



## James C. Ayer Lion

### History

In 1835 when James Cook Ayer was 17, he moved to Lowell from Ledyard, CT to live with relatives and receive an education. He was apprenticed to a pharmacist and within three years he learned the trade and managed to buy the drugstore. At this time, there was no pharmaceutical industry. Doctors would write a "prescription" (more like a recipe) that the patient would bring to the drugstore where the pharmacist would prepare the medicine in accordance with the doctor's instructions. In addition to becoming a pharmacist, Ayer studied with two doctors in Lowell but never actually practiced medicine. Ayer founded a company to make his own medicines that were valid according to the state of knowledge in the medical field. The Ayer company advertised heavily in almanacs (1853-1925), newspapers, pamphlets, trade cards and magazines, all suggesting ailments for which Ayer provided remedies.

Medical authorities found fault with Ayer because he (1) advertised unlike other doctors at the time; sold non-prescription medicines in his pharmacy; and (3) promoted certain medicines as cures for diseases. Despite this, Ayer's business went global and J.C. Ayer and Co. became the largest and most lucrative patent medicine business in the world. Ayer and his brother/business partner Frederick diversified and eventually owned dozens of textile mills around New England. James Ayer lived in the "stone house" on Pawtucket Street at the top of Fletcher Street. Frederick's brick house, which was at the corner of School and Pawtucket Streets (later the Franco-American School and now private residences).

James Ayer became a philanthropist later in life. While traveling in Germany, Ayer saw a statue of an angel holding a wreath. He commissioned a duplicate from the artist Christian Daniel Rauch and presented the artwork to the city of Lowell on July 4, 1876. The statue, called "Winged Victory," depicts Victoria, the goddess of victory, in a flowing garment throwing a victor's laurel wreath. To this day, it sits in front of Lowell City Hall and honors the Union victory in the Civil War. In 1923, after discovering that the monument had eroded beyond repair, James' nephew, Frederick Fanning Ayer, paid for a replica of the original made from higher quality bronze.

James C. Ayer also helped "Groton Junction" become a separate town. This community was in the western part of Groton and had arisen with the Boston to Fitchburg rail line. The residents won a new town charter from the state legislature. Ayer donated \$10K for a town hall and the people named the new town Ayer, Mass., in his honor.

James, who died in 1878, was the "wealthiest maker of patent medicine in country," according to the *New York Times*

## Art and Architecture

The remarkable Ayer monument is among the Lowell Cemetery's most beloved monuments. This recumbent lion with its powerful, expressive face is a symbol of strength and bravery.

In 1888, the Ayer family hired Albert Bruce-Joy (1842-1924), an Irish sculptor working in England, to carve the almost 25-ton lion from Italian marble. It is eight feet high and rests on a 7' X 13' base, in the style of a Roman sarcophagus. Because the lion is carved from marble, a very soft stone, the Lowell Cemetery constructs a shelter over the lion each winter to protect it from the snow, and more particularly, from the acid embedded in the snow.