

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
WESTERN RESERVE STUDIES SYMPOSIUM

**BUILDING A MEDICAL COMMUNITY
IN THE WESTERN RESERVE**

October 12-13 2001

Allen Memorial Medical Library
Ford Auditorium

**The Women's and Children's Free Medical &
Surgical Dispensary (1878)
Forerunner of Woman's General Hospital**

Jennifer Nieves

The Women's and Children's Free Medical and Surgical Dispensary was founded in 1878 under the direction of Dr. Myra K. Merrick and Dr. Kate Parsons, both graduates of "irregular" medical schools. The doctors witnessed much sickness and suffering among poor women and children and found it necessary to develop an organized method of alleviating it. The Dispensary was to serve two purposes 1) to furnish clinical advantages for young women physicians and students, 2) as a place where self-respecting women of limited means could receive for a moderate amount, or free if necessary, the services of physicians of their own sex. Perhaps as important as the medical treatment they received, young mothers were also taught the proper care of infants and children. Personal hygiene problems were attended to as well as diet, clothing, and household cleanliness. Oftentimes, those patients too ill to work would be treated and when competent, recommended to area employers.

The Dispensary represented the energy and compassion of two generations of Cleveland's women physicians. Their efforts did eventually result in a full scale hospital for the women of Cleveland, however, those early years greatly influenced the treatment of Cleveland's less fortunate population.