

KECK SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

TRIALS AND TRANSFORMATION

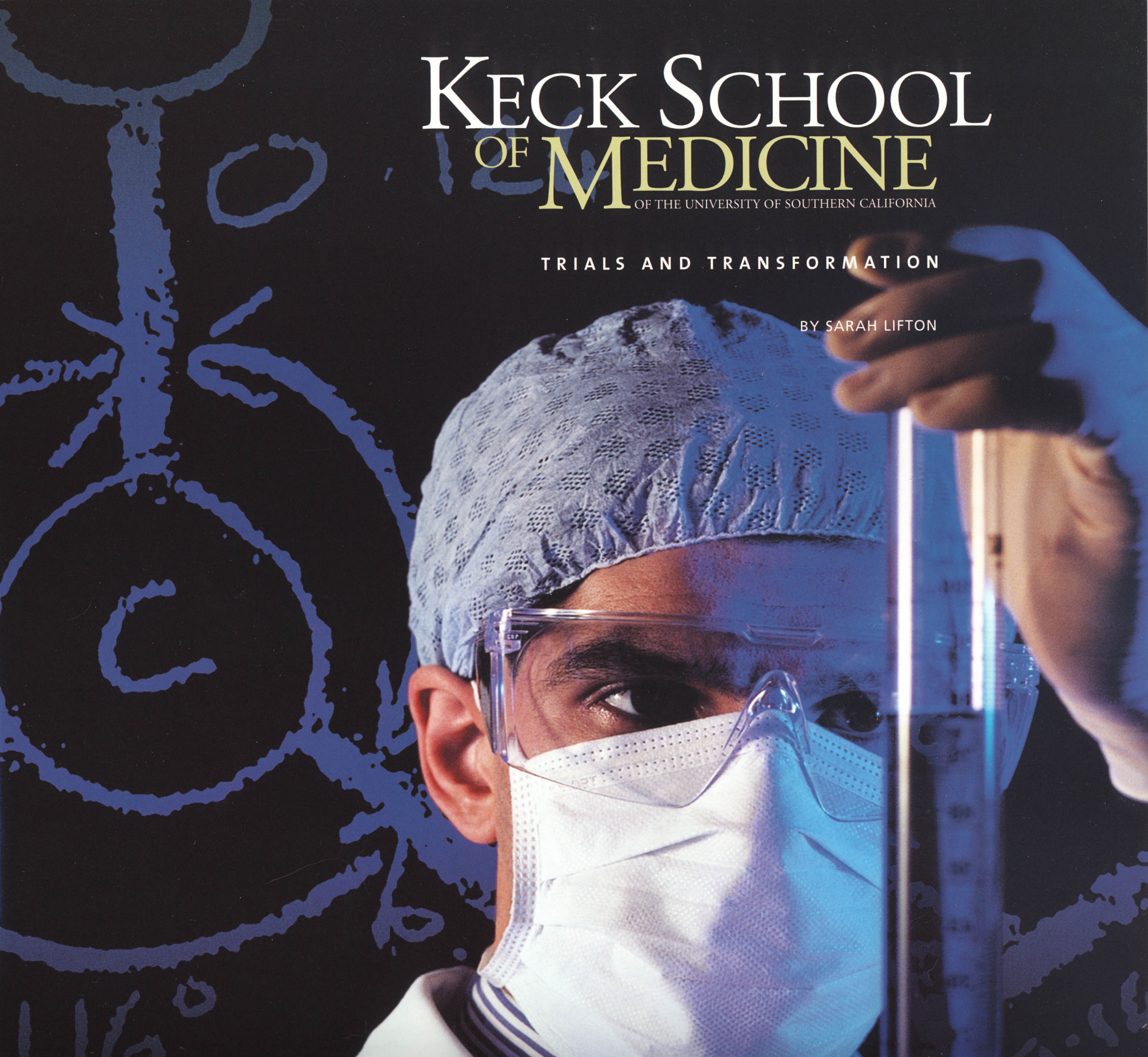


KECK SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

TRIALS AND TRANSFORMATION

BY SARAH LIFTON



The site of today's Keck School of Medicine was mostly agricultural fields and ranch land in the early days of Los Angeles.



Entered According to Act of Congress in the Year 1877, by The Brooklyn Land and Building Co. in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.

VIEW OF LOS ANGELES FROM THE EAST.

BROOKLYN HIGHTS

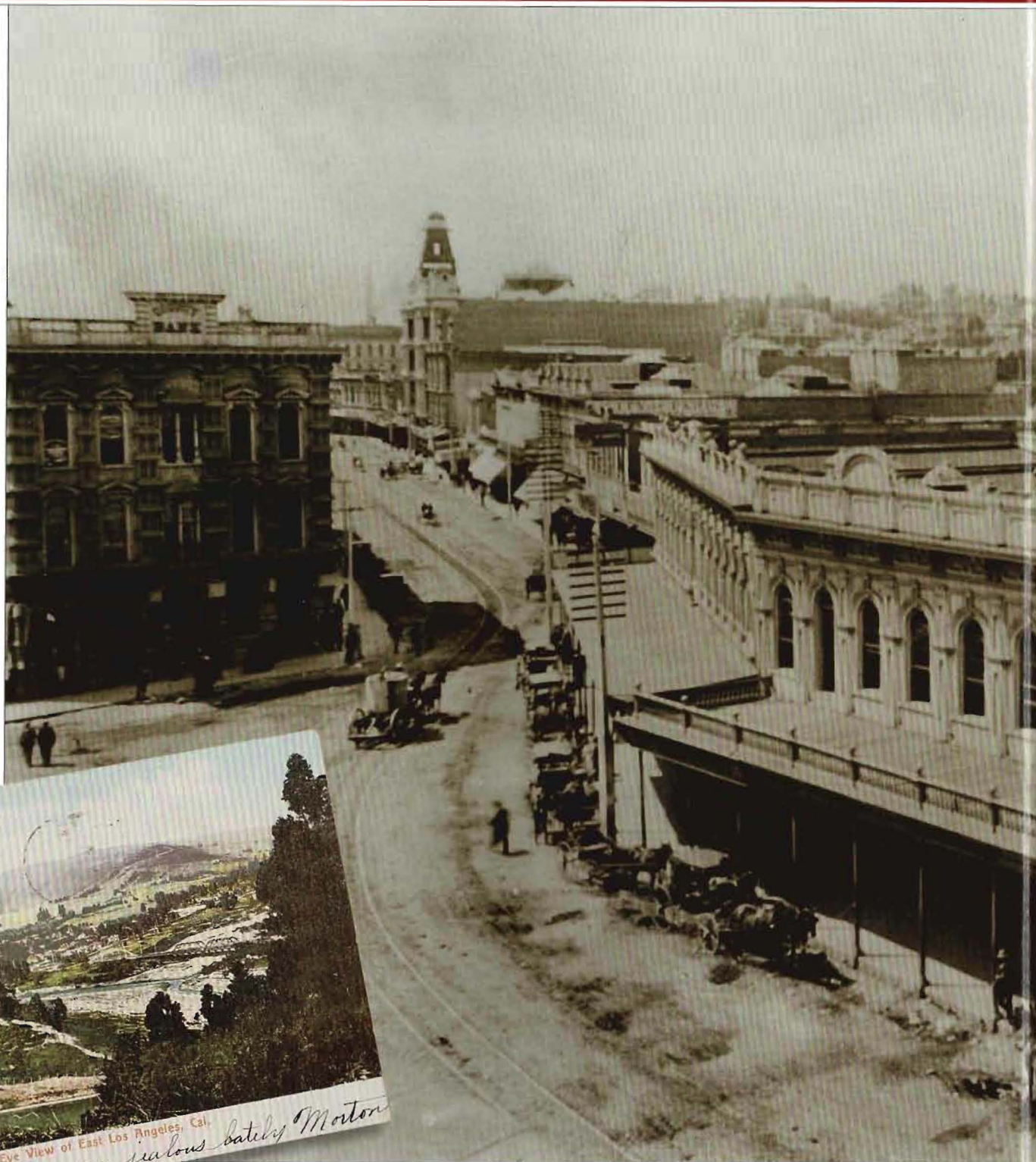
IN THE FOREGROUND.

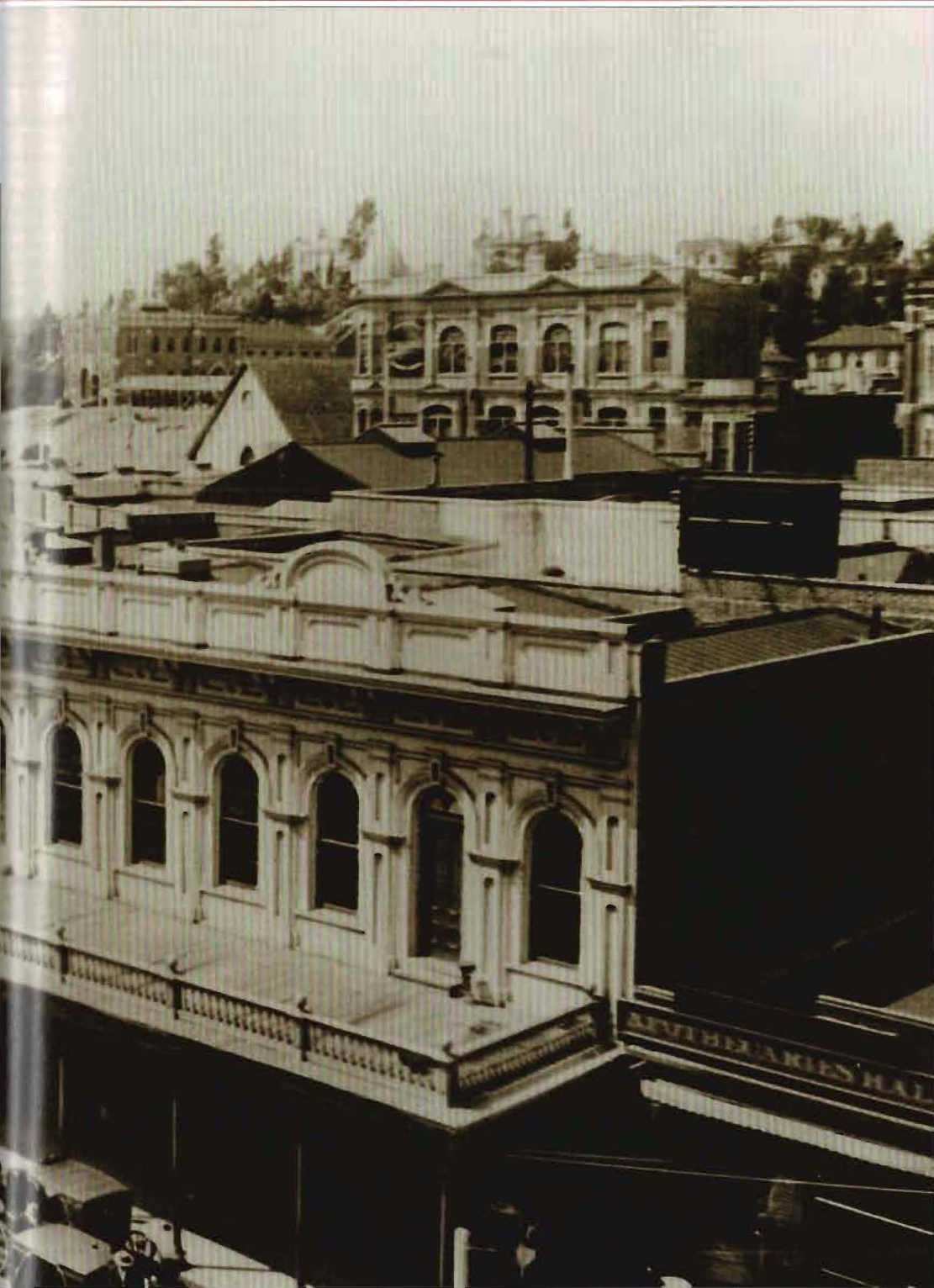
PACIFIC OCEAN AND SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS IN THE BACKGROUND.

Starting From Scratch

In November 1926, after a decade of rancorous skirmishes in the courts, newspapers and city council chambers, Los Angeles voters turned out in record numbers to endorse a pair of municipal referenda calling for a new train station. The measures proposed to consolidate under a single roof the operations of the Union Pacific, Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads, which had previously maintained their own passenger terminals. ■ The new depot, Union Station, would be located in the city's historic core, on the site of the ramshackle Chinatown. For opinion makers like Harry Chandler, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* and one of the new station's most ardent supporters, the measure would not only encourage tourism and serve the paper's downtown interests, it would redevelop a major blot on the Los Angeles landscape.

Many of the early medical school faculty members played key roles in the Los Angeles County Medical Association, founded in Apothecaries Hall at Main and Temple streets in Los Angeles. Far right, Joseph P. Widney, M.D., the medical school's eccentric founding dean. Below, a postcard of Los Angeles, ca. 1906.





Roughly a year later, with the station given the go-ahead but the dust from the battle still settling, the *Los Angeles Record* sent a reporter to Chinatown to investigate a particularly curious property—a three-story brick edifice on Aliso Street that was among those slated for demolition. What attracted the paper's attention was a faded sign on the structure that was clearly at odds with its current occupants.

"Time has played a queer prank upon the old University of Southern California 'medical school' at 445 Aliso Street," read a caption in the December 13, 1927, issue of the paper. "Where once the voices of dignified professors instilled scientific knowledge in the minds of would-be physicians, the mournful 'hee-haw' of several hundred mules reverberates today. ...For more than 25 years the medical college building has housed the offices of W. A. Saunders' mule market—the largest in the southwest, says Jim Connor, local manager. ...From these offices more than 1,500 work animals are rented over Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada. The mules are held in corrals



around the building, which was built nearly a half-century ago, Connor estimates, out of brick brought to Los Angeles

by sailing vessels around the Horn. The words, 'Medical College,' are still dimly visible above the front door of the building facing Aliso Street...."

BIRTH OF A MEDICAL SCHOOL

Much as the inscription had grown faint and the former classrooms filled with mule harnesses, so the medical school itself had been transfigured by the years. USC, founded in 1880 by civic leaders belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church, was Southern California's first research university, and amid the land boom of the decade it quickly mushroomed into a sys-

tem of campuses stretching from San Diego to Tulare. The university ultimately closed most of these campuses in the real estate bust of 1888. The medical college was a notable exception.

At the time of the medical school's creation in 1884, the study of medicine in America amounted to little more than vocational training. The vast majority of the country's medical schools were proprietary enterprises designed as much to turn a profit as to educate the next generation of physicians. The scientific basis of medical practice was virtually unknown, and the quality of the instruction was erratic

at best. The West's two schools were both in San Francisco. The Medical Department of the University of the Pacific, founded in 1858, later affiliated with Stanford University. Toland Medical College, established in 1864, eventually affiliated with the University of California and became the University of California, San Francisco.

USC's medical school was conceived by Joseph Pomeroy Widney, M.D., an 1866 Toland graduate and the younger brother of Judge Robert Maclay Widney, who was a driving force behind USC's founding. The younger Widney was a successful physician in the dusty frontier town of Los Angeles



Los Angeles was a true frontier town when USC's medical school was founded. The Widney brothers collaborated on many real estate ventures in the growing city. One of them was the Widney Building, seen at far left in 1888.



W. A. Saunders' mule market, which later occupied the original medical college building, provided mules, like the ones seen at left, that were central to the region's growth. Los Angeles grew rapidly following the opening of the transcontinental railway and attracted people from many parts of the country. This diverse population made a variety of medical conditions available for study.

and a member of USC's Board of Trustees. His concept initially merited only a sentence in the minutes of the 1884 Methodist Episcopal Annual Conference: "At a recent meeting of the Board of Directors, steps were taken towards the opening of a College of Medicine, J. P. Widney being elected Dean of the Faculty with power to act."

In March 1885 Widney convened a group of colleagues at his office on First Street, hoping to recruit them as faculty for the new school. The assembly was a

distinguished one by the standards of 19th-century Los Angeles, including many of the city's medical elite. Eleven physicians joined Widney on the new faculty. Four more were appointed the following month.



"A College of Medicine has been organized with an able faculty of 16 members, who are eminent in their profession, and the department is fully provided for and equipped, having lecture rooms and large hospitals at their disposal, and quite a large number of students have signified their expectation to be in attendance during the coming year," stated that year's Methodist Episcopal Annual Conference minutes. "The success of this college is assured."

The faculty of the nascent college hammered together a curriculum and

JOSEPH WIDNEY

Joseph Widney, founding dean of USC's medical school, was by turns a visionary and anachronism, civic leader and eccentric, scientist and man of letters, philosopher and racial chauvinist, Renaissance man, pastor and, some would say, a kook.

Born December 26, 1841, in a log cabin in Miami County, Ohio, one of seven children, Widney effectively became the head of his household at 15 when his father died. He worked to support the family, but managed to complete high school and attend Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, to study Latin and Greek. He was there only five months before the Civil War intervened, and he enlisted with the Ohio Volunteers. He was ill-suited for army life, however, and in 1862, with his health in shambles, he followed his two older brothers to California, where he hoped to regain his vigor.

He enrolled in Toland Medical College in San Francisco, where he won the award for "most deserving" student among the 1866 graduating class of 10. He reenlisted in the army and spent two years as a doctor in the Arizona campaign against the Apaches.

After his discharge, Widney moved to Los Angeles, where his brother Robert was a prominent attorney. In 1868 he began a medical practice with John S. Griffin, a Confederate sympathizer. Widney is said to



Joseph Widney

have examined William Tecumseh Sherman in consultation with Griffin, and is reputed to have dissuaded the local sheriff from releasing an outlaw—Tiburcio Vasquez—from whom Widney had once removed a bullet after a gunfight. Widney bought land in several Southern California towns and spearheaded an effort to build a harbor in Wilmington. He personally supervised the dredging of the channel.

In 1872 Widney founded the Los Angeles County Medical Association. He helped found USC in 1880, serving on its Board of Trustees and faculty. Five years

later, he established USC's medical school. Along with colleague Walter F. Lindley, he penned a travel book and co-founded *Southern California Practitioner*, the region's first medical journal.

Stern and pious, Widney was not popular with his students. Resigning the deanship in 1896, he retired from medicine and devoted himself to his first love, writing. He also founded and built a church, and served as its pastor for many years.

Widney wrote a mixed bag of poetry, essays and allegorical fiction that reflected his growing obsessions with religion and race. In 1907 he published *Race-Life of Aryan Peoples*, a two-volume opus that some considered his masterpiece and others reviled for its promotion of the superiority of the white race.

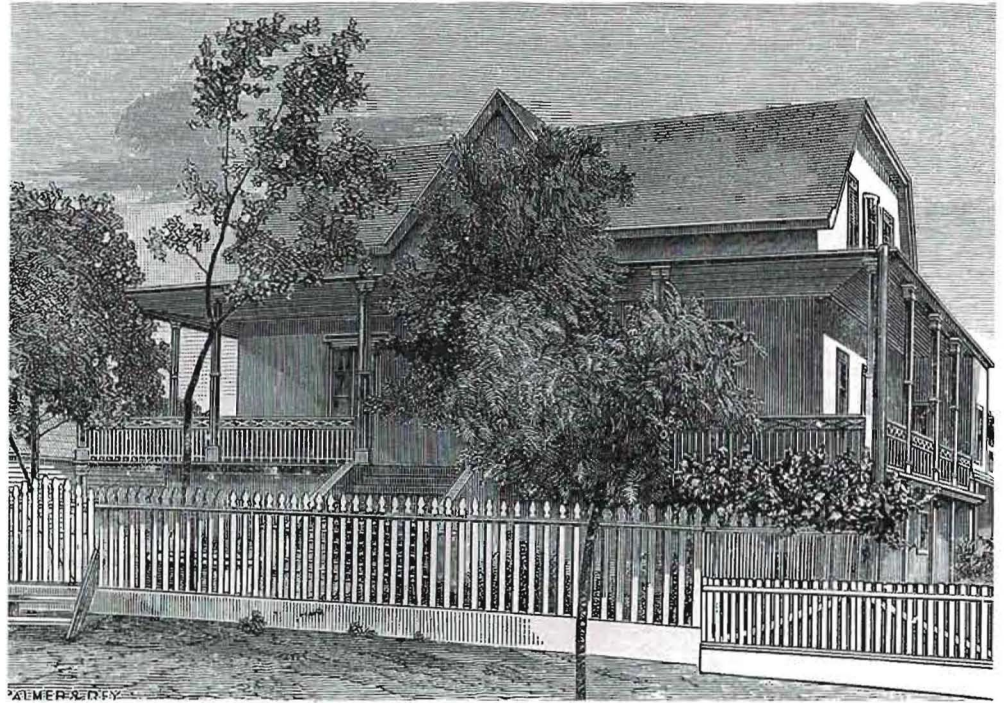
Late in life Widney appeared odd and caught in a time warp. Even in the late 1930s, his home lacked electricity. His breakfasts consisted of raw onions, potatoes and salt pork. When he went to town, he usually wore his old army hat and cape. By 1937 Widney was blind with cataracts but refused to have them removed. "I never saw so clearly before I was blind," he said. "With the onset of blindness came increased clearness of my inner vision."

That vision, however peculiar, came to an end on July 4, 1938, a few months shy of his 97th birthday.

admission requirements. The trustees decreed that “the standard of attainments for the admission of students into the said College of Medicine shall be as high, the course of study as long, as varied and thorough, and the requirements for graduation as rigid as in the recognized first-class colleges of medicine of the United States.” Widney and his colleagues took that charge seriously. From the start they insisted on a three-year curriculum, even though there were only three other medical colleges nationwide with the same requirement (most had two-year programs).

Widney found a home for the college in a two-story brick building on Aliso Street. The building, which formerly housed the Vache Frères Winery, was part of the famous El Aliso Vineyards of pioneer vintner Don Luis Vignes. Vignes had acquired the vineyard’s 104 acres in 1831 and is credited with introducing winemaking to California. The lower floor of the brick building, originally a wine cellar, became the dispensary. The upper two floors, formerly living quarters, were converted to classrooms.

The medical school was to be a self-supporting entity and, beyond serving as volunteers, the faculty actually paid for the privilege of teaching at the new school—a reflection of the status it afforded them. They voted an initial assessment of \$25, followed by \$10 a month. Rent for the property was \$50 a month and the building’s renovation was carried out for less than \$200. Lab equipment cost \$100 and



a startup supply of drugs and dressings for the dispensary was obtained for \$62.50. A library was culled from old medical textbooks dating back to the faculty’s own medical school days.

Widney had 1,000 catalogs printed and distributed to Eastern colleges and medical journals, accompanied by letters touting the healthful and delightful climate of Los Angeles—especially to prospective students “who are not robust.” In the catalog Widney described an additional allure to the region: “[B]ecause of the cosmopolitan character of the population, and the constant travel by sea and by land from all parts of the world, disease in all its forms and in almost every race and nationality” was present for them to study. He also

The original medical school building at 445 Aliso Street, whose previous occupant had been the Vache Frères Winery, was later expanded to equip the growing school with laboratories, an outpatient clinic and free dispensary. Students dissected cadavers in the same basement quarters that had once been used as a wine cellar.



claimed that the exposure to surgery would be great because “the many and important railroad lines entering the city” offered many an opportunity to encounter injuries resulting from railroading.

Notices were placed in local newspapers announcing that the college would open on October 7, 1885. Admission guidelines were liberal by any standards. There were no matriculation requirements—not even a high-school education—and there were no restrictions based on age, race, color, religion or sex. Although an entrance examination was required, it usually consisted of an oral test in classical languages at Widney’s home.

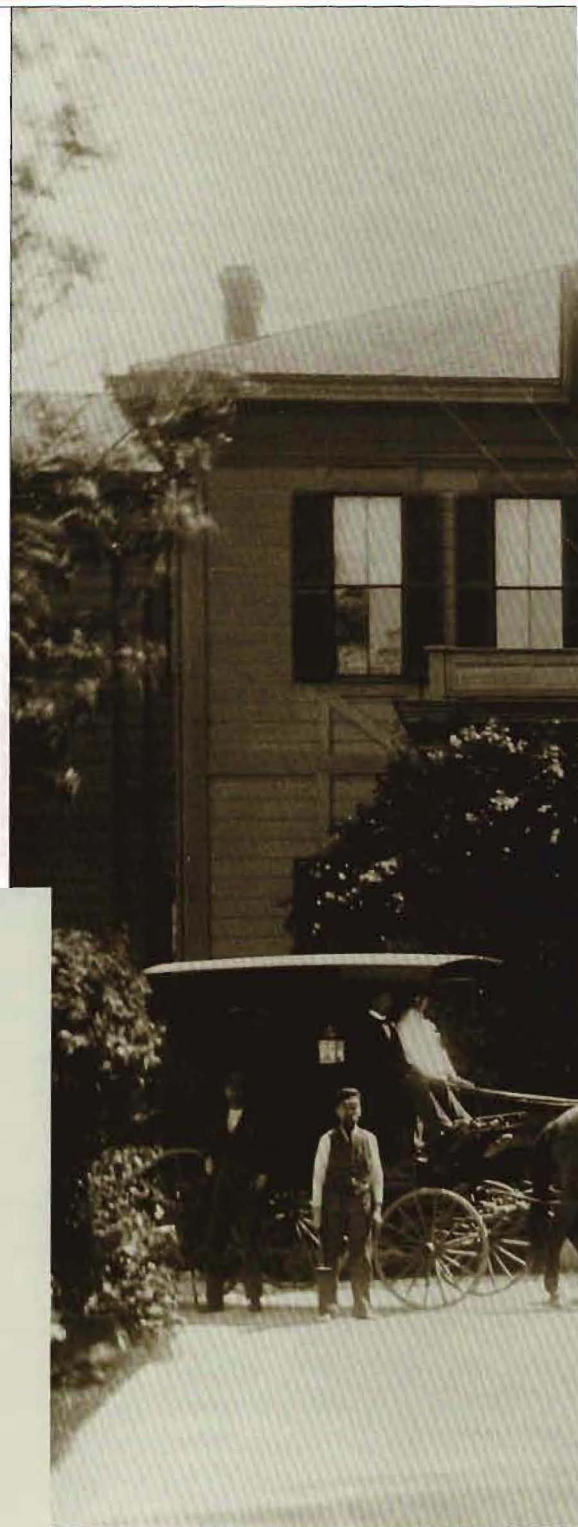
The three-year course of instruction was distributed over six-month terms, allowing students to work for half the year and attend school during the other half. Tuition was \$145 for the first term and \$130 for the second term. The third year was tuition-free, but there was a \$25 fee for a compulsory intermediate term of two months, plus a \$15 diploma fee. That brought to \$315 the cost of the entire program. Students were expected to purchase their own textbooks, which were as outdated as those of their instructors.

The building was ready in June and, as October neared, students began to register. Ten, including one woman, enrolled in the complete medical course. Two signed up for special lectures only. This wasn’t quite the “large number” predicted, but it

was acceptable nonetheless. By the time classes began there were 18 faculty members, including a woman, Elizabeth A. Follansbee, and Judge Robert M. Widney, the dean’s older brother, who became a professor of medical jurisprudence.

Instruction consisted mainly of lectures, and on-the-job training was limited. With the only free dispensary in town, the school’s clinics were always crowded—an inconvenience made worse by the fact that its hours were limited because supervising physicians couldn’t afford time away from their practices. Bedside teaching ostensibly took place at the County Hospital and Poor Farm, located on Mission Road, and the Los Angeles Infirmary, operated by the Sisters of Charity, but in practice this, too, was only available sporadically, subject to the whims of the instructors.

The only internships available were three



Deed.

John S. Griffin
TO
Los Angeles County.

Dated June 6th 1878

Recorded at the Request of
A. W. Potts
Aug 31st A. D. 1878
at 15 min. past 11
A. M. in Book No. 614

of Deeds, page 53

C. E. Miles



The original county hospital, located on Mission Road, was constructed in 1878. It boasted 106 beds, six staff members and a \$4,000 budget, and it became affiliated with USC's medical school in 1885. It served as the site of clinical training for medical school students. Far left, the deed of John Griffin's land to Los Angeles County for the site of the county hospital.



Previous page, the 1896 USC College of Medicine student body. Left, the new medical school building at 737 Buena Vista Street was built with funds from the faculty, who took out a mortgage to pay for it. Upon opening in 1896, the building offered larger and more modern facilities for instruction.

per year at the county hospital. Similarly, laboratory instruction was limited to chemistry, microscope work and anatomical dissection, this latter subject being enormously popular owing in part to a steady supply of cadavers from the county hospital. Germ theories were still new and not yet integrated into laboratory routine. The X-ray had not yet been discovered; bacteriology and biochemistry were in their infancy; and knowledge of antitoxins, antibiotics and serum treatments lay in the future. As a result, medical instruction amounted to little more than a discussion of symptoms and conjecture about approaches to treatment.

Nine of the original 12 students graduated in three years. Three members of that inaugural class later became faculty members of the college; one became a president of the Los Angeles County Medical Association.

THE QUEST FOR NEW QUARTERS

Because the College of Medicine's facilities were inadequate even by 1880s standards, Joseph Widney, a major investor in Southern California real estate, purchased the Aliso Street property and an adjoining lot in 1886. His goal was to tear it down and replace it with an appropriate facility.

As it turned out, California land values collapsed the following year and expansion plans were put on hold. But larger issues were about to affect the medical school. On December 30, 1891, USC's founding president, Marion McKinley Bovard, died, leaving behind a university in dire financial straits and on the verge of collapse. Joseph Widney was persuaded to assume the presidency, a post he held in addition to the deanship of the medical college for three years. Serving without compensation, he overhauled the university, putting the brakes on its expansionist ways.

In the meantime, the medical school limped along on Aliso Street until 1895, when the faculty purchased a lot on Buena Vista Street, now North Broadway, in what today is Chinatown. Incorporating themselves as the Hospital Building Association, they borrowed \$20,000 to construct a modern three-story building, which opened on January 3, 1896. Their plans also called for the eventual construction of a hospital. Widney, who had stepped down as president of USC in 1895 and relinquished the deanship to Henry G. Brainerd, M.D., the following year, retained the Aliso property and rented it to W. A. Saunders' mule market.

Consistent with its many enhancements, the new medical school building proved considerably more expensive to operate than the first. To support it faculty members were forced to increase the size of their contributions and to find ways of generating additional revenue. Students in USC's dental school joined medical students for lectures; this contributed roughly \$1,000 a year toward expenses. Additionally, from 1905 to 1907 the school rented its auditorium to USC's new College of Pharmacy and its laboratories to private physicians.

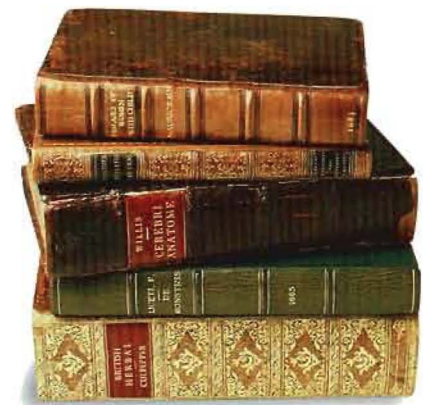
While operating expenses remained a challenge, private contributions allowed the medical school to make significant capital improvements. In 1899 Wilbur A. Hendryx, M.D., donated \$2,500 to build a laboratory building in memory of his late wife. The college also received \$1,000 from Mary Jane Mansill to equip a laboratory.

In 1904 the faculty, now led by Dean



Walter F. Lindley, M.D., voted to give up their plans for a hospital and convert the Hospital Building Association into a non-profit holding corporation. It was during Lindley's deanship that W. Jarvis Barlow, M.D., who had built the Barlow Sanitarium in Los Angeles, provided the school with its first real library. In 1906 Barlow built a classical-style brick library across the street from the school and deeded it to the college. The books inside belonged to the Barlow Library Association and eventually

D. C. Barber, M.D., right of center, a superintendent and surgeon at the county hospital, is seen here supervising a surgery in 1897. Barber was also professor of pathology, histology and microscopy at the medical school.

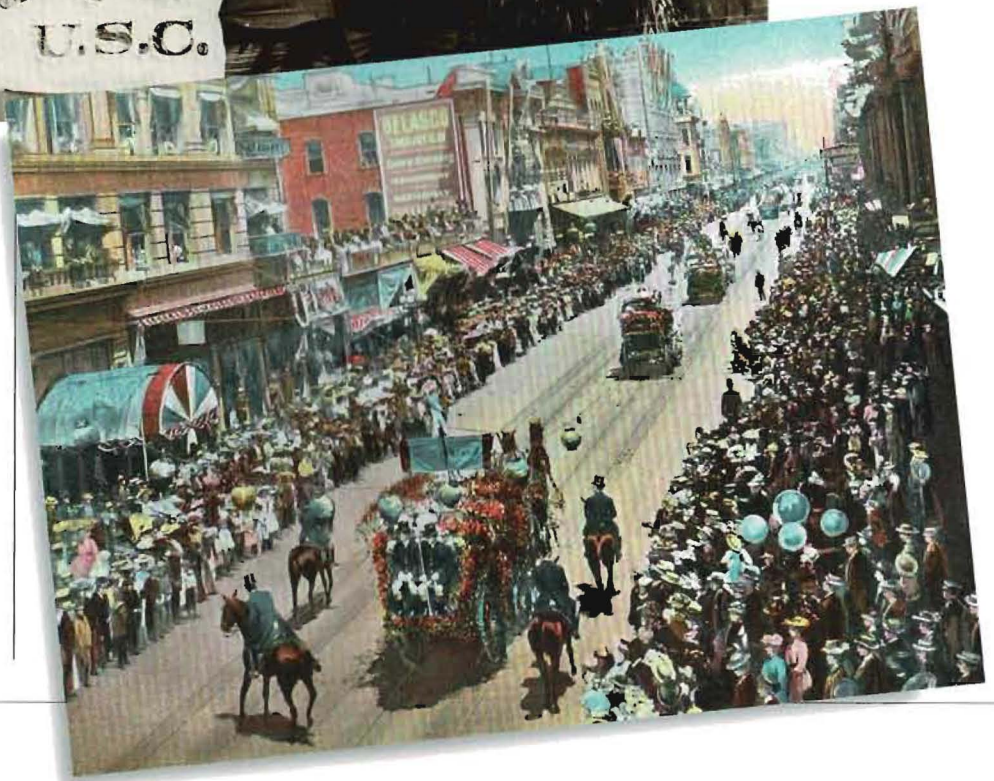




The College of Medicine entered this float in Los Angeles' first La Fiesta Parade in 1894. Another view of the parade is seen in the vintage postcard below.

became part of the Los Angeles County Medical Association library.

Lindley was succeeded as dean in 1906 by William D. Babcock, M.D., who served a single year before stepping down. Barlow became dean in 1907, inheriting a medical school with serious financial problems. Enrollment had plummeted from 129 to 98 in a single year, bringing tuition revenues down with it. The school was facing a shortfall of \$4,000 on an operating budget of just under \$16,000. What's more, it now had intensifying competition. The new



College of Physicians and Surgeons had been established in 1904 and had its own hospital, and the College of Medical Evangelists was pursuing certification. Furthermore, diploma mills were turning out doctors in half the time and at half the cost. Payment of the \$20,000 mortgage was coming due. By 1909 the USC Board of Trustees announced that the school was \$22,000 in debt, with expenses increasing.

IDENTITY CRISIS

Clearly, the medical school could no longer survive on tuition alone, but USC lacked the resources to provide any support. Faculty began agitating for state contributions, noting that the University of California (UC) had taken over San Francisco's Toland Medical College, which under its new status was enjoying generous legislative funding, and that the population of Southern California had eclipsed that of the north.

Convinced that drastic measures were

called for, Widney and a delegation of faculty members traveled to Berkeley to appeal to the UC Regents to save USC's medical school by making it, like Toland, part of the UC system. At first the Regents rejected the offer because the school was deeply in debt. But Jackson Graves, a regent and local businessman, agreed to assume the \$20,000 mortgage as his gift to the University of California, and faculty members paid off the remainder of the debt from their own pockets. The Regents agreed in 1909 to accept the medical college, which became the Los Angeles Department of the School of Medicine of the University of California. Under the aegis of the University of California, the school eventually became strictly a post-graduate school. It ultimately closed in 1952 when UCLA pursued plans to open its own medical school.

Students and faculty loyal to USC protested the University of California plan, however, largely because it would require

students to attend the first two years of medical school in Berkeley and the last two in Los Angeles. Partly to placate them, USC almost immediately sought a new affiliation, this time with its former competitor, the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

A proprietary school, the college was the 1904 creation of Charles W. Bryson, M.D., a well-known Los Angeles physician who was considered a technically skilled surgeon and compassionate doctor. Handsome and stylish, he cut a colorful figure, and he drew many of his patients from Chinatown and from among the town's prostitutes. Bryson had been so successful raising funds for the new Angelus Hospital that there had been enough money left over to build a modern three-story building for a medical school. The school opened at 516 East Washington Boulevard, with Bryson as dean. The 1905 graduating class, the College of Physicians and Surgeons' first, had six students. Within four years the college had been elected to membership in the Association of American Medical Colleges.

On August 11, 1909, following a series of meetings, USC President George Finley Bovard, a graduate of USC's first class and its fourth president, asked the university's Board of Trustees to approve a merger with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They complied, and the new College of Physicians and Surgeons, Medical Department of the University of Southern California was ready for the fall term. With Bryson remaining as dean, the college



Early anatomy classes at the medical college were illuminated by light provided by gas jets, which were suspended from the ceiling.

EXCERPT FROM THE FLEXNER REPORT ON THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

Established as an independent school, it suddenly became, in 1909, nominally the medical department of the University of Southern California, when the former medical department of that institution cut loose in order to become the Los Angeles clinical department of the University of California. The seriousness with which the University of Southern California treats medical education may be gathered from this amusing performance.

Entrance requirement: High school graduation or "equivalent."

Attendance: 32

Teaching staff: 41, 28 being professors. The teachers are practicing physicians; no one gives his entire time to the school.

Resources available for maintenance: Fees, amounting to \$4,075 (estimated).

Laboratory facilities: The school is ordinary in type. It possesses a small chemical laboratory, a single laboratory in common for pathology, histology, and bacteriology, with meager equipment and supplies, and no animals; a dissecting room with sufficient anatomical material, and clay for modeling bones; a limited number of wet specimens, and a small number of books in a room that is locked, though opened to students on request. There is no laboratory for physiology or

pharmacology. The building is new, attractive, and fairly well kept.

Clinical facilities: A considerable part of one floor is used for a dispensary. The rooms are poorly equipped and cared for; there is no clinical laboratory. The attendance is very small, for the neighborhood is decidedly well-to-do.

The school adjoins a private hospital in which many of the teachers are interested. It is, however, of no teaching use. The catalogue describes it as "not a charity hospital by any means. ...In fact it is a twentieth century classy hospital." For clinical instruction the students have access to the County Hospital, several miles distant, where the school has the use of 100 beds, holding clinics for senior students two days weekly. In surgery, students witness an operation without taking part in it; in medicine, the students make brief histories, which are, however, no part of the hospital records. Autopsies are done by internes, who have no connection with the medical school. Students are not admitted to the obstetrical ward. Clinical facilities are thus extremely limited, for the management of the hospital is in no essential respect controlled by educational considerations.

Date of visit: May 1909

opened an outpatient clinic in 1913, the faculty was expanded, and by 1914 the entrance requirements were ratcheted up to include one year of undergraduate studies. This was soon increased to two years. By 1918 one year of hospital internship was required, making a total of seven years of college required before an M.D. degree was granted.

Not everyone was impressed, however. In 1910 Abraham Flexner, once the headmaster of a private school in Louisville, Kentucky, produced a landmark report for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*. The influential document, which quickly came to be known as the "Flexner report," was the result of 18 months of personal visits Flexner made to all 155 medical schools in the United States and Canada. In the report he rebuked the schools for their commercialism and deplorable standards.

Flexner used as his quality benchmark the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, founded in 1893, which had combined a German approach to medical research with British traditions of clinical education. Hopkins required a baccalaureate degree for admission, and it had a highly qualified faculty that conducted research, a rigorous four-year curriculum and hospital clerkships with hands-on bedside teaching. Flexner looked for proper lab equipment, libraries, evidence of a school's control of hospitals where faculty



Medical students work in a biology laboratory at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1914, the year World War I began in Europe. Much of what would be learned about treating disease and injury in the ensuing few years would come out of the war.

had a right to teach, adequate financing and full-time faculty. He didn't mince words when it came to reporting what he saw.

Among the outgrowths of the Flexner report were a tightening of state licensing laws in which medical licenses were only granted to graduates of approved schools, and the development of a system of quality ratings by the American Medical Association (AMA). Class A schools were considered acceptable, Class B needed

improvement and Class C schools were inadequate.

After the merger with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, USC received a Class B rating, and the AMA indicated that the rating wouldn't be changed until the school had acquired an endowment of between \$2 million and \$3 million. Although the university tried to raise endowment funds, its efforts fell short. What's more, World War I and the requirements of the

armed services had reduced the ranks of the faculty and student body. The graduating class of 1919 was very small, and there were no applicants for the class entering in 1920. In April 1920 the Board of Trustees announced that the medical school would close. It would not reopen, the board declared, until the university could assure sufficient endowment for a Class A rating.

It would be nearly a decade before their condition could be met.