

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

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Reorganizing the Osler Library



Visitors to the Osler Library this summer may wonder if we are playing "musical books." In a sense we are, since almost every one of the 24,000 volumes in the collection will be moved at least once, many of them more than once. The reason? The Library is being reorganized to improve security, preservation, use, and development. In the course of it, Osler's original gift of about 8,000 volumes will be integrated with the rest of the Osler Library collection, a rare book stack room established, a reference collection organized, and the circulating collection rearranged for better accessibility and expansion.

Of particular interest to Oslerians will be the integration of Osler's own books with those acquired since his library came to McGill in 1929. This particular move might better be called a *re-integration*, since it will restore the Osler Library to essentially one expanding collection in the History of Medicine, eliminating the division created in the early 1960's when all the post-1929 acquisitions were separated, catalogued, and classified according to a modification of the United States National Library of Medicine and Library of Congress schemes.

The decision to organize Osler's books the same way, and re-integrate them with the rest, was made by the Curators in 1963. They were motivated by two things: the improved management and use of the Library which would result, and the knowledge that a working educational and research library was clearly what Osler had intended according to his Memoranda to his Curators of 1919.

At their 1963 meeting, the Curators knew that the "Osler Library" would be moved to the new McIntyre Medical Sciences Building, there to become but a single room, the "Osler Room," in a much larger Osler Library which would also include the Wellcome Camera, stack areas, and offices. It was thought that this relocated Osler Room would contain all the rare books and that a majority of Osler's own collection would therefore stay there. In subsequent years it was discovered that Osler's rare books constituted neither a majority of his own collection, nor a majority of the rare books then possessed by the Osler Library. In addition, it had become apparent that using the Osler Room exclusively for rare books was unworkable; the Room could not contain all of them, is not suitable for their adequate security, preservation, or use and, on the contrary, is appropriately located for the rapidly expanding circulating and reference collections. At their 1967

meeting, the Curators resolved that the 1963 decision to re-integrate Osler's collection should stand, but not the plan to use the Osler Room exclusively for rare books.

An active growing library is surely the best way to honour Osler's memory for, as Dr. Wilder Penfield, our Honorary Osler Librarian, has remarked, Osler would have preferred "a workshop rather than a museum." However, in their efforts to realize the full potential of Osler's rich legacy, the Curators were anxious not to lose sight of the fact that the Osler Library has another function - to serve as a focal point for those interested in Sir William and the things he stood for. This *Newsletter*, of course, serves as a bond of communication between the Library and its many friends. The recent reprinting of the *Bibliotheca Osleriana* perpetuates our knowledge of his original collection, organized according to his scheme, and annotated with his own comments. As Osler said of Billings, Haller, and Gesner, "there is no better float through posterity than to be the author of a good bibliography."

But the Curators also wished to ensure that the Osler Room itself would continue to be a reminder of its original benefactor, even though most of the shelves would now be used for circulating books. To achieve this, they decided that the "Osler Niche," consisting of the Vernon plaque flanked by Osler's own works and his treasured collections of Browne, Burton, and Rabelais, should remain. In addition, the great books in the history of medicine and science from his "Prima Section" will also stay in that Room. Both areas will be provided with special security. The Room itself will remain essentially unaltered and visitors will continue to be most welcome.

Since 1967, considerable planning and preparatory work has taken place, and the re-cataloguing of Osler's books is now under way. This work is supported in part by a grant from the McConnell Foundation. Although the major shifting of books will be accomplished this summer, the entire project is expected to take at least five years.

Meanwhile, as they are catalogued, Osler's books are being distinguished from the rest by transparent jackets which bear the call number. Gradually these books are permeating the whole of the Osler Library, sharing the shelves with books Osler would surely have liked to have acquired, new books whose appearance he would have welcomed, and many books transferred from the Medical Library which, during his life, Osler had either donated or urged the Librarian to buy, thus uniting the gifts of his active years with his final bequest.

The historiated letter used in this issue is taken from Jean Fernel (1497-1558), *Joan. Fernelii vniuersa Medicina . . .*, Frankfurt, 1577, *Bibl. Osl.* no. 2574.

Donald G. Bates, M.D.,
Acting Osler Librarian

As may be gathered by the preceding article, these are organizing years for the Library; it has many special "collections" and these must be attended to, first with regard to safe storage and second with regard to easy accessibility. Materials that cannot be immediately catalogued must be arranged in such a way that they "self-index" themselves.

One such collection is an amalgamation of several: the picture collection. This year, the Evans Collection (purchased in 1960), the Kalz Donation, and materials previously in the Osler and Medical Libraries, were merged, duplicates removed, and the portraits arranged in alphabetical order according to sitter. They were installed in acid-free folders in a file cabinet, two map cases and several solander cases.

Two other collections have received special treatment. The Cushing Papers, consisting of a draft of *The Life of Sir William Osler*, transcripts of letters, clippings, photographs, and miscellaneous papers connected with *The Life*, are in the process of being microfilmed. In the future, the microfilm will be consulted, rather than the papers, which are very brittle and easily damaged when handled. The manuscript papers, correspondence, and scrapbooks belonging to Dr. William Henry Drummond (1854-1907), "habitant" poet-physician, have been removed from the large tin trunk where they were deposited some years ago and are being placed in acid-free folders in a cabinet. They have been partially calendared, and this will hopefully be completed in the coming year.

A project of greater magnitude was accomplished during the winter. This was the amalgamation of all the uncatalogued non-*Bibliotheca Osleriana* books in the Library, about 2,500, into one check-listed arrangement. An inventory was done at the same time, and both books and slips for the books arranged in alphabetical order by the author. The slips, many larger than the standard catalogue card, were microfilmed and printed from the film in reduced form on cards for filing in the Library's card catalogue. New acquisitions that do not need to be catalogued immediately can easily be added to the uncatalogued collection and check-listed in the catalogue from now on.

With the collection expanding steadily, and cataloguing keeping more or less apace, procedures connected with cataloguing and processing are in a state of almost continuous review with the dual needs of scholarly cataloguing of primary materials and of efficient handling constantly in mind. Sometimes it is not easy to reconcile the two!

Acquisition of new publications in the history of medicine has been steady, and during the last year a major effort was made to fill in gaps in out-of-print materials published from 1850 to 1950. This provided some excitement in reading second-hand dealer catalogues, bidding at auctions, and sending out requests to dealers to search for specific items. A working relationship with the National Science Library in Ottawa has resulted in over 100 items, mostly late 19th century texts, coming to the Osler Library on an informal depository arrangement.

The Osler Society

For the first time in several years, the Osler Society, headed by president John Esdaile, held meetings during the school year in the Wellcome Camera of the Osler Library. Various papers were presented by members of the Society on topics ranging from Chinese acupuncture to blood-letting, and a distinguished guest, Dr. Wilder Penfield, spoke on Dr. William Halsted. The W. W. Francis Prize, given by Dr. Harry Ballou for the best paper, was divided this year, first prize going to Bruce Case for his paper on "Galenic Psychotherapy," second prize to Tom Welch for "Chiropractic," and third prize to John Esdaile for his discussion of "Egerton Yorrick Davis."

This year's Banquet, the 49th, was held on April 3, 1970, again at the Faculty Club. The evening's guest speaker, Dr. R. A. Kinch, chief of obstetrics and gynecology at the Montreal General Hospital, presented an illustrated discussion of "The Historical Aspects of What Women Are For."

Results of Mail Order Auction

In the February issue of the *Newsletter*, our readers had an opportunity to purchase some of the Library's duplicates through a mail order auction. Sixteen bids were received for 12 books, and a total of \$120.00 was realized for the joint Osler Library-Medical Library book fund.

A visiting physician and his wife were given a short tour of the Library. They were keenly interested in Osler and made several complimentary remarks about our quarters. The physician's wife expressed the thought that they were deeply moved to be in Osler's library. Her husband agreed and then, almost apologetically, said "Yes, we *are* deeply moved, but I must tell you, in all honesty, that we were more deeply moved by *one* other place — Westminster Abbey."

Deterioration and Conservation of Library Materials

A recent exhibit in the Library, *The Loss of a Heritage*, was designed to bring to the university community an awareness of the effects of poor materials and the results of thoughtless handling of library resources. The world is increasingly concerned with the conservation of its natural resources and with urban-industrial pollution. Libraries are confronted with collapsing, crumbling volumes, many of which cannot be physically saved.

When books which are printed on paper of poor quality are handled roughly (shipping, shelving, photocopying), and then are repaired using inappropriate means, they deteriorate rapidly.

One cause, poor production materials, is sometimes unavoidable. Newspapers, generally printed on the cheapest of woodpulp paper, are intended as ephemera – to be used and disposed of. But libraries collect long runs of them, or used to. The acidic compounds originally used to break down the wood chips to cellulose fibres, and never completely washed out in the paper-making process, together with cheap sizings, continue to weaken the paper long after the production process is complete, resulting in torn, crumbling, brown sheets. They are saved with difficulty. Microfilm and microfiche have become an effective means of preserving an image of these items. A few papers, like the *New York Times*, issue microfilm editions annually, and many libraries find it cheaper to buy and store the microfilm than to bind and shelve the crumbling paper pages. The exhibit includes one example of this, a tattered, yellow, brittle copy of S. P. Sherman's review of Cushing's *Life of Osler* in the *New York Herald Tribune*, May 31, 1925.

Fire not only burns books, but as often as not the accompanying water, hot air and smoke cause damage. The McGill medical buildings of 1872 and 1902 were heavily damaged by fire in 1907, and some of the survivors, stained and warped, are on display, one of them being Charles Bell's finely engraved and hand-coloured *Illustrations of the Great Operations of Surgery*, London, 1821.

Along with water come mould and other fungi, which flourish in conditions of high humidity and warmth. These micro-organisms produce exudates which weaken the cellulose fibres and sometimes stain the paper ("foxing"). Visible invertebrate life forms, such as cockroaches, silverfish and the bookworm, feast on the glue in bindings, paper and leather. A special exhibit case, entitled "Osler and Bookworms," commemorates his very special interest, as immortalized in his "Illustrations on the Bookworm," published in the *Bodleian Quarterly Record*, 1917.

Human depredations, often encountered in the collectors' world, are shown too. Many rare books lose pages to autograph collectors or picture hounds. *Bibliotheca Osleriana* no. 637, Gesner's *Icones Avium Omnium*, Zurich, 1560, is incomplete, and was actually acquired by Sir William for the series of original sketches by Jonathan Couch which are bound at the end. Not only is the *Icones* incomplete, but woodcut illustrations have been cut and torn out.

The picture is not completely bleak, however. Bindings can be repaired and restored by experts. Fortunately for

the Osler Library, there are such talents available in Montreal, and the exhibit case on bindings includes *Bibliotheca Osleriana* no. 2268, Symphorien Champier's *Speculum Galeni* (1512), which was rebound, inlaying the fragments of the old leather binding and clasps on a new leather spine with the old label. Books that are frail or cannot be bound may be stored in custom-made boxes, and two Chinese works by Ho Hsin-shih from the 1850's are shown with their yellow silk-covered box (*Bibliotheca Osleriana* no. 2974-5).

Rare documents or archival materials on poor paper can sometimes be preserved by deacidification of the paper, resizing and subsequent lamination, or as mentioned before, by microfilm or copying methods. We know a lot about the harmful effects of the innocuous "brown paper wrapper" (acids from the decaying paper "migrate" to the item being stored, and weaken it), and the use of acid-free paper or carefully selected inert plastics for storage can avoid such contamination. Two letters from Alexis Carrel to Harvey Cushing on grafting a new leg on Dr. Cushing's bulldog, in 1908, are shown, stored in a plastic "envelope."

We can store rare items away from high concentrations of ultraviolet light (such as that from fluorescent lights) and from the well-known bleaching effects of sunlight. We can prevent worsening the condition of a shaky book by avoiding the stains and stickiness caused by pressure-sensitive tapes for binding repairs and tacking torn pages together. It is better to tie the bits together with soft cloth tape until they can be properly rebound or repaired by a qualified person.

It is to be hoped that today's rapidly developing technologies will provide book collectors and librarians with the knowledge necessary for preserving the vast printed and written treasures from the past. In the meantime, we must try to do the least harm possible, with our present conservation techniques, and our common sense.

Donors to the Lady Osler Fund, 1969-70:

Mr. G. S. T. Cavanagh; Dr. J. Cohen; Dr. D. Collins; Dr. A. D. Kelly; Dr. J. A. Lewis; Dr. J. P. McGovern; Dr. G. K. Parke; Dr. B. I. Wulff.

Donors to the Osler Library Collection, 1969-70:

Mrs. H. F. M. Bennett; Mr. N. Brown; Mr. S. Budrys; Dr. R. V. Christie; Dr. C. C. Clay; Clendening Library, Kansas City, Kansas; Countway Library, Boston, Mass.; Dr. W. D. Davison; Miss C. Desbarats; Duke University, Durham, N.C.; Dr. M. Etziony; Miss M. Fransiszyn; Mr. C. Greenland; Dr. S. Hamarneh; Mr. R. G. Harries; Mr. W. Helfand; Hoffmann-LaRoche, Montreal; Dr. E. Holman; Institute of the History of Medicine and Medical Research, New Delhi; Jewish Public Library, Montreal; Mr. T. Keys; Mr. L. Lande; Dr. J. A. Lewis; Dr. S. Lewis; Lilly Library, Indianapolis, Indiana; Miss E. Lutzker; Dr. H. E. MacDermot; McGill University Faculty of Medicine (Dean's Office); McGill University Medical Library; Dr. F. L. McNaughton; Miss R. J. Mann; Dr. E. L. Margetts; Merck, Sharpe and Dohme International; Ministerio de Sanidad y Asistencia Social, Caracas; Montreal General Hospital; Montreal Neurological Institute; Osler Club of London; Dr. L. C. Parish; Dr. E. T. Peer; Dr. W. Penfield; Dr. S. X. Radbill; Miss E. Robinson; Dr. C. G. Roland; St. Louis Society for Medical and Scientific Education, St. Louis, Mo.; Dr. E. P. Scarlett; Miss S. C. Smith; Dr. G. Sonnedecker; Miss M. B. Stern; Dr. G. Turner; Prof. J. W. Wells.

Maughan Memorial

In November 1966, Dr. J. H. Ferguson donated \$50.00 to the Library in memory of the late Mrs. Muriel Maughan. In

October 1969 this gift was used to purchase a fine honey maple dictionary stand or readers' stand for large books. It has been in use since its arrival and is a welcome addition to our library furniture.

Medical Canadiana

Following a brief correspondence with Dr. E. H. Bensley of the Department of the History of Medicine, Dr. Samuel X. Radbill donated a certificate appointing John Loftus Hartwell surgeon to the military forces, Upper Canada, 1838. According to Dr. Bensley, Hartwell served the military from about 1828 until his death in 1849. He was shipwrecked twice: in 1829 when he and the captain were the sole survivors, and in 1836 when he spent two days on the mast of a wreck before being picked up. In the latter episode, he was injured in the head while firing a signal of distress, the gun having burst! Hartwell's appointment as military surgeon was made by Sir George Arthur (1784-1854), lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada at the time.

John McCrae's Autopsy Book

During the year, Dr. H. E. MacDermot, Archivist of the Montreal General Hospital, deposited an item rich in associations, known as "John McCrae's Autopsy Book." It records the Hospital's autopsy reports for 1902-03 and is distinguished by an inscription by McCrae, and a paraphrase on lines given in Joseph Henshaw's *Horae Succisivae* (1631). The inscription, McCrae's version, and Henshaw's lines were examined by Dr. MacDermot in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1939, 40: 495.

Are You Moving?

At this time of the year, many of our readers, particularly students, interns, and residents, are on the move. If you are changing your address, could you please let us know?

Editorial Committee for the Newsletter: *Ellen B. Wells*, Editor; *Nancy Grant*, Associate Editor; *E. H. Bensley, M.D.*, Advisor; *Karl Holeczek*, Photography.
