Guide to the Providence Board of Health records
1857-1977

Rhode Island State Archives
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Collection overview

Title: Providence Board of Health records
Date range: 1857-1977
Creator: Providence (R.I.). Board of Health
Extent: .35 cubic feet
Abstract: Black and white photographs documenting disease and living conditions in Providence during the early 1900's as well as activities of the City of Providence Health Department. The collection also includes annual reports, and examples of actual signs used to warn of the existence of scarlet fever or diphtheria.

Language of materials: English
Repository: Rhode Island State Archives
Collection number: C#95-197

Scope & content

This collection contains primarily photographs that document the activities of the Providence Board of Health from circa 1900 until 1977 as well as the living conditions of the population of Providence during the early years of the 20th century. The photographs include those taken by Dr. Charles V. Chapin documenting the living conditions in a Providence neighborhood circa 1900 and those taken by the Providence Housing Authority documenting the Well Baby Clinic conducted at Hartford Park in 1959. The collection also contains the first annual report completed by the Superintendent of Health (year ending July 1, 1857) as well as annual reports for the years 1961, 1963 and 1964. There are also original warning signs used to warn of the presence of diphtheria or scarlet fever in a building. The collection also includes a program from the award dinner held in 1977 for Joseph E. Cannon M.D.
Arrangement

Items are arranged chronologically within each folder. Items are arranged into the following series:

- Series 1. Photographs, circa 1900-1963
- Series 2. Annual Reports, 1857-1964
- Series 3. Ephemera

Historical note

In 1854, Dr. Edwin Snow pioneered efforts to document and analyze a wave of cholera which attacked the citizens of Providence. Tracking the disease among his own patients, he devoted himself to tracing its source and preventing its recurrence. Snow became the first Superintendent in 1856 when Providence established a permanent city health department. Twenty-two years later, a State Board of Health was formed with three mandates: preventing the spread of disease, collecting vital statistics, and implementing a sanitation program.

In 1883, Dr. Charles Value Chapin became Providence’s Superintendent of Health. Dr. Chapin continued Dr. Snow’s efforts, improving sanitation, advocating city sewer construction, establishing quarantine regulations, and identifying the source of a cholera outbreak in 1888. Dr. Chapin instituted mandatory reporting of contagious disease cases such as scarlet fever and diphtheria. He was a leader in discouraging fumigation of houses as a disease prevention measure and established the nation’s first contagious disease hospital, the Providence City Hospital, in 1910.

Access & use

Access to the collection: No special restrictions unless otherwise specified.

Use of materials: Copyright is in the public domain unless otherwise specified. We reserve the right to restrict reproduction of materials due to preservation concerns.

Preferred citation: Providence Board of Health records, C#95-197, Rhode Island State Archives

Contact information: Rhode Island State Archives
Rhode Island State Archives
Administrative information

About the collection

Aquisition:

About the finding aid

Author: Finding aid prepared by Kate Telford.

Encoding: Finding aid encoded by Kate Telford 2009 February 05

Descriptive rules: Finding aid based on Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)

Additional information

Related material: Typhoid Fever cases - Map of Providence (1878) 1882-1883

Typhoid Fever Cases in military camps during the Spanish American War (1904)

Rhode Island Department of Health Library records. Collection number 2006-27


Search terms

Names: Snow, Edwin M. (Edwin Miller), 1820-1888

Chapin, Charles V. (Charles Value), 1856-1941

Subjects: Providence (R.I.). Board of Health

Smallpox--Rhode Island--Providence.
Poliomyelitis--Patients--Treatment.
Scarlatina.
Diphtheria
Providence (R.I.)--Economic conditions--20th century.
Providence (R.I.)--History.

Types of materials:
black-and-white photographs
photograph albums
cyanotypes
annual reports
warning signs
invitations

Occupations:
physicians
nurses
# Inventory

## Series 1, Photographs, circa 1900-1963

27E:3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Box 1, Folder 1 | Small Pox Outbreaks  
Photo album of 2 x 3 and 6 x 8 photographs of specific small pox cases. | circa 1900 |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Living Conditions in Providence  
Contains seven 4 x 5 photographs taken by Dr. Charles V. Chapin documenting living conditions in a Providence neighborhood. Some street names correspond with those in the Federal Hill neighborhood. | circa 1900 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Small Pox Outbreaks  
Photo album of specific small pox cases from December 1912 - January 1913. Contains 20 un-retouched 3 x 3 1/2 photographs. | 1912-1913 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Living Conditions in Providence  
Documentation of living conditions in Providence. Includes 8 photographs of various sizes and one unmarked photograph taken April 1, 1898. | 1898-1912 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Unsanitary Conditions in Providence  
Contains twenty-six 4 x 5 photographs. | circa 1913 |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | Immunization  
Contains one 8 x 10 photograph. | circa 1920 |
<p>| Box 1, Folder 7 | Nursing Activities | 1939 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Well Baby Clinic</td>
<td>1959 March 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Polio Clinic (Dr. Sarah Smith)</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Part of a Thorough Physical Exam</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nickerson House Clinic (Dr. Shatkin)</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Day Nursery</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Chapin-Pulmonary Clinic</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Health Team</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Health Class</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dr. Dolan</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>X-Ray Clinic</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Health Department Staff Photographs</td>
<td>1958-1963</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contains eleven 5 x 7 photographs plus negatives.

Contains four 8 x 10 photographs courtesy of the Providence Housing Authority documenting the Well Baby Clinic at Hartford Park, Providence.

Contains five 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains eight 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains three 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains four 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains nine 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains four 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains three 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains three 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains twelve 8 x 10 photographs.

Contains twelve 8 x 10 photographs.
Box 1, Folder 24  | Unsanitary Conditions in Providence  | undated
| Contains five 4 x 5 cyanotypes and one 5 x 8 cyanotype.

Box 1, Folder 25  | Portrait of Dr. Charles V. Chapin  | undated
| Contains one 8 x 10 photograph.

Box 1, Folder 26  | Portrait of Dr. J. M. Peters  | undated
| Contains one 4 x 5 photograph.

Box 1, Folder 27  | Chapin Hospital, Providence  | undated
| Contains twelve 4 x 5 photographs.

Series 2, Annual Reports, 1857-1964

| Container        | Description                                                                 | Date  
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------
| Box 1, Folder 1  | Annual Report for the Health Department of the City of Providence          | 1857  
|                  | Includes two copies of the First Annual Report of the Superintendent of Health of the City of Providence (year ending July 1, 1857) |       
| Box 1, Folder 19 | Annual Report for the Health Department of the City of Providence          | 1961  
| Box 1, Folder 20 | Annual Report for the Health Department of the City of Providence          | 1963  
| Box 1, Folder 21 | Annual Report for the Health Department of the City of Providence          | 1964  

Series 3, Ephemera,

| Container        | Description                                                                 | Date  
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------
| Box 1, Folder 22 | Award Dinner Program for Joseph E. Cannon M.D.                             | 1977  
|                  |                                                                             | October 28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder</th>
<th>Warning Signs for Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria</th>
<th>undated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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