



A WOMAN'S SPHERE IS WHAT SHE IS BEST FITTED TO DO

An archive of letters from Dr. Consuelo Clark-Stewart to Dr. Elmira Howard, two 19th-century women physicians in Cincinnati, one Black and one White, with the Howard family archive

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A brief prospectus

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Catalogued by P. Scott Brown

**A full printed catalog, including excerpts and summaries of all the Clark family letters is
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A MAJOR, PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN, AMERICAN MEDICAL ARCHIVE

This unprecedented archive documents the interlocking careers of two 19th century Ohio doctors, one white and one Black, and both with distinguished, long careers. Elmira Howard and Consuelo Clark-Stewart were among the first women with medical degrees to practice in the interior of America.

Dr. Clark-Stewart graduated at the top of her class at Boston University's medical school in 1884 and was the first Black resident physician at the affiliated hospital. This archive includes more than one hundred evocative letters (70,000 words), written to Dr. Howard by Dr. Clark-Stewart and other members of the Clark family. They provide the most substantive known account of an African American doctor's life in the 19th century and are one of a handful of extensive sources for the personal and professional life of a Black woman from the era. The archive is notable for Dr. Clark-Stewart's vivid descriptions of racism, sexism, her struggles and triumphs as a physician, and her mental illness.

Dr. Howard's correspondence offers an unparalleled post-Civil War account of an ambitious single mother balancing a desire for a profession and the guilt of leaving her children behind to pursue it. Dr. Howard set up practice in Cincinnati in 1870, after graduating from the New York Medical College for Women. This archive preserves hundreds of letters written to her children over fifty years, her 1890s account book, business cards, canceled checks, a diary kept during a course of advanced study, and dozens of letters from friends, patients, and other physicians.

The remainder of the archive, more than 3000 letters by Dr. Howard's three children and her grandchildren, along with more than 100 identified cabinet card and CDV photographs and several boxes of printed ephemera, provide a granular record of an entrepreneurial white Ohio family in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Clark letters, combined with the Howard family correspondence, which periodically references Dr. Clark-Stewart, makes a full-fledged biography of Consuelo Clark-Stewart possible. By contrast, the groundbreaking biography of her father, *America's First Black Socialist: The Radical Life of Peter H. Clark* by Nikki Taylor (University Press of Kentucky, 2012), drew on fewer than ten letters from the Clark family. So little was known about Dr. Clark-Stewart that she is referenced only twice in the index.

The Howard family preserved this archive for more than a century. It is entirely unknown to scholars and is arguably the most significant 19th century women-in-medicine and one of the most significant African American archives to surface in years. This collection represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance American medical history.

Dr. Elmira Howard



The time has not yet come
for the whites to be brave enough
to call in a colored woman
physician

The Letters of Consuelo Clark
and Her family

Dr. Consuelo Clark-Stewart



INTRODUCTION

“In 1870, after I began the practice of medicine in Cincinnati, Consuelo Clark, then a child ten years old, became a member of my class in the Sunday School of the Unitarian Church... Peter H. Clark and family had long attended this church, and I came in time, to know them well.” This is how Dr. Elmira Howard described her introduction to the young girl who would become her protégé, close professional associate, and most importantly for us today, the recipient of dozens of her letters. Here is a brief account of their story.

ELMIRA HOWARD’S EARLY YEARS

Elmira Young (1841–1921) was born into a large family of at least a dozen children in rural Ohio. Her father was an attorney, and several of her brothers pursued professional careers in the law and medicine. Like her sisters, Elmira became a wife and mother, although not in that order.

As a teenager, she met Jerome Bonaparte Howard (1819–1864), a 40-year-old artist with an ex-wife and a daughter. Elmira and Jerome moved to Cincinnati, where they had a son, Jerome Bird Howard, in 1860. When Elmira married Jerome Bonaparte, on December 12, 1861,¹ she was, perhaps, already pregnant with their second child, Ellen Jeanette (1862–1909), who was called “Ella.” Elmira was seven months pregnant with her third child when her husband volunteered for the Union Army. Elmira certainly knew the risks of the Civil War—two of her brothers had died and a third had been seriously wounded early in the conflict.

Jerome Bonaparte’s luck was no better. Within just a few months of enlisting, a Confederate patrol captured him. He went to the notorious prison at Andersonville and soon died from disease. This tragedy changed Elmira Howard’s life.

MEDICAL SCHOOL

As a young widow with three children under five years old, Elmira seemed to have had few options, but she made a choice very few single mothers—then or now—pursue: she went off to study medicine. To do this, she left her children in the care of her parents and younger sisters and took her widow’s pension to the New York Medical College for Women.

Publicly, Dr. Howard explained her motivation by saying that “her little girl was a cripple, and the

¹ Huron County, Ohio, Marriage Record no.1966, license issued December 11, 1861.



Consuelo Clark as a medical student

study of medicine was suggested by that fact.”² In a letter in this archive, she offered her son Jerome a different explanation:

I think sometimes I am cheating myself to compel this separation from you and so take out of my life the crowning grace of a woman’s life, the motherhood that makes life to all women such an earnest true life. And as I study it all over I think it is for the best—for if I should give up and come home, I could do nothing but just to care for you, teach you, make your clothes, attend to the thousand little necessities that grandma and Aunt Cele now do. I could not be earning anything and putting myself in the position to by and by give the advantages that money can only give you... To do all this for you I must give up the joy of giving the mother’s care to you personally... and put all my strength in the work of getting money and position so I may by and by get for you all that which money only can buy.

The medical school (now the New York Medical College) taught homeopathy, an alternative medical system based on the idea that “like cures like.” Homeopaths prescribed medicines that caused the same symptom they were trying to cure, which could have led to severe complications but for the fact that they also believed that the more diluted a dose was, the more effective it would be.

Today homeopathy is considered pseudoscientific, but at the time Elmira entered medical school, there were hardly any effective medicines beyond quinine and morphine. Most treatments offered by “regular” doctors were as ineffective as those given by homeopaths, and many treatments, like the lead-based ointment that killed Jack London, and some therapies, like bloodletting, were actively harmful. Homeopaths learned the same anatomy and physiology as regular physicians, they performed surgery with the latest techniques, and in almost every way but prescription medicines, trained identically to regular doctors.

Elmira ultimately spent five or six years away from her children, except for brief vacations to visit them. She keenly felt the conflict between raising a family and pursuing a profession and expressed it as well as any writer in the 19th century in a letter to her eldest boy:

Do you think Mama is a long time answering your nice letter? Well Mama has a great deal to do and does not have very much time to write letters, but sometimes she just puts away her books and thinks that Lecture may wait for another time and she’ll just write anyway, and so I have put away my Theory and Practice and if Prof Millard finds your Mama blunders this afternoon when he asks her “what is the pathology of Neurosis Mrs. Howard?” she can just lay the blame upon your little shoulders and not upon mine. Now what do you think of that?

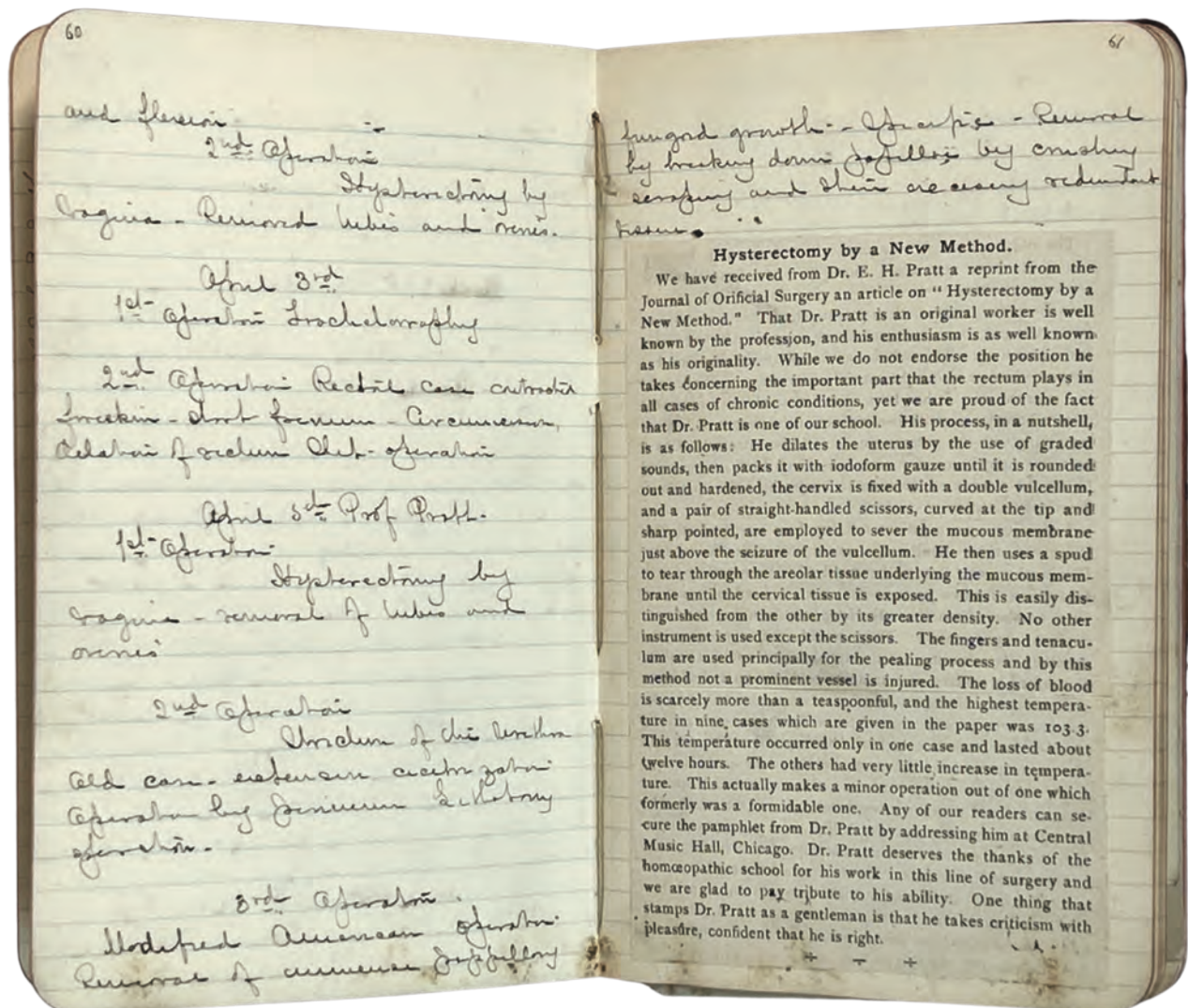
² *A Woman of the Century* (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893).



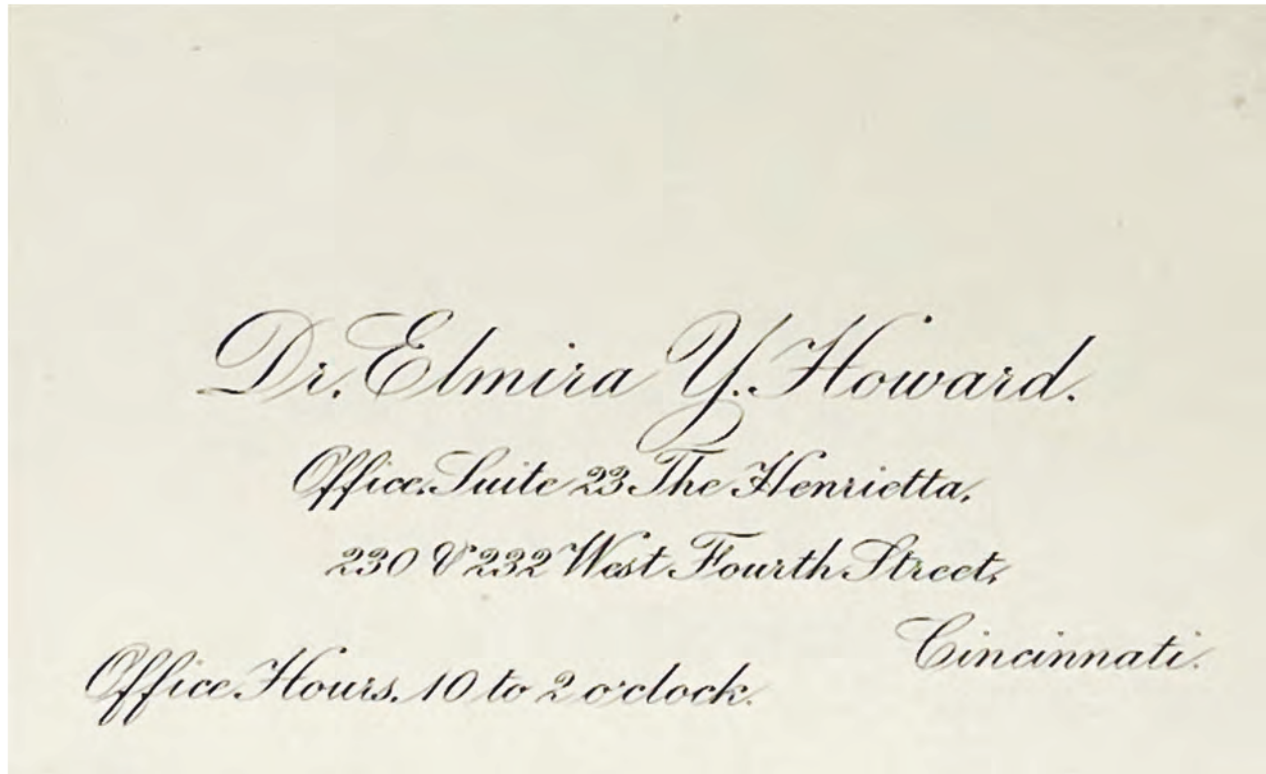
Dr. Elmira Howard's portrait for *A Woman of the Century*

But Mama does not often fail when she is questioned and he might be surprised and ask the why of it, then I just have to say, "Prof Millard, I was writing to my little son the hour that I should have studied up your lecture and am sorry I am not prepared." Then he would say, "Madam, you must forget you have sons when you take upon yourself the study of Medicine." Well I don't forget it, hourly my darling babies are with me.

Elmira graduated in 1870, one of five women earning a degree that year. The valedictorian of her class was Susan Smith (later Susan McKinney Steward), the third Black woman to earn a medical degree. Consuelo knew of their connection and wrote about Dr. Steward in one of her letters from medical school.



Elmira Howard's journal



Dr. Elmira Howard's calling card

SETTING UP PRACTICE IN CINCINNATI

Dr. Howard returned to Cincinnati and opened her practice. She may have been the first woman physician in the city; she was definitely the first woman with a successful practice there. She joined the Unitarian Church, where she met the Clark family. Her own children remained with their grandparents. Dr. Howard's practice took off almost immediately, attracting as patients members of both the Procter and Gamble families, the owners of Procter & Gamble.

During the second year of her practice, Dr. Howard missed her son Jerome's twelfth birthday. In her letter of apology, she described her financial success which, while promising, remained insufficient to allow her to reunite with her children.

The week past has been the busiest week I have ever put in since I have been practicing medicine and earned more money this week just past than ever in any week before. Over one hundred dollars for the past week's work stands on my account book and I feel very sure of getting every cent of it...

But though I have earned over a hundred dollars, there has never been a time hardly when I was so run ashore for money. I have just seventy cents in my portmanteau but this afternoon I shall go down and draw my pension.

One hundred dollars in a single week was a remarkable income for a physician at a time when the average doctor made \$1,000 in a year.³

Soon, Dr. Howard had saved enough money to pursue an advanced course in Vienna, Austria, at the Allgemeines Krankenhaus (Vienna General Hospital). During a few months as an intern in the public hospital's maternity ward, Dr. Howard attended more births than a typical American physician would see in a career.

When she returned to Cincinnati, Dr. Howard was finally able to bring her children to live with her. The years of separation and her insistence that they write to her inculcated a lifetime letter writing habit. Some 2,000 letters written to their mother survive in this archive, dating from their childhood in the 1870s to her death in 1921. These letters offer the answer to the question of whether Dr. Howard's sacrifice—missing out on “the joy of giving the mother's care” to her children so that they could have “all that which money only can buy”—was worth it.

CONSUELO CLARK STUDIES MEDICINE

Sometime in 1879, Dr. Howard, one of Cincinnati's most experienced and well-trained specialists in the diseases of women and children, agreed to prepare Consuelo Clark to attend medical school. Dr. Howard later summarized her training. “At the age of nineteen, Consuelo Clark came into my office as a student. and in two years completed the prescribed course of reading and entered the Boston University School of Medicine. She had had the usual High School education and a two-year course in the Cincinnati University School of Design.” In Dr. Howard's opinion, Consuelo “was well fitted both by natural ability and preliminary education, to distinguish herself in her chosen profession.”

Consuelo may have chosen Boston University because one of Elmira Howard's medical school classmates, Mary Jane Safford (1834–1891), one of the first women gynecologists in the US, held a faculty position there. At the time, the school was a homeopathic institution with an affiliated hospital. According to Consuelo, the Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital “was established by women” and was “mainly supported by their contributions.” Both the school and the hospital staff were coeducational and interracial, unlike many “regular” medical schools.

When Consuelo applied to medical school (and for decades after), the medical establishment in general, and the American Medical Association (AMA) in particular, actively discriminated against

³ Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of Medicine*, second edition, Basic Books, 2017, p. 84, citing an 1871 report.

both black and women doctors. In 1872, the AMA denied Howard University's affiliation request, officially not because it was a Black college but because it admitted women.⁴ Homeopathic medical societies, medical schools, and hospitals typically allowed and often encouraged women and people of color to join.

Consuelo arrived in Boston in the fall of 1881. Upon presenting herself at the Boston University Medical School, she easily passed her entrance examinations in every subject but Latin, a defect that she cured within a few weeks of arriving. In addition to studying, attending lectures, and undertaking practical training, Consuelo regularly made time to write to Dr. Howard, and her letters in this archive sketch a remarkable picture of her medical school experience, possibly the only such sustained account by a Black student in the 19th century.

Like most medical students, Consuelo found her anatomy course hard to stomach. "I spent this afternoon, in the dissecting room," she wrote to Dr. Howard a month into her studies. "Of course, it was at first very revolting to me, but as I did not faint or get sick, as several of my comrades did, I think I overcame my first impression very well." When she became more accustomed to the bodies, she threw herself into the study of anatomy as she would with every aspect of her medical training, "Since I began the work, I have done nothing else day or night—waking or sleeping but dissect—dissect."

Over time, Consuelo's initial elation and excitement at being in medical school began to dim as social pressures took their toll. In early 1882, Consuelo introduced the subject of sexism for the first time in her letters, reporting on an uprising among her male classmates because a woman had been appointed the resident physician at the teaching hospital, a post previously open only to male students. "This seems to have completely upset the men and they have held indignation meetings—and passed resolutions demanding a reconsideration of the matter." In that same letter, Consuelo mentioned a bout of depression—described as "a blue state, approaching the hue of indigo"—for the first time, a harbinger of the mental illness that would lead to her confinement in a mental institution for the final years of her life.

At the end of her second year, Consuelo informed Dr. Howard that she planned to apply for the position of resident physician at the teaching hospital, even though "the test has never been fairly made of a colored applicant." She won the position only to have the hospital trustees float the idea that perhaps they weren't going to be able fund the position after all. When Consuelo confronted members of the medical board about this "being a dodge of the Trustee Board to get out of confirming a colored woman physician," they resented her suggestion. Consuelo's experience went

⁴ "The American Medical Association and Race" by Robert B. Baker in *AMA Journal of Ethics*, June 2014.



Dr. Consuelo Clark

downhill from there.

In the end, Consuelo was allowed to take the resident position, but it almost proved to be too much. “I have been living for the past 3 months in a perfect little hell, in this hospital work,” she wrote Dr. Howard. “Continually driven & criticised & hagged at,” Consuelo was filled with self-doubt and felt the constant pressure to prove herself. “I am on trial, both with reference to race & sex & I must stand it or give up for good,” she wrote. “To give up now, would be rank cowardice & desertion.”

Despite the pressures of mastering the complexities of practical medicine combined with continually having to prove herself, Consuelo graduated at the top of her class in 1884. As Dr. Howard later remembered it, Consuelo “held the highest record of Scholarship... and received her diploma, the gold medal and, in competitive examinations, the hospital internship.” Her father saw it differently, writing to Dr. Howard as his daughter’s mental health deteriorated near the end of her life, “I think she has not been perfectly sane at any time since her return from Boston.”

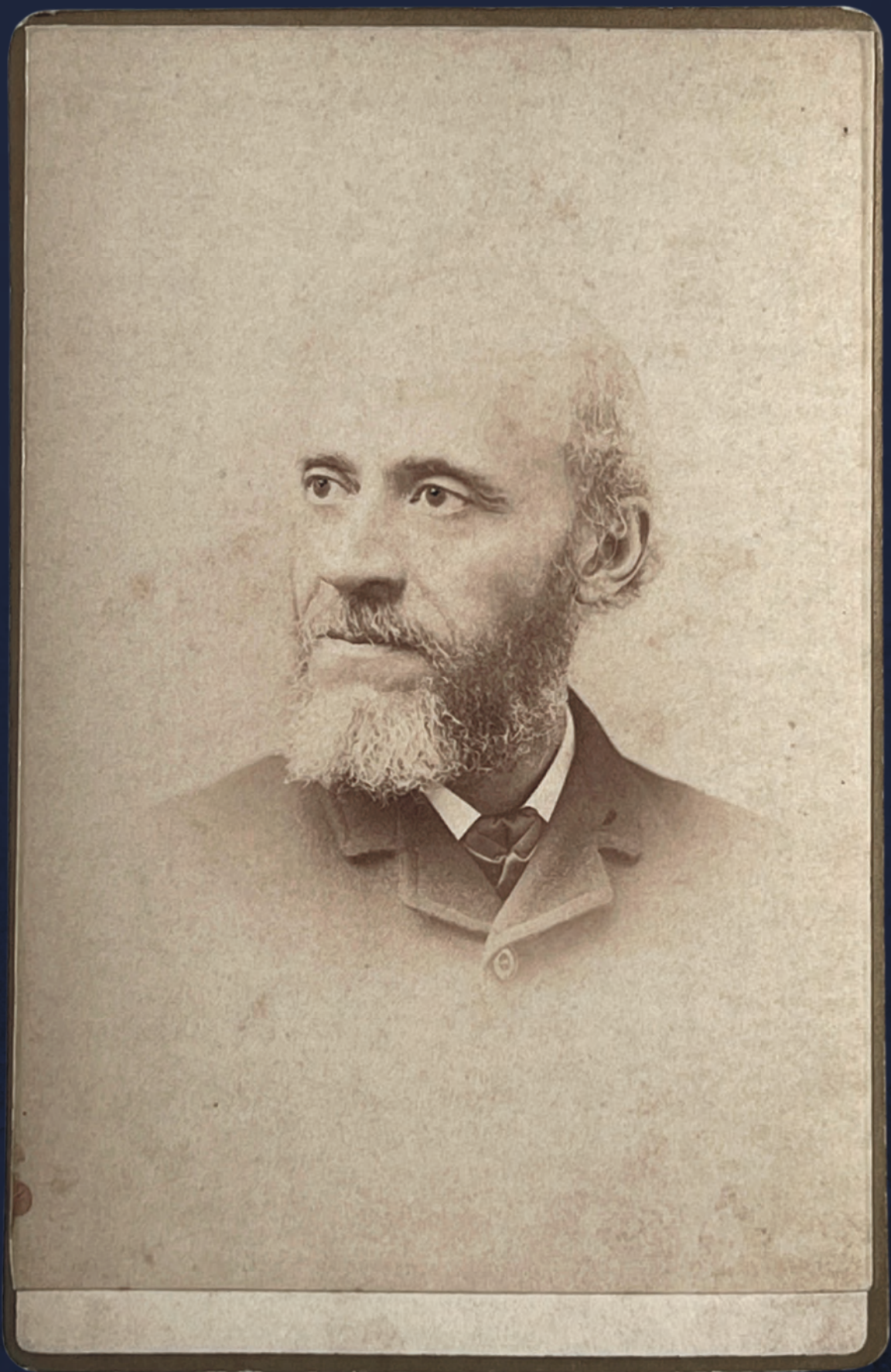
CONSUELO CLARK, M.D.

On arriving back in Cincinnati in mid-1884 to set up her practice as Dr. Consuelo Clark, she struggled to find paying patients. “The most demoralized piece of humanity in Cincinnati, is your protégé Doctor Consuelo Clark,” Peter Clark wrote to Dr. Howard. “She is utterly discouraged.”

Gradually, with persistence and Dr. Howard’s help, Dr. Clark’s practice began to take root. Her success as a physician was assured in 1887 when Dr. Howard fell ill and spent a year recuperating out of town. Dr. Howard turned her practice over to Dr. Clark and cajoled and badgered her patients into continuing to see Dr. Clark.

Even Peter Clark, who was bitter over the lack of racial justice in America, could hardly believe it. “What shall I say of the nobility of soul which prompted you to defy the laws of caste into which you were born and take that colored girl into your office, guide and encourage her in her studies, send her forth with your endorsement, divide your clients with her, take her to your family and your heart?” Consuelo’s sister, Ernestine, cemented the friendship between the Clarks and Elmira Howard, naming one of her daughters Elmira Howard Nesbit.

During 1887 and 1888, Dr. Clark wrote long, detailed medical letters to Dr. Howard about their mutual patients. While Dr. Clark was a homeopath, she was not doctrinaire. She prescribed quinine and kept detailed records on its effects. She gave patients opiates when needed. She described in detail to Dr. Howard her first use of Antefebrein, the first commercially available fever-reducing medication that actually worked. She also related a long conversation with a patient about newly discovered microbes that cause disease and the implications of that discovery.



Dr. Clark's descriptions of social issues are stunning in their contemporary relevance and for her ability to write about them with humor. She wrote about passing for white, patients realizing she was colored for the first time, the patronizing attitudes of male doctors, the potential harm to her reputation when she was called out to see a prostitute, her efforts to hide a pregnancy from a young woman's family, and the willingness of white patients to see her in her office and their discomfort when she made house calls.

In 1888, she wrote about what we would call *déjà vu*, a common delusion associated with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses:

Some of the most peculiar things happened to me. I know you will laugh because it seems so ridiculous, but—do you know there were days & days when I could never think of a person or of a series of events, but that I met that person or saw the events happen just as I had thought or dreamed them, no matter how foreign they or the person might be to my routine life. It happened again & again so many times that it made me nervous & ... I was afraid of my own thoughts.

Dr. Clark continued with a characteristically funny observation that she wasn't interested in having superpowers, "I have no desire to be endowed with any new faculties and am perfectly contented to live on with what I already have."

LATER YEARS

Consuelo married William Stewart, an up-and-coming Black attorney, in 1890, and they moved to his hometown, Youngstown, Ohio. Initially, Dr. Clark struggled with the expectation that she would give up medicine when she married. Her surviving letters do not explain how the couple ultimately decided that she would keep working and that she would keep her name, becoming Dr. Consuelo Clark-Stewart.

After Dr. Clark-Stewart left Cincinnati, Dr. Howard's practice continued successfully. Her children grew up. Jerome became a partner in the Phonographic Institute, the official promoter of Pitman shorthand in the United States. Hiram pursued dentistry, briefly



William Stewart

sharing an office with his mother. He gave that up to work on electrical equipment, eventually securing a job running the municipal electric supply in Palmyra, Missouri. Ella, always plagued with ill-health, bounced around to various family member's houses. Strength permitting, she worked for the Phonographic Institute. In the late 1890s, Dr. Howard began a period of semi-retirement, relocating to Palmyra. Ella followed, bought the local bookstore with a close friend, and ran it until she died of consumption in 1909.

MENTAL ILLNESS

Dr. Howard's correspondence with the Clarks declined during this period, although Dr. Clark-Stewart visited Palmyra a few times, and Dr. Howard visited Peter Clark at least once in St. Louis, where he had moved with his daughter Ernestine. Their regular letters resumed in 1905, mostly with Peter Clark writing to Dr. Howard about his daughter's deteriorating mental state and her confinement in an insane asylum. Consuelo's husband also wrote agonizing letters to Dr. Howard, asking in one about "the cruel neglect of her friends and relatives" who did not explain Consuelo's true condition to him before they were married.

In the one letter from Dr. Clark-Stewart during this period, written during a short period when she was released to live at home, she described conditions in the mental hospital:

You understand, of course, that my stay at Massillon State Hospital was not a paradise. I was choked and gagged and beaten & dragged along the floor by the hair of my head, and given terrific blows in the abdomen with the doubled fist of my attendant, whenever I attempted to go to the water-closet at night. Other patients, who had less courage than I had would urinate on the floor.

Dr. Clark-Stewart died at Massillon State Hospital in 1910.

The Clark family continued to write to Dr. Howard periodically until her death in 1921. One of the last letters announced the marriage of her "namesake Elmira" to a white man. The couple had to tie the knot in East St. Louis, Illinois, because Missouri had "a law forbidding such marriages."

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CONTINUING SIX DAYS.

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MUSIC,
ADDRESS, Judge P. Mallon.
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ADDRESS, by Mayor Smith.

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Cincinnati, Jan. 1st, 1886

Doctor Elmira Howard

My dear Madam:-

I have been wanting to see and talk with you for a month or more, but as often as inclination has pointed me to your door, some over-mastering duty has dragged me in a direction opposite.

I wanted to let you know how wonderfully changed Consuelo is. She seems so much happier, takes an interest in home affairs and to everybody, but me is very kind.

She, I think, has given up all idea of ever being a doctor and I presume the conviction of her failure in that direction is the thing which so embittered her in the past, and I suppose her lack of kindness to me, comes from the thought that I pushed her forward to a career which she has concluded is a conspicuous failure.

She is very sharp in her criticisms of me and of anything I do and we do not quarrel simply because I never reply to her criticisms.

I confess that her failure has been a bitter thing for me. It has driven home upon me two things which I knew were

enough before, and which I was a fool for not remembering. The first of these things is, that the status of the negro is so fixed in this country that it may almost be almost deemed irrevocable. The second is, that the negro himself as a basis for any honorable effort is utterly worthless and unreliable. The first of these considerations makes it impossible for her to hope for patronage among whites and the second of them makes the patronage among the colored people worthless. She seems to have seen this fully and is renewing her school text books and preparing to look out for a situation as a teacher.

I am writing this at her desk (she has gone to Glendale) and to write I have to push aside a number of books which she is using in her reviews.

You may perhaps think that my political position has something to do with this failure, but it is not so. The women of the family hold as high positions as ever and for that matter the men also.

I send with this a circular (badly spelled) by which you will see that the family has not lost social consideration and therefore Consuelo's failure does not come from any lack of social standing.

I write this because I felt sure that you would be pleased to have the results of other observation than your own

on her mental state.

Finally, if she continue to improve, there is no reason why she should not be to a degree happy. She has books, all congenial to which middle class people are accustomed, and if she, her sister and mother will be forbearing with each other, and less critical, they will attain a very human happiness.

I cannot close this without telling you that I earnestly wish that Elvira's matrimonial venture may prove a happy one. I do not congratulate you, because to congratulate is to signify. My life ventures have so often gone ^{awry} ~~astray~~ that I never congratulate a friend at the beginning of any venture, but I hope with you that all may turn out well.

I am, as ever, sincerely yours
Piled H. Clark



Certificate of Contributing Membership
CALAMATION COMPANY
OF CINCINNATI

Howard Family Archive
Box 1
Correspondence, by Writer
LINSLEY, Charles H.
CLARK, Anna M.
CLARK, Edward
HOLLAND, John
HOWARD, Emma (Jan 1870)

Howard Family Archive
Box 18
Correspondence, by Writer
LONG, Anna (late Young)
YOUNG, Angelina (late Martin)

Howard Family Archive
Box 3
Correspondence, by Writer
CROFT, Jean (late Howard, Helen Jane) cont. -
HOWARD, Ellen "Ella"

Howard Family Archive
Box 19
Correspondence, by Writer
HOWARD, Elizabeth (late Campbell)
HOWARD, Rosa (late Brown) / Brant

Howard Family Archive
Box 7
Correspondence, by Writer
HOWARD, Jerome B. cont.

Howard Family Archive
Box 8
Correspondence, by Writer
HOWARD, Jerome B. cont.

Howard Family Archive
Box 11
Correspondence, by Writer
CROFT, Sarah

Howard Family Archive
Box 16
Correspondence, by Writer
WILSON, George & Sons
WILSON, George (late Robert & son)
WILSON, George
WILSON, John
WILSON, Mary
WILSON, William

Howard Family Archive
Box 20
Correspondence, by Writer
WILSON, George

Howard Family Archive
Box 19
Correspondence, by Writer
PUMPHREY, C.A.
SANDFORD, George
WILSON, Lewis
WILSON, Mary
WILSON, Lewis

Howard Family Archive
Box 10
CROFT, Sarah
WILSON, George
WILSON, Mary
WILSON, William

Howard Family Archive
Box 22
Correspondence
UNSORTED 8 (late 1940)

Howard Family Archive
Box 21
Correspondence
UNSORTED 1 (late 1940)

Howard Family Archive
Box 11
Correspondence, by Writer
HOWARD, Sophia cont. -
VARIOUS

Howard Family Archive
Box 12
Correspondence, by Writer
VARIOUS cont.

Howard Family Archive
Box 13
Correspondence, by Writer
VARIOUS cont. -
YOUNG, Stephen

Howard Family Archive
Box 23
Photography Books & Ephemera

Howard Family Archive
Box 26
HOWARD, Hiram M.
Business & Personal Epistol

Howard Family Archive
Box 29
Photographs I

HIGHLIGHTS
FROM THE
HOWARD-CLARK
ARCHIVE



CLARK FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE — 110 LETTERS, 5 CABINET CARD PHOTOGRAPHS

These letters by Dr. Consuelo Clark-Stewart (1860–1910; 66 letters), her father Peter H. Clark (1829–1925; 29 letters); her sister, Ernestine Nesbit (1855–1928; 10 letters); her husband, William Stewart (1864–1958; 2 letters); and her niece Elmira Howard Nesbit (1887–1965; 2 letters), total more than 70,000 words. The Clark family letters are insightful, full of detail, and for personal letters, exceptionally well-written. They address issues of race, class, and gender with remarkable frankness. They also offer glimpses into Dr. Consuelo Clark-Stewart's mental illness, which contributed to her early death. The Clark letters span 1881 to 1921 and are concentrated in three periods:



Peter H. Clark

- 1881 to 1884, when Clark-Stewart was attending medical school at Boston University;
- 1887 to 1888, when she took over Dr. Howard's medical practice in Cincinnati;
- 1905 to 1910, when she was committed to an insane asylum and died.

There is very little surviving material by Black women from the latter part of the 19th century. For professional Black women, there are just three sources: Alice Dunbar Nelson's diary, Mary Church Terrell's papers, and Ida B. Wells' diaries (1885–1887), all of which have been published and are the subject of considerable scholarship.

Among Black medical archives, these letters are probably unique. Dr. Clark-Stewart describes her time in medical school, as one of few women in a co-educational program and the only person of color. After graduation, Dr. Clark-Stewart took over Dr. Howard's practice for a year beginning in 1887, and she wrote long, detailed letters about their shared patients. Due to norms about patient confidentiality, detailed medical letters from women physicians in the 19th century are uncommon (the largest surviving collection is in the Drs. Emily and Elizabeth Blackwell papers at the Library of Congress). Outside of the Howard-Clark archive, such letters from early Black doctors are virtually unknown.

LETTERS FROM ELMIRA Y. HOWARD — 300 LETTERS, 6 CABINET CARD PHOTOGRAPHS

The oldest of Elmira Y. Howard's three children was four years old when her husband died in a Confederate prisoner of war camp in 1864. This archive includes about 300 letters written by Dr. Howard (1841–1921) to her children. The most significant letters date from the 1860s and early 1870s, when she was in medical school, pursuing advanced study in Austria, and beginning her practice in Cincinnati.

In her letters, Dr. Howard periodically mentions Consuelo Clark. The later letters, written at frequent intervals to her adult children, appropriately do not discuss her patients, but they offer insight into her reading and book collecting (she collected women's history in particular), family affairs, and her exacting personality.

MEDICAL ARCHIVE OF ELMIRA Y. HOWARD

A few remnants from Dr. Howard's medical practice survive, including a 76-page manuscript diary from the Chicago Homoeopathic Medical College's 1895 post-graduate course, a printed course of study for her work in midwifery and gynecology in Vienna in the early 1870s, a few business cards, canceled checks, several medical pamphlets, perhaps 50 letters from other doctors and some of her patients, her Missouri medical license, and an account book from her practice in the early 1890s. Dr. Howard practiced medicine for 25 years in Cincinnati and for another ten years in semi-retirement in Palmyra, Missouri (where her son Hiram and his family lived).

LETTERS OF THE EXTENDED HOWARD FAMILY — 3,000+ LETTERS

This archive includes more than 2000 letters written to Dr. Howard from her parents, siblings, and children. It also includes hundreds of letters written among those same correspondents. Another thousand letters were written to or from Dr. Howard's grandchildren. The majority of the extended Howard family letters date from the 1840s to the 1940s, with the bulk in the first part of the 20th century.

Among the most significant of these letters are those that mention Dr. Consuelo Clark. The Clark and Howard families were close for many years. Dr. Clark-Stewart's sister, Ernestine Nesbit, even named one of her daughters Elmira Howard Nesbit. Dr. Clark treated members of the extended Howard family, one of whom was given the name Consuelo.

Jerome Bird Howard (1860–1923), Dr. Howard's eldest son, became a partner in the Phonographic Institute, the Cincinnati-based business promoting Pitman shorthand in the United States. Dr.

Howard was a shareholder, and her other children worked in the business. Jerome was active in Republican politics and Cincinnati civic affairs. Many of his thousand-plus letters to his mother discuss these topics. A number of postcards and notes from Jerome are written in shorthand.

Ellen Jeanette “Ella” Howard (1862–1909), Elmira’s daughter, had a debilitating condition from birth. As an adult she was a corporate officer of the Phonographic Institute and worked there, off and on, for several decades. Like her mother, she later moved to Palmyra, Missouri, to join her youngest brother, Hiram, and his family. Ella may have had a long-term “romantic friendship” with another employee of the Phonographic Institute.

The youngest Howard sibling, Hiram M. (1864–1951) was born after his father left for the Civil War. He initially pursued dentistry (a few pieces of related ephemera survive) and shared an office with his mother. He gave that up and became an installer, repairer, and inventor of electrical equipment. He later worked for the City of Palmyra, sat on the City Council, and served as City Clerk. Many of his letters discuss his professional life. He and his wife, Rosa, had three children and adopted five of Rosa’s half-siblings; there is extensive correspondence to and from this generation.

NOTABLE HOWARD FAMILY CORRESPONDENTS

In the Howard family archive are many letters from notable writers from outside the family, including:

Parker Pillsbury — 45 letters; 2 CDV photographs

Abolitionist and advocate for women’s rights. More than 100 manuscript pages, written to Jerome Bird Howard and Elmira Y. Howard. Elmira and Parker boarded in the same house when she was in medical school, and they remained in touch for the rest of Pillsbury’s life.

Henry Joseph “Joe” Breuer — 98 letters, plus ephemera

An artist known for his California paintings; member of the Bohemian Club. Several hundred pages, mostly written to Jerome Bird Howard, with enclosed photographs, drawings, and ephemera.



Parker Pillsbury

Lucian F. Plympton and C. A. Plimpton — 17 letters

Plympton was a Cincinnati architect; his mother, C. A. Plimpton, accompanied Dr. Howard to Vienna in the early 1870s; noted for her art pottery.

Charles W. Chesnutt — 4 letters; book prospectus

Written to Jerome Bird Howard, discussing Chesnutt's books and their mutual friend, Parker Pillsbury. Chesnutt made his living running a court reporting company and seems to have known Jerome Howard through the Phonographic Institute.

Mary H. Gamble — 25 letters

A patient of Dr. Howard's and Dr. Clark-Stewart; wife of David Gamble, heir to Proctor and Gamble. She is best known for the Gamble House, the Arts and Crafts masterpiece in Pasadena, California.

Laura J. Wylie — 9 letters, 2 cabinet cards

English professor at Vassar, lesbian, and founder of the Equal Suffrage League. How she met Elmira Y. Howard is uncertain.

PHONOGRAPHY

The archive includes one box of books and ephemera related to Pitman shorthand.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND EPHEMERA

The archive includes several hundred photographs plus five photo albums of the Howard family as well as four boxes of ephemera. In the early 20th century, Dr. Howard's namesake granddaughter, Elmira R. Howard (a fashion journalist who published as Daphne Carr), identified most of the photographs on the back of the images; at a later date someone else provided identification information for the rest of the photographs.

ARCHIVE ORGANIZATION

Each of the Clark family letters and the letters of Elmira Y. Howard, Charles W. Chesnutt, Parker Pillsbury, Laura Wylie, and "Joe" Breuer are in separate paper sleeves, sorted by date in archival manila file folders. The letters from Dr. Howard's children and parents are in separate paper sleeves, grouped by author in archival manila folders, roughly sorted. The other letters are sorted by writer and housed in paper sleeves or archival boxes.

PROVENANCE

Hiram M. and Rosa Howard moved to Palmyra, Missouri, in the early 1890s. They lived at 324 W. North Street. Over the years, Dr. Elmira Howard, Ellen “Ella” Howard, and Jerome Bird Howard all lived in Palmyra house. Dr. Howard lived there for more than two decades. She returned to the Cincinnati area a few years before she died, but she seems to have left most of her papers in Palmyra. All three of her children were living at the family compound in Palmyra when they died. Hiram M. Howard lived until 1951, when the house passed to his son, Hiram S. Howard and then to his granddaughter, Virginia Burdine. Burdine died in 2018.

The contents of the house were sold at auction on July 25 and August 1, 2020, by Sparks Auction Service in Edina, Missouri. Most of the letters in this archive were acquired at the auction by _____, who purchased many lots at the sale. He subsequently sold the letters and photographs to _____ a Civil War specialist. [The Civil War specialist] also acquired a few photographs and pieces of ephemera that initially went to other buyers at the Sparks sale. [His] interest in the archive was the letters written by Elmira Y. Howard’s husband, Jerome Bonaparte Howard, during the Civil War, which he has retained.

In November 2021, Downtown Brown Books acquired the archive from [The Civil War specialist], by private treaty sale. The complete provenance will be provided to prospective buyers.



Howard family books and papers at auction

The time has not yet

The time has not yet come
for the whites to be brave enough
to call in a colored woman
physician

WALL

OSTC
ASS

