

Louis Henry Severance (1838–1913)

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PROLOGUE

Yonsei University College of Medicine and Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, which have a close relationship through Louis Henry Severance and Dr. Alfred Irving Ludlow, have decided to publish a review article series jointly edited by the two institutions in memory of these two figures in history.

A considerable number of foreigners appear in modern Korean history. While most of their names have disappeared from history, a few still persist in Korean society; the name 'Severance' is one. This article will introduce who this figure is and how could his name be firmly established as an unforgettable name in Korean history.

WHO IS SEVERANCE?

Louis Henry Severance was born in Cleveland, OH, USA on August 1, 1838 to Solomon L. Severance and Mary H. Long. Unfortunately, his father, Solomon L. Severance died a month before the birth of Severance, and he grew up in his maternal grandparent's house. His maternal grandfather was the first physician in Cleveland, and there were many physicians in his paternal and maternal family, as well as his wife's family. His mother, Mary H. Long was committed to mission work and participated in the anti-slavery movement. Young Severance seemed to be considerably influenced by his mother's activities. Severance did not enter university after graduating from high school and joined the Commercial Bank in Cleveland at age 18

in 1856.¹ Around this time, he met Fanny Benedict through a church friend, and they married in 1862. His son, John Severance, was born in May of the following year. With the Civil War reaching its peak, Severance became a 100-day Union army volunteer in the defense of Washington D.C. The Commercial Bank where he worked financed John D. Rockefeller's oil business, and he went into the oil business himself after resigning from the bank where he had worked for 8 years, considering the promise of the oil business. In 1864, he moved to Titusville, Pennsylvania, as oil boom town, and conducted business there for 10 years. His two daughters, Elizabeth and Anne Belle, were born in 1865 and 1868, respectively. While his business flourished in Titusville, his wife died in 1874. After this, he went into liquidation and returned to his hometown of Cleveland. Severance's brother, Solon, raised his nephew and nieces, whose mother had died, as his own children.

In 1876, Severance joined Standard Oil as treasurer, and he became a major shareholder of Standard Oil over his lifetime. While working in the oil company, he founded another company mining sulfur, and this business was also a huge success. Severance, who amassed great riches, retired in 1894, and remarried Florence, the only daughter of Stephen Harkness, who was the second largest shareholder of Standard Oil, in the same year. Unfortunately, Florence died within a year of the marriage.

After retirement, Severance devoted to using his wealth for education and mission. He was a trustee of the College of Wooster, Oberlin College, and Western Reserve University, and he donated a large sum of money for the development of these colleges. There are still many traces of his donations to these colleges. Severance, a devout Presbyterian Christian, made efforts to directly support churches and overseas Presbyterian missions. Thanks to his special interests in overseas missions, a hospital named after Severance could be founded in Seoul. This is described in more detail below. He passed away on June 25, 1913. After the death of Severance, his son John and his daughter Elizabeth honored the wishes of their father and continued the charity work started by their father.

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SEVERANCE MEETS KOREA

Korea became a meaningful name to Severance for first time on April 30, 1900. On that day, he was attending the Ecumenical Conference of Missions held in Carnegie Hall, New York, along with L. E. Holden, president of the College of Wooster. There, he heard a presentation entitled 'Comity in Medical Mission' by Dr. Oliver R. Avison, who had come from Korea. The main points of Avison's presentation were as follows: seven missionary doctors are serving in Seoul, Korea. The small medical clinics throughout the city are staffed with one or two doctors due to manpower constraints, and the operation thereof is inefficient. Avison stated that if a large-scale hospital where all missionary doctors could work together is established in Seoul, the effect of medical missionary activities could be much greater.²

Severance who was deeply impressed by the presentation of Avison made up his mind to establish a hospital in Seoul. After the presentation, Severance met separately with Avison and talked more about the situation in Seoul and the necessity of a hospital. At that time, Avison showed a hospital design prepared by Henry B. Gordon, his friend and an architect from Toronto, and said that the hospital could accommodate 40 patients and about 10000 dollars would be required for the construction of hospital. Severance showed no intentions to offer a donation on the spot; after a while, however, he endowed the Northern Presbyterian mission with a hospital construction fund of 10000 dollars without notifying Avison. At the end of May 1900, Avison met Severance at the general assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church held in Saint Louis, and expressed gratitude to him for his donation. Severance replied, "You are no happier to receive it than I am to give it."³

Although Severance made a big donation for the construction of a hospital, there were many obstacles to the completion of the new hospital. Firstly, missionaries who were serving in Korea, especially Pyongyang, opposed building a new hospital

on the grounds that Christianity and churches may be regarded simply as charities, if a large and luxurious hospital is built.⁴ Thus, they insisted that only 5000 dollars should be used for the construction of hospital and the rest of 5000 dollars for missionary work. The New York mission that did not know the local situation accepted their claim and decided to use the donation by dividing it in half. Avison appealed to the mission headquarter in opposition of the unfair decision, and informed Severance of this situation. On hearing the news, Severance complained to the mission of the decision. He said that he would donate only the amount of 5000 dollars for use in building a hospital, because his donation was for the construction of hospital and no other purpose. As a result, all 10000 dollars would be used to build a new hospital as originally planned. Secondly, there was difficulty in selecting a hospital site. Emperor Gojong, who learned of the construction of hospital, tried to help with the selection of a hospital site, but the site selection was delayed due to uncooperative bureaucrats. Severance worried about the delayed establishment of the hospital and donated an additional 5000 dollars for purchasing a site to hasten the building process, obviating the need for government assistance. Although there were many problems during its construction, Severance Hospital, the first modern western-style hospital in Korea, finally opened its doors on September 23, 1904.⁵ Mr. Severance, a donor, did not attend the opening ceremony of the hospital. He visited a new hospital with Dr. Alfred Irving Ludlow (1875–1961), his family practitioner in September 1907 (Fig. 1), three years after the hospital opened (Fig. 2). He paid a visit to the hospital as part of his tour of the Presbyterian mission stations in Asia.⁶ Severance contributed to school buildings in Seoul, as well as several cities in China. The purpose of visiting Seoul was to check on its condition and to make up for deficiencies, in addition to looking around the new hospital building. While he was satisfied with the established hospital, he also discovered insufficient parts. For example, the new hospital building had rooms for medical treatment, but did not have spaces for the education of medical students. For this reason, Severance donated another 30000 dollars so that a school building could be constructed in 1913.⁷ Additionally, Severance knew that Avison



Fig. 1. Mr. Severance's visit to Severance Hospital in Seoul (1907). From the left Dr. Ludlow, Mr. Severance, Dr. Avison.



Fig. 2. Severance Hospital (1904).

was struggling with running the hospital, so he dispatched Dr. J. W. Hirst (1864–1952) through the Mission Board at his own expense.⁸ Therewith, Severance Hospital could attain internal stability in both medical treatment and education, thanks to an excellent assistant who was dispatched by Severance.

Dr. Ludlow, an excellent surgeon who graduated from the School of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University and served as a professor at the same university, participated in an operation at the new hospital during his stay in Seoul. Upon this opportunity, he volunteered for a missionary after returning to America. He left behind remarkable achievements in medical treatment, research, and education as a surgeon from his start in Severance Hospital until his retirement.⁹ Severance Hospital was founded with a great deal of influence from the treatment and education systems of the School of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University, where Dr. Ludlow graduated, and University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine, where Dr. Avison graduated.

Severance continued to support overseas missionary work with great interest even after he returned to America. Although he supported many institutions, he loved the hospital and medical school in Seoul more than any other place, and took great pride in Severance Hospital.¹⁰ Severance died on June 25, 1913, at the age of 75. Even after his passing, his aid for the hospital and medical school in Seoul did not end. His son John and his daughter Prentiss continued to support Severance Hospital following their father's wishes. In 1924, they contributed 100,000 dollars of which only 50,000 dollars were deposited into school funds and the remaining 50,000 dollars were used to build a new

ward, which was named Severance-Prentiss Wing.¹¹ In addition, they assisted in improving the facilities of Severance Hospital by making a donation at every chance. John and Prentiss had no offspring. With this in mind, they raised Severance Funds to maintain support for Severance Hospital, even after they passed away.

The determination and action of one figure helped establish a hospital in a strange land far away, a hundred years ago, thrusting his name into existence as an ineffaceable and beautiful name in Korean society.

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