January 7, 1896.

²¹ Ibid., January 14, February 4, February 5, March 3, July 14, 1896.

²² Ibid., July 14, 1896; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, July 23, 1896.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, July 16, 1896.

²⁵ Ibid., September 16, 1897; HCMA Minutes, September 7, 1897.

²⁶ HCMA Minutes, November 21, 1895, July 7, 1896.

²⁷ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 17, 1896.

²⁸ Ibid., November 18, 1896.

²⁹ HCMA Minutes, December 2, 1896.

³⁰ Ibid., December 2, 1896, January 5, 1897.

³¹ Ibid., January 5, 1897.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., July 1897.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, August 17, 1899.

³⁶ Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida* (St. Petersburg, Florida: St. Petersburg Printing Company, 1950), 206.

³⁷ James M. Ingram, "Dr. Louis Sims Oppenheimer: Culture Among the Sandspurs," *Journal of the Florida Medical Association*, 58(1971): 56; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 12, 1898.

³⁸ Grismer, *Tampa*, 207-11; Scheffel H. Wright, "Medicine in the Florida Camps During the Spanish-American War: Great Controversies," *Journal of the Florida Medical Association*, 62(1975): 25-26.

³⁹ Wright, "Medicine in Florida Camps," 25-26; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, November 17, 1898.

⁴⁰ *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, November 17, December 15, 1898, April 6, April 13, June 8, August 17, September 14, November 23, 1899.