



THE OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

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Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University, Montréal (Québec) Canada

IN THIS ISSUE

Dr. Jennifer Connor, author of the lead article in this number, is a new contributor to the *Newsletter*, though certainly no stranger to the Osler Library. Dr. Connor is both a librarian and a historian, with a doctorate in Library Science from University of Western Ontario, and an impressive career of scholarship and teaching in medical history at Western and the University of Toronto. Her book *Guardians of medical knowledge: the genesis of the Medical Library Association* appeared in 2000. She now teaches in the Graduate Program in Biomedical Writing at the University of the Sciences of Philadelphia. As an expert in medical communication, Dr. Connor has a keen interest in the marginalia of medical publishing. In this essay, she probes a longstanding claim that Osler was the author of a biting anonymous satire on the Toronto General Hospital. We look forward to the response of our readers, particularly those steeped in Osler's writings, to her conclusions!

And speaking of those steeped in Osler's writings, Dr. Charles Roland, Hannah Professor Emeritus at McMaster University and member of the Library's Board of Curators, gave the inaugural McGovern Lecture at Green College last fall. A portion of his talk is excerpted in this number.



WHO WROTE 'THE MODEL HOSPITAL'?

In 1881, the *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* published an anonymous essay entitled 'The Model Hospital.'¹ Through a fictional construct, the essay has both allegorical and satirical elements. The story opens with a hospital in a ruined city. Papers found in the ruins, we are told, reveal major problems with hospital management – the superintendent's absences to study other hospitals, the poor treatment of staff, and others. 'But at last a change came,' the narrator relates, so that vastly superior management procedures rendered the hospital 'perfect in every respect,' well-deserving its 'world-wide reputation.' The reversal of actual names – 'Otnorot' and 'Oiratno' for place, 'Ytinirt' for school – leaves no doubt that the essay described the Toronto General Hospital.

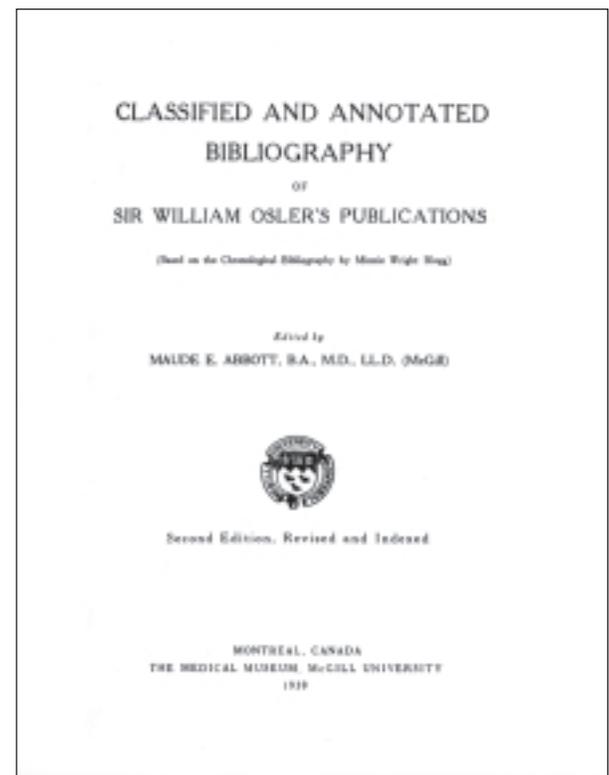
Since 'The Model Hospital' first appeared in Maude Abbott's *Classified and Annotated Bibliography of Sir William Osler's Publications* in 1939, it has generally been attributed to William Osler (see illustration).² But how can we uncritically accept that he was the author? Apparently without primary evidence, Abbott had included the essay based on others' opinions. Not merely second-hand, these opinions were evidently coloured by hindsight: Abbott presented the essay as 'an allegorical statement of changes afterward effected in the Johns Hopkins Hospital.' There is no personal claim to authorship here; rather, it was assigned long after Osler's death by well-meaning but often adulatory friends and family (notably, W.W. Francis). Signi-

ficantly, the essay had not appeared in Minnie Blogg's 1921 *Bibliography of the Writings of Sir William Osler* – a bibliography based on two earlier lists that Osler himself had reviewed and helped compile.³ Is it not reasonable to suppose that Osler would have identified this essay as his own for Blogg's bibliography?

Of greater concern is the contemporary context for this essay. We have to wonder about the timing: why would Osler write an essay about this hospital a decade after he left Toronto? and why would he publish a template for the Johns Hopkins

by
Dr. Jennifer
Connor

Ill. 1. Title page
of *Classified
and Annotated
Bibliography*



We therefore have both questionable attribution and incongruous context for asserting that William Osler wrote 'The Model Hospital.'



Hospital a decade before he got there? We might question why he would write at all about Toronto from his position of medical authority in Montreal: in the same issue of the *Canadian Journal of Medical Science*, in fact, Osler has the lead article, a clinical lecture as professor of the institutes of medicine at McGill. We might also ask why the editors emphasized that they had removed sections for conciseness, including 'expressions which might offend where no offense was meant.' William Osler, surely, had greater stylistic finesse and a more equitable character than to attempt to publish something that would offend – even anonymously. Even with these unknown 'expressions' expunged, the essay ridicules the hospital's medical superintendent:

under this all-supreme head were several poor assistants who did a large share of the work [who] took entire charge, while their superior visited the sister institutions . . . ; he went away to imbibe any new ideas and to enjoy life.

Would William Osler really write this way about 'Charlie O'Reilly' – the man for whom he had acted as *locum tenens* only a few years earlier? The language of the essay becomes even more caustic as the narrator condemns the treatment of the matrons:

their toil was meanly paid with a miserly pittance, because it was the toil of women; what else could we expect among the heathen where it is customary to make the women work while the men receive the pay?

It is extremely doubtful that Osler would be so blunt, even if he did share this feminist view.

Finally, we might wonder about Osler's familiarity with the Toronto General's development since the appointment of Charles O'Reilly as superintendent. O'Reilly's long absences to visit European institutions, the Mercer bequest, the fever hospital, the laundry, morgue,

and lying-in hospital – all were well-known, but would such a busy man in Montreal have time to recount them? We might ask as well why Osler would propose yet more dramatic change – apparently to complete the transformation to a 'model hospital' – while ignoring the positive aspects of this construction boom. In fact, far from being a novel allegorical statement, the image of 'the model hospital' had been routinely invoked for the Toronto General in professional and public press alike.⁴

The whole subject of the model hospital was not just in the air: the Toronto General's board chair had sent a circular to the Toronto medical community seeking its input on the very issues addressed in 'The Model Hospital.' The invitation then attracted public responses of senior Toronto medical men, such as J.E. Graham, who suggested changes based on his visits to New York hospitals. More significant, both the *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* and its rival, the *Canada Lancet*, published editorials on the subject. They called for a term of appointment for physicians on active staff and a system of rotation whereby junior staff would succeed to senior positions. Editors of the *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* in particular suggested that assistants be put in charge of outpatient clinics – a practice followed at large hospitals elsewhere.⁵ The anonymous essay, then, was one response of many.

We therefore have both questionable attribution and incongruous context for asserting that William Osler wrote 'The Model Hospital.' On the other hand, the case for a Toronto-based author is relatively strong. Indeed, a Toronto medical man later took responsibility for writing this anonymous essay. Addressing the recently formed ex-house staff association of the Toronto General Hospital as its president in 1907, Dr. J.F.W. Ross presented a brief history of the hospital that embraced his own reminiscences from the time of his father's medical practice to his own internship and later experience. When he became an intern in 1878,

Ross told his colleagues, the hospital 'was not what it should have been.' Charles O'Reilly had just taken over as medical superintendent, but he had to 'make haste slowly.' Then Ross comments that

Enough of misery was caused to me by a youthful effusion called the Model Hospital, and published in the *Canadian Journal of Medical Science*, in 1881. From the time that paper was written until a few weeks ago, I never saw it in print.

He read a large excerpt, which deletes the portion dealing with absences of the medical superintendent and treatment of staff, so that his hospital colleagues 'can then judge of the prophesy.'⁶

Made almost thirty years after its publication, this claim to authorship surprises a modern reader: how had the editors acquired the essay, if not from the author? why had he not seen it in print? The context for Ross's talk, however, together with his introductory remarks suggests an audience familiar with both his 'youthful effusion' and the 'misery' he endured for having written it. This simple statement, then, implies that his essay had been circulated among Toronto General physicians *before* it was published in the journal. In short, the audience of leading Toronto physicians who heard Ross's statement in 1907 – including Charles O'Reilly – undoubtedly knew it to be true.

Ross's background provides stronger evidence that he wrote 'The Model Hospital.' Having grown up in the Toronto medical scene, J.F.W. Ross made rounds with his father and local leaders of medicine. He himself had become an intern at the Toronto General in 1878; he had then done the European tour, obtaining a licentiate in London in 1880, and returned to Toronto in 1881. Minutes of the Toronto Medical Society in the previous issue of the journal show that he was elected member. J.F.W. Ross therefore was intimately familiar with the subject of the essay at precisely the time it appeared.

Furthermore, Ross published an article in the same issue of *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* on 'Teaching of Obstetrics in Vienna' which immediately follows Osler's lead article.⁷ He thus fits the editors' description of the essay author as 'a gentleman who has had a wide experience of "men and cities", but who, for special reasons, desires to remain *incog.*' Although the placement of these articles is suggestive, his own signed article shares features of the anonymous essay: both outline clinic hours; both use a question mark in parentheses to indicate a dubious statement.

With this context in mind, does it not then make more sense that 'The Model Hospital' was created by an impatient 24-year-old former intern rather than by a senior friend of the editors in another city? Decades later, as a senior Toronto physician himself, a member of the University of Toronto senate, with the recently retired Charles O'Reilly in his audience – a man widely praised for his transformation of the Toronto General – is it not understandable that Dr. Ross would regret his 'youthful effusion'? Even though Ross had by then acquired a reputation for

clinical arrogance and pomposity, would it not be natural to remove his criticisms of O'Reilly in the second telling?

Finally, we would have to question why Ross would claim authorship to an essay that laid out plans for Johns Hopkins – a hospital model he scathingly rejected in 1907 as merely making men like Osler rich and famous.⁸ In light of his antagonism, it appears that recommendations in 'The Model Hospital' were more commonly implemented than later observers supposed.

Such internal evidence of the author's ethos and style, combined with collateral evidence from the journal issue and the historical context in which it appeared, therefore suggests that the essay was indeed written by James F.W. Ross. At least, we may argue that the *kernel* of it was his. What if others influenced its composition through circulation of a rough manuscript? Would Ross remember? What if *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* editor Richard Zimmerman did more than merely excise parts from the essay? What if Zimmerman had even sent the manuscript to his former Toronto

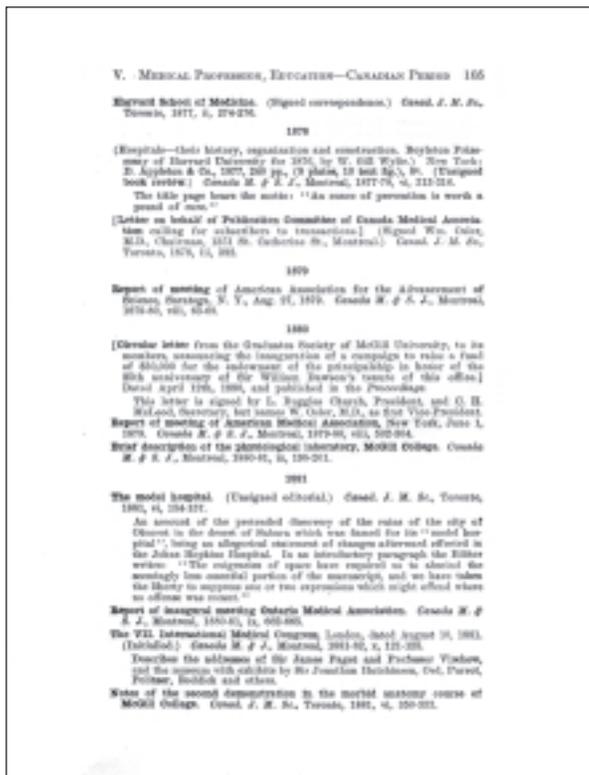
classmate and friend William Osler for comment? Would Ross even recognize any such substantive editing – or ghost writing – of his manuscript? How many 'authors' would then be here? Can we ever know with certainty who wrote 'The Model Hospital'? ❁

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8. Connor, *Doing Good*, p. 177.

With this context in mind, does it not then make more sense that 'The Model Hospital' was created by an impatient 24-year-old former intern rather than by a senior friend of the editors in another city?

Ill. 2. The Model Hospital Entry



CHEERFULNESS KEEPS BREAKING IN: OBSERVATIONS ON SIR WILLIAM OSLER

Editor's note: On 10 October 2004, Dr. Charles Roland, Hannah Professor Emeritus at McMaster University and prolific writer on Oslerian subjects, delivered the inaugural McGovern Lecture at Green College, Oxford.

Dr. Roland's lecture ranged widely over many aspects of Osler's life and achievements, from his philosophy of life to his smoking habits. In the excerpt we print here, however, Dr. Roland describes some recent Oslerian discoveries.

We do learn that the Osler's first automobile was a 14-horsepower Renault landau which, purportedly, ran well at 20 miles per hour in 1908 – hardly a breakthrough in documentation.



One could be excused for thinking that there can be little new to be said about Osler's life. Certainly it has been examined assiduously and more or less continuously for the past eighty-two years. Two substantial biographies are available: Harvey Cushing's wonderfully detailed *Life* from the 1920's and Michael Bliss's 1999 biography,¹ less detailed than Cushing but thoroughly saturated with the scholarship of the intervening decades and re-interpreting many events from within a modern context. Further, a bibliography of writings about Osler, published in the year 2000, brings the total number identified to 1,861.²

With all this attention, one wonders about revelations, positive or negative. Readers of modern biography must feel bemused when they encounter Tennyson's animadversions on too intimate biography: "...not easily forgiven/Are those who setting wide the doors that

bar/The secret bridal chambers of the heart,/Let in the day." Has Osler suffered from day being let into the secret chambers of his heart? I think not.

Indeed, at times Osler seems almost too good to be true. Yet surely cynicism should not rule here? It is telling that Michael Bliss, Osler's most recent biographer, shared this feeling. He has recorded that when he began the research leading to his biography, he expected to find a darker side to the man. Yet when his work was finished, no darkness had been uncovered. As he put it: "Try as I might, I could not find a cause to justify the death of Osler's reputation."³ So there may be no significant secrets, though Osler's records of some of his dreams make it evident that his mind travelled in private regions familiar to us all.⁴

Meanwhile, the hunt for Osleriana goes on, the research continues. Let me give a few instances. The first three refer to Oslerian correspondence, newly discovered or newly interpreted.

The Oslers and Kate Cushing

One revelation occurred in 1999, when Bliss had the distressing experience all historians fear: just after publication of his *Life of Osler*, he found substantial new information. Bliss is now preparing a biography of Harvey Cushing. While examining microfilm from Yale University, he discovered eighty-seven notes and letters from the Oslers – mostly from William's wife, Grace – to Kate Cushing, Harvey's wife.⁵

Bliss does not believe that anything revealed in the letters would have caused him to change his book manuscript significantly. Of factual revelation there is little. We do learn that the Osler's first automobile was a 14-horsepower Renault landau which, purportedly, ran well at 20 miles per hour in 1908 – hardly a breakthrough in documentation.

But there were many passages of great sensitivity that Bliss might have interpolated. For example, Grace Osler wrote, just after the decision had been made in 1904 to accept the Regius Professorship:

Such a serious matter settled and now I am in possession of an Oxford Professor. My heart is heavy & light in turn. And I hardly know what to do or say. I have had very worrying weeks over it. I am trying only to look on the bright side and think of the many advantages of comparative ease for Dr. Osler and a charming chance for Revere. Please forgive us – and remember how easy it is to cross the sea...⁶

This poignant note indicates the strength of friendships in North America, and the wrench that the move to Oxford would give to so many people. Osler, it appears, had no doubts that the move was wise, but Grace admitted to deep misgivings which, like a dutiful Victorian wife, she kept to herself – or, rather, confided to an intimate friend, Kate Cushing. Ultimately, of course, she came to love Oxford and, at least until the war, to be happy here. Once war began, she found, as she put it, "the world is upside down and no one can be happy"⁷ – a sensation the world has known several times since – and again now.

The Egyptian Letters

Another source of recent enlightenment has come from examining a collection of letters written by Osler – then still plain "Doctor Osler" – during a trip to Egypt in the spring of 1911.⁸ The letters were written to Grace. They are not notably eloquent letters. Despite his great love of things Egyptian, especially ancient Egyptian, Osler's letters contain surprisingly little about the pyramids and monuments. What they do contain is much routine domestic communication. These are very much

the letters of a man keeping his finger on the pulse of life at home with his distant wife and teen-aged and somewhat worrisome son, Revere.

He wrote frequently. We have none



Dr. Charles Roland delivered the inaugural McGovern Lecture at Green College, Oxford. He is pictured here receiving a medal from HRH the Princess Royal.

of Grace's responses, but the context often is evident. Osler devotes the main part of one short letter to financial matters. They have, apparently, sent money so that the young daughter of a friend can visit them from Canada – "I expect we can stand it financially" he wrote – and laments the sums he must spend on daily living, taxis and other things. (In another letter he expresses obvious pleasure in the fact that the fees he earned caring for an ill fellow-traveller would completely offset his Egyptian expenses.) Money had to be set aside for their son Revere's future. And then, revealing a concern faced by most of us, Osler continues: "On the whole we have not done badly but I fear the time when my income will be very small & expenses the same, or with the boy starting, even larger. Still if anything happened to me you would have \$18,000 and the house..." From this last comment, I conclude that 13 Norham Gardens was not encumbered by a mortgage.

Banal, and touching because of it, this letter seems to reveal a glimpse of the usually hidden Osler. Behind the early-21st-century aura of this world-renowned physician, author, and scholar we find a man worrying about

his son's education and, particularly, his wife's financial well-being when she has become his widow. These, we remember, were the days before pensions and tax-advantaged retirement savings. And while income tax had existed in Great Britain since 1799, a graduated tax had just been introduced in 1910, the year before this letter, so that matter may have agitated Osler's mind also.

All this obviously heartfelt concern about the finances of the Osler household nevertheless seems puzzling. Partly this observation depends on hindsight; Osler left a sizeable estate on his death in 1919, and Grace seems not to have had financial worries for the seven years then remaining in her life. Sadly, one reason for this is that the money set aside for Revere presumably became available for other uses, after Revere died in France in 1917 – though ultimately that fund, or some portion of it, was used to endow the Tudor

and Stuart Club at Johns Hopkins University in Revere's name.

But we also know something of Osler's professional income at this time, largely due to the research of the late George Harrell.⁹ Osler's income achieved a level in the early years of the 20th century that should have precluded the misgivings that he displayed. For example, the year preceding the Egyptian trip, he earned £7,813, which was equal then to \$39,000 (US\$), an amount that would be in the \$300,000 range in today's dollars. And that – perhaps I don't need to point out – is a substantial income.

If Osler's financial worries seem exaggerated in detail, nevertheless they existed in his mind, and the revelation of this and similar concerns acts positively in humanizing the icon. That, it seems to me, is the chief benefit of reading these letters, which will be published later this year, edited by Lawrence Longo and Philip Teigen.

The Sa'eed-Osler Correspondence

And to emphasize the ongoing potential for additional insights by examining correspondence, I will mention a third avenue of research to complete this particular portion of the lecture. This is the series of communications, beginning in 1913, between Osler and Dr. M. Sa'eed [Dr. Mohammed Mirza Sa'eed Khan Kurdistani], recently discussed by Dr. Anand Date. Dr. Sa'eed was Persian, a learned Muslim cleric who became a distinguished Christian physician.¹⁰ The details need not detain us here; they concern, chiefly, Osler's acquisition, for his historical library, of Arabic medical manuscripts, and his involvement in an effort to rebuild the tomb of Avicenna at Hamadan.

The restoration was sidelined by the Great War. That the tenor of life in that part of the world is little changed is shown by Sa'eed's descriptions of a divided family, border encounters, and escapes from advancing Germans

If Osler's financial worries seem exaggerated in detail, nevertheless they existed in his mind, and the revelation of this and similar concerns acts positively in humanizing the icon.

"...I hope William will take up medicine too; but many generations must pass away before another William like our beloved teacher Physician & Friend can be produced."



and from fanatic Kurds intent on the destruction of one particular Kurdish apostate – Dr. Sa'eed himself. But the letters clearly demonstrate Sa'eed's great respect for his correspondent – respect shown both by his frequent statements about how useful Osler's textbook has been to him and, most touchingly, in a letter to Lady Osler after Sir William's death, indicating that Sa'eed's young grandson has been named William. He wrote: "...I hope William will take up medicine too; but many generations must pass away before another William like our beloved teacher Physician & Friend can be produced." Regrettably, I cannot tell you if this young William achieved his grandfather's ambition.



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OSLER LIBRARY CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS: MARCH 23 TO SEPTEMBER 3, 2002

5 5,000 books, plus every print, photo, archive and artifact in the Osler Library is now in storage. Carlos Rojas, our move manager, on loan from the library of the Faculty of Law, hired 19 packers, including students, technicians and short-term contract helpers to get the job done. McGill Work Study students worked in shifts supervised by Carlos and Mélanie Hallé and Isabelle de Mélo, museology technicians hired especially to prepare 25,000 rare books for packing. Along with extra special wrapping, their work included limited conservation, particularly the preparation of special acid-free boxes, to keep the books safe while packed. Most of the special boxes will be kept on the books once the project is completed and the books reshelved. Thus the packing will have long-term benefits for some of the more fragile books. A few

photographs of this process can be seen on our Web page.

Rare books are in storage off-site in an especially secure and climate controlled environment. Circulating books are boxed and stored in this building. Before the project began, every effort was made to accommodate the research of professors and graduate students. Volumes from our rare collection needed for their research were transferred to the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections for consultation during our renovations. Those wishing to borrow circulating works were encouraged to take out their books before packing began and are allowed to keep them until the beginning of October. If the renovations proceed as planned, the circulating collection will be back on site on September 3rd, the rare books and archives, at the beginning of November.

We have done better than expected, finishing well before the May 1st deadline, a triumph celebrated by a



Certain works can be protected permanently by making simple, acid-free boxes. The move provides an ideal opportunity to carry out basic conservation.

packers' pizza party. Naturally, the deadline was always before us and this involved Carlos and our technicians in negotiations about what could and could not be done to preserve the rare books, pack them



Maryse Lemoine, library school student and Caroline Cholette, archivist, working on files.



Isabelle de Mélo, museology technician and McGill Work Study student packing rare books. Note cotton gloves and tissue to protect rare books.



Mélanie Hallé museology technician and McGill Work Study student preparing box to protect a rare book.

Before the project began, every effort was made to accommodate the research of professors and graduate students.

carefully and still meet the deadline. Mélanie and Isabelle captured the project in a "thank you" card for Carlos. They were lucky enough to find a commercial card with three agonized expressions on the cover

(please see illustration). To these they added captions and inside the card, their own expressions and responses. The results provided us all with much amusement as we hope it does you. ❀



WWW... ANDREW FERNANDO HOLMES



Most of us think of Andrew Fernando Holmes (1797-1860) as one of the four founders of McGill University's Faculty of Medicine, and its' first Dean. An imaginative and beautiful new web site, entitled *The Lost Flora of Montreal* demonstrates another side of this versatile doctor.

The bi-lingual site was co-ordinated by Professor Marcia Waterway of Macdonald College's Department of Plant Science and sponsored by Industry Canada's Digital Collections Programme.

The site is found at:
<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/holmes/>

From 1820-25 Dr. Holmes collected 500 plants on the island of Montreal, mounted and catalogued them.



Today the island has almost completely changed and many of the plants are no longer found here. But the herbarium brings everything back to life. By clicking on the various options, including the searchable catalogue, the viewer can find Holmes' original specimen sheet, what the live plant looks like today in the wild and the original site from which each specimen was taken. ❁

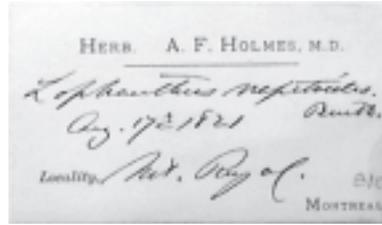
Holmes' original specimen sheet.



What the live plant looks like today in the wild.



Original site from which the specimen was taken.



Dr. Feindel Honored

It is a delight to report that Dr. William Feindel has just been made a Grand Officier de L'Ordre nationale du Québec in recognition of his devotion to research in epilepsy and his tireless work on the use of brain imaging technology in neurology and neurosurgery.

American Osler Society Conference

From the 23rd to the 25th of April, the American Osler Society held another successful conference in Kansas City, Missouri. Members gathered to hear two days of papers pertaining to Osler and related history of medicine topics. Many members participated in the American Association of the History of Medicine sessions which followed, almost a full week devoted to medical history. Members of the American Osler Society were welcomed by the Clendening History of Medicine Library and Museum where we were able to see a selection of treasures, including their impressive Rudolf Virchow archive.



NOTES FROM THE OSLER LIBRARY

Dr. Sourkes Awarded Medal

Dr. Theodore L. Sourkes, Chairman of our Standing Committee has another award to add to his collection. He has just received the Inaugural Medal of the History of the Neurosciences for the most outstanding article published in the Society's journal for the years 1998 to 2000. The article entitled "An Element of Thought: Phosphorus and Mental Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century", was published in the *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*.

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