

A CENTURY OF AMERICAN MEDICAL LIBRARIES, 1830-1930

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The Library of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland, despite the weight of one hundred years carries her head high, and there are few older sisters in the family of American medical libraries who like her have enjoyed an existence of single blessedness "promoting and disseminating medical chirurgical knowledge throughout the State," to borrow the words of your charter. She went into a decline as was fashionable for young ladies to do in the early Victorian era, and had it not been for her first guardian, the devoted Dr. Fonerden, who had taken her under his roof in 1845, charging nothing for professional services, she might have faded away entirely. In spite of all efforts she fell into a state of lethargy from which she aroused herself in 1876 only when the insatiable John Shaw Billings wished to spirit her hundred oldest and most endearing charms away to Washington. She then realized her true worth and that life was after all not so hard as she thought.

Now on her hundredth birthday, in the full vigour of maturity, the Council and officers of the New York Academy of Medicine have asked me to bring best wishes and to say to her "Many happy returns of the day." But we must not entirely forget those older sisters, some of whom have died, or at least have lost their identity amongst in-laws. The oldest of the family, the Pennsylvania Hospital Medical Library (born 1763), the libraries of the Harvard Medical School (1782), Transylvania College (1784), the College of Physicians of Philadelphia (1788), the Medical Society of South Carolina, Charleston (1791), the Medical Department of Dartmouth College (1797), Worcester District Medical Library (1820), have not changed their status. The library of the New York Hospital (1796) is at the New York Academy of Medicine; the Second Social or Boston Medical Library (1805) is at the Boston Medical Library; the library of the Medical School of Maine (1820) is incorporated into that of Bowdoin College, and that of the Montreal Medical Institution (1823) is in the Medical Library

of McGill University. The books of the Library of the Medical School of the College of Philadelphia, founded in 1765, therefore the second library of its kind in this country, apparently were dispersed about 1800. Our family numbered eight in 1800, sixty in 1876, 120 in 1899 (Spivak), and about 214 at the present time. Sad to relate, the last American Medical Directory traces no members of the original family or descendents in Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, or Wyoming. Surely there is room for missionary effort in these states.

In time the right men will arise. Without someone who has a love of books, the craving to collect, and plenty of energy, libraries cannot be built up. There has been a glorious procession in the history of medical libraries. We can recall only a few names now, J. R. Chadwick of Boston; William Browning of Brooklyn; S. S. Purple, Abraham Jacobi, and Mrs. Laura E. Smith of New York; Weir Mitchell and C. P. Fisher, of Philadelphia; Lewis H. Taylor who created the Luzerne County Medical Society Library at Wilkesbarre; Eugene Cordell, William Osler, George J. Preston, and John Ruhräh, here at Baltimore; J. S. Billings at Washington, George Dock at Ann Arbor, St. Louis, and now of Los Angeles; C. D. Spivak, Henry Sewall and W. A. Jayne of Denver, where, by the way, the first magazine devoted to medical libraries was published; and Emmet Rixford of San Francisco. Listen to what Sir Thomas Bodley ascribed his success after he had "set up his staffe at the Librarie dore in Oxon:"

. . . . For the effecting whereof, I found my selfe furnished in a competent proportion, of such fower kindes of ayds, as vnless I had them all, there was no hope of good successe: for without some kinde of knowledg, as well in the learned and moderne tongues, as in sundry other sorts of Scholasticall literature, without some purse habilitie to goe through with the Charge, without very great store of honorable freinds, to further the designe, and without speciall good leasure to follow such a worke, it could have proved a vayne attempt and inconsiderate.— (pages 19 and 20 in *Trecentale Bodleianum*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1913.)

If it were but possible for us to be transported back into a medical library as it existed before 1830, we could easily realize the growth and changes which have taken place in the course of a century. But I have not the pen to make such a library live again. Let us be content to point out a few things of those days that strike us as interesting.

The New York Hospital Library, founded in 1796, issued its first catalogue in 1804 and it is quite instructive reading. The first of the "Rules and Orders Concerning the Library" is an amusing one—"The Apothecary shall be the Librarian." Contrast that idea with ours that a librarian should have long contact with books or special training in their care. Apothecaries were often well-educated men, and they learned to read the cryptic prescriptions of doctors. Therefore they would have made excellent Keepers of Manuscripts, but the choice would not have been altogether a happy one even for that position or for that of librarian. Just think for a moment of the sticky syrups, the gummy balsams, the greasy unguents they had to make up. One shudders to think of them forgetting to wash before hastening to the library to unlock the bookcase, hand out the first edition of Vesalius, and help the reader to find his place, or wrestle with some Latin sentence.

This published catalogue of 1804 must have been printed from a written catalogue in which the folios were listed first, then the quartos, the octavos, and finally the duodecimos. Altogether there were 433 works not counting some imperfect ones. We no longer store our books according to these four sizes, but it is the best way to economize space. We are now not so economical of space, but are of time, so our books are arranged in classes according to subject, so that it does not take long to fetch or look at several books on the same subject. The first catalogue of the Pennsylvania Hospital Medical Library was issued in 1806. Apparently the books at Philadelphia were also arranged on the shelves according to size, but Philadelphia was more advanced or up to date than New York, for in this 1806 Catalogue there is also a list showing "The Names and Authors and Editors in the Catalogue arranged under Distinct Heads," such as "Anatomy," "Botany," "Surgery," etc. Later the New York Hospital Catalogue of 1899 had an "Analytic Catalogue" of the same kind. At the time of publication of the 1806 catalogue of the Pennsylvania Hospital Library, fifty-one "Periodical Publications" in several languages were subscribed to. Evidently in those days at New York and Philadelphia—perhaps tastes were different at Boston—the larger books were not in as great demand as the smaller ones, for both libraries had a rule, "Folios may be kept out four weeks, Quartos three, Octavos

and Duodecimos two weeks.” Or did the fee for borrowing a book vary directly with its size?

Although the catalogues of two of the great libraries of the world with which we are familiar—that of the British Museum and of the Bodleian Library—are still in the form of slips pasted into large volumes, there can be little doubt that cards possess evident advantages. I cannot tell you when such cards were used for the first time in medical libraries, but at the Surgeon General’s Library about 1865, they were employed in the author catalogue, the subject catalogue being added just before 1880. Both were started at the Boston Medical Library in 1875. At the New York Academy of Medicine Mr. John S. Brownne made an author card catalogue in 1880, but the subject catalogue was not begun until 1901.

Our librarian of a hundred years ago would open his eyes wide at some of the other changes in the libraries of today—“new fangled notions” he would probably call them. Many libraries now catalogue large collections of reprints or at least keep them on file, realizing very well that they are so much more convenient to slip in a pocket than a huge bound volume of such a magazine as *La Presse Médicale*. Also the editors of medical magazines often cannot consent to long lists of references taking up much space at the end of papers, but they allow them at the end of reprints, much to the delight of the author. The librarian of old would probably hold his hands up in horror at the thought of interlibrary loans, of which we hear so much. Many libraries now lend all but their oldest and best books to almost any other library in the country in this way, and very few volumes are lost in the express or mails. This is really lending a helping hand as well. And nowadays, if it is impossible to lend valuable works, we have photostats made of the passages desired and send these instead. A number of medical libraries possess their own photostat machines and also facilities for photographing portraits of doctors in their large collections, and means of making lantern slides. The American Medical Association (1924), the State Medical Society of Wisconsin aided by the Medical School of the University of Wisconsin (1926), and other bodies send out small package libraries at the request of individual doctors for papers on special subjects.

In no department of medical libraries is development more evident

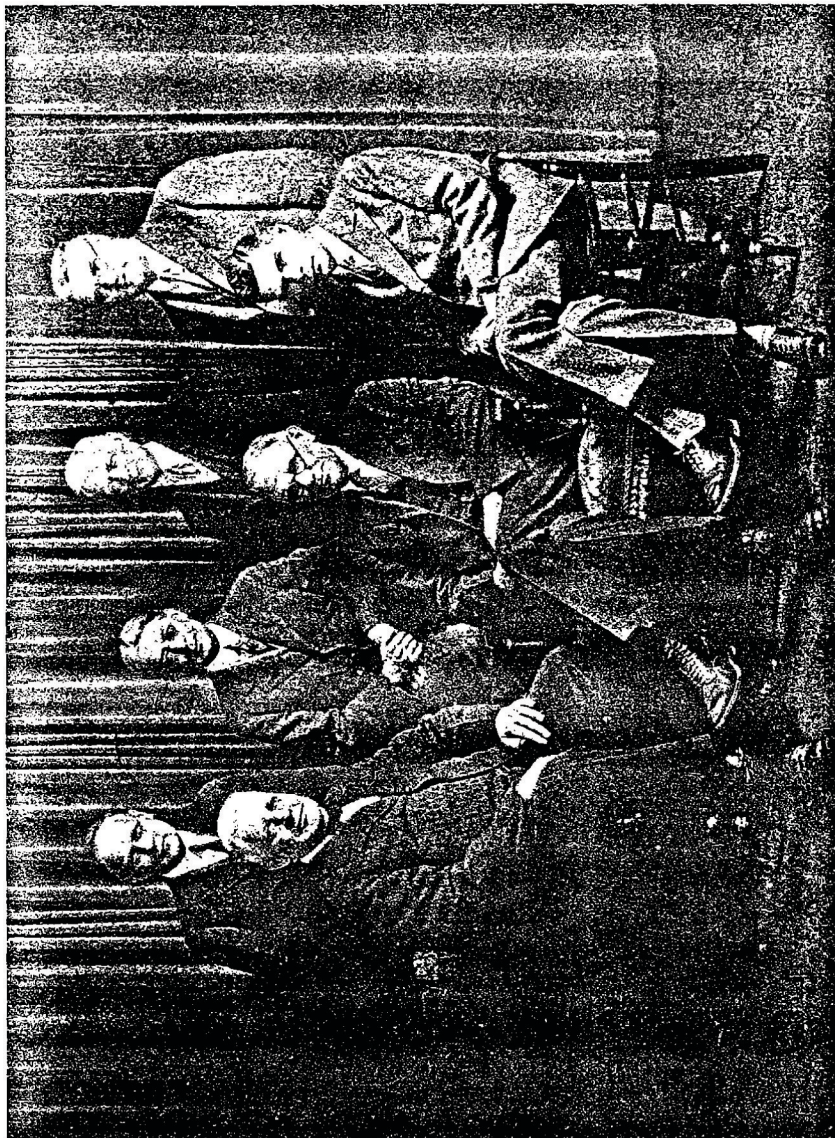




JOHN RUHRÄH

Chairman Library Centennial Celebration Committee; Chairman Library  
Committee 1916-1929.





LIBRARY CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

Top row, left to right: George A. Stewart, Alexius McClannan, Lewellys F. Barker, and Andrew C. Gilles.  
Front row: Charles Emil Brack, *Treasurer*, Henry M. Fitzhugh, *President*, and John T. King, Jr., *Secretary*.  
Photograph by Bachrach.

than in that of magazines or periodical literature. It is not an easy matter to obtain figures for the early days of medical libraries in this country, but fortunately the late Dr. J. R. Chadwick of Boston has come to our aid, for he tells us the "Second Social or Boston Medical Library," issued a catalogue of their books in 1808 and recorded that that Library took all the medical journals printed in English—ten in number, seven of which were of English and three of American origin. At the present time the largest medical libraries in this country have between eighteen and nineteen hundred on their shelves. There are now about 200 English and about 600 American journals. The development in medical journalism has not been one of progress on all sides. I fancy "trade" journals, pseudo-scientific articles, and advertisements of patent medicine vendors did not bulk so large in 1808 as now. Happily the infant mortality of medical journals is high and many marasmic magazines never reach years of maturity, certainly not of discretion, whether through failure of food supply, indigestion or possibly through circulatory failure, I know not, but at least 5000 titles of medical magazines—the quick and the dead—can be enumerated.

A great deal more interest is now taken in the study of the history of medicine of all ages, and of medical biography and bibliography, than a hundred years ago. Such men as William Osler are largely responsible for this movement, and today splendid collections are to be found in private and public libraries throughout the country. And may I say in passing that nowhere have I seen local medical history better displayed than in your own library. To a small boy "Md." written after Baltimore of course denoted "Doctor of Medicine" so famous were your physicians. Beginning in the East there is the Bullard loan collection of medical incunabula and other collections at the Boston Medical Library and the private library of Dr. Harvey Cushing. At the King's County Medical Society at Brooklyn there are 6,000 titles in the George Jackson Fisher collection of medical classics and incunabula purchased in 1907. At the New York Academy of Medicine there is the collection which was made by Dr. E. C. Streeter of Boston, recently acquired, also the many historical volumes which were in the New York Hospital Library, which came to the Academy in 1898. At the College of Physicians, Philadelphia, there is a very

fine group of incunabula and a very large collection of the medical classics. Prof. George W. Corner is building up a splendid collection of anatomical books at the University of Rochester. Here in Baltimore there is the Howard A. Kelly collection now in the new Welch Library, not to speak of the almost unique Laennec and Jenner books in the Library of Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs. The Library of the Surgeon General's Office is the richest historical medical library in the country. It leads in this as in all other fields. Professor S. Wingate Todd has a very good collection of books on anatomy at Western Reserve University, Cleveland. At the University of Michigan are Dr. Lewis S. Pilcher's books. At the Northwestern University Medical School, Chicago, the Dean, Dr. Irving Cutter, is making a very good historical collection and the books of the late Dr. Mortimer Frank are at the University of Chicago. At the Milwaukee Academy of Medicine are those of the late Dr. Horace Manchester Brown. The collection of the German historian, Pagel, is at St. Louis. The Lane Medical Library of Stanford University has a splendid historical collection, and Dr. LeRoy Crummer has recently taken his wonderful books out to California. Turn your steps backwards and north to Montreal and you will find the Bibliotheca Osleriana at McGill University, gathered by one who was a member of this Faculty and of great help in building up your library of medical classics.

Nothing is so remarkable in the development of medical libraries as the extraordinarily rapid growth of the Library of the Surgeon General's Office. Like Jonah's gourd it came up in a night. The collection was begun by Surgeon General Lovell prior to 1836, but at the outset of the Civil War in 1861 it consisted of about three or four hundred volumes. Then in 1865 John S. Billings, a man of vision, appeared on the scene. He found about 1800 volumes in the library, twenty-six American journals and transactions of societies, and seventeen foreign ones. Listen to the latest figures published for October, 1929. There are in the Library 324,541 bound and 45,072 unbound volumes, 483,849 pamphlets, making a grand total of 853,462 items. Instead of 43 periodicals of 1865, about 1,710 are taken now. The richness of the historical collection is extraordinary, for example there are 518 incunabula or cradle books printed before 1501. Besides, the Army Medical Library houses 8,707 portraits, 797 medical engravings

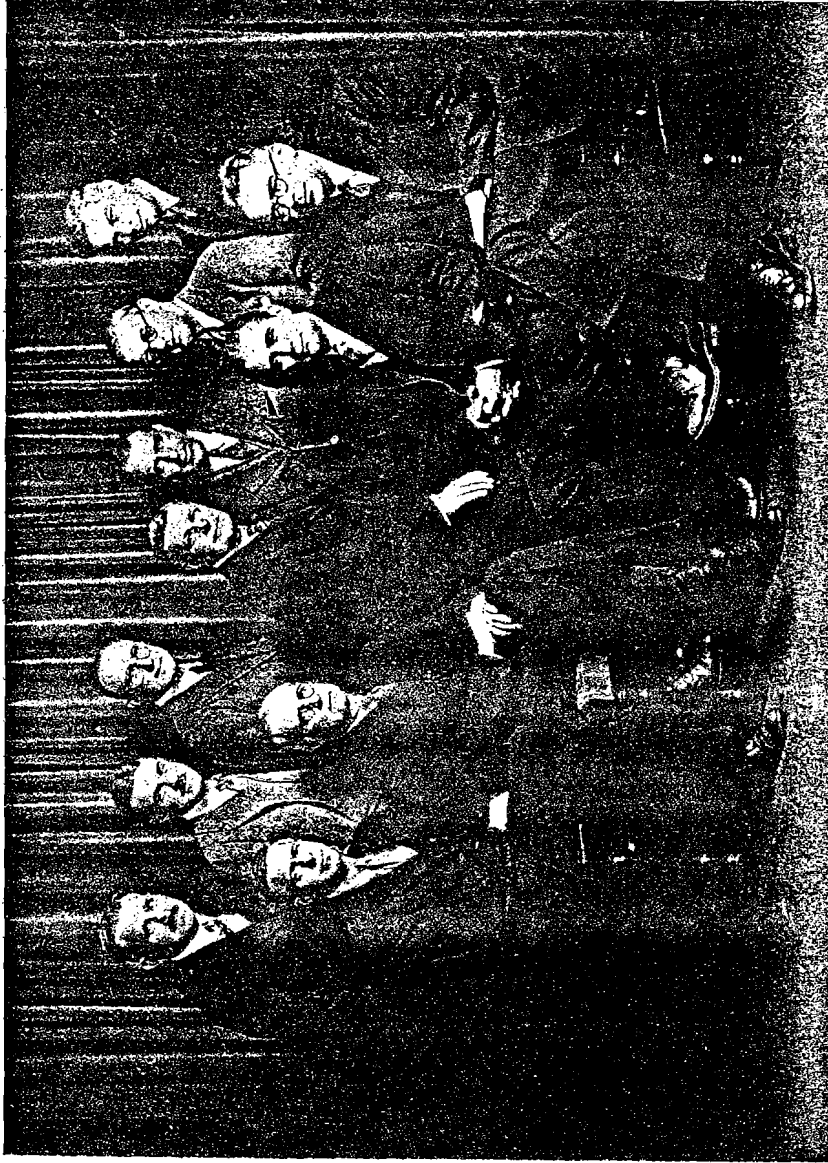


and prints, and 444 medical caricatures. The new Statistical Division, started in 1923 with the gift of a magnificent and unrivalled collection of the Prudential Insurance Company gathered by that prince of statisticians, Dr. Frederick L. Hoffmann, is extraordinarily valuable to insurance and public health workers. This magnificent library ranks second only to the Bibliotheque de la Faculté de Médecine at Paris, but for what it has done in advancing the cause of medicine, it stands far, far, ahead of any other, for from the Library of the Surgeon General's Office have issued the greatest bibliographies the world has ever seen. I refer of course to the *Index Medicus* which, appearing in monthly or quarterly parts in three series from 1879 until 1926, gave lists of almost all the books and theses received by the Library and articles in the medical periodicals taken at Washington; and the *Index Catalogue*, each volume of which covers about twenty years of medical literature to be found under that letter or letters of the alphabet with which that particular volume deals. Since the advent of these bibliographies, the work of Billings, Fletcher and Garrison, it cannot be said that "journalism is the grave of genius," for good articles are no longer buried. Beginning with the letter A in 1880 the *Index Catalogue* has gone through the alphabet twice already and the third series is rapidly nearing completion. It is probable that if pressure be not brought to bear on Congress, no fourth series will be started. As far back as 1893 we find there was a special meeting of this Faculty "to urge upon Congress the annual government appropriation for the publication of the *Index Catalogue*. Other bodies have striven for the same financial support. To all medical writers and medical investigators the *Index Catalogue* is a well nigh indispensable tool and it has been extraordinarily valuable as an aid to the growth and increased usefulness of medical libraries. Mr. President, I now ask if it would not be an auspicious occasion at the time of your centennial celebration to repeat your appeal of 1893. Should appeals come from all medical libraries of this country and even from those abroad, the authorities at Washington simply could not resist.

Progress has also been aided by the Medical Library Association. The suggestion to found it came from the late Dr. George M. Gould of Philadelphia, Editor of the *Philadelphia Medical Journal* and Miss M. R. Charlton of the Medical Library of McGill University, Mon-

trear, who called the first meeting in 1898 when he was elected the first President. This Association now has about 130 libraries, 111 doctors, and 14 professional librarians as members, and has played its part in the development of the medical libraries of the United States and Canada. Through its Exchange as planned, and already found to be successful, by Dr. Gould in 1897, much aid has been given especially to the smaller libraries in building up collections of medical magazines. This is very economically carried out, as libraries send into headquarters lists of magazines which they wish to give away. These lists are combined and sent to all the libraries and then the material is allotted by the Manager of the Exchange; the largest libraries having first choice as they contribute the most and they have the fewest wants. The library receiving the magazines pays the express or postage. I am happy to tell you that this Exchange was housed in the Library of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland from 1900 until 1904 and again from 1909 until 1925, and for most of that time, before the new arrangements came into being, all the magazines and books had to be handled and stored here. The medical libraries are profoundly grateful to Miss Noyes and her associates and on behalf of the Medical Library Association I wish to tender her our best thanks. Also, there can be little doubt that the Association has done a great deal towards the development of librarians as well as of libraries, for the annual meetings have brought the librarians into close touch with one another. I can assure you that these meetings mean as much to librarians as medical meetings do to doctors. Fortunately most library committees realize this, but some do not. These should send a representative to the meetings every year.

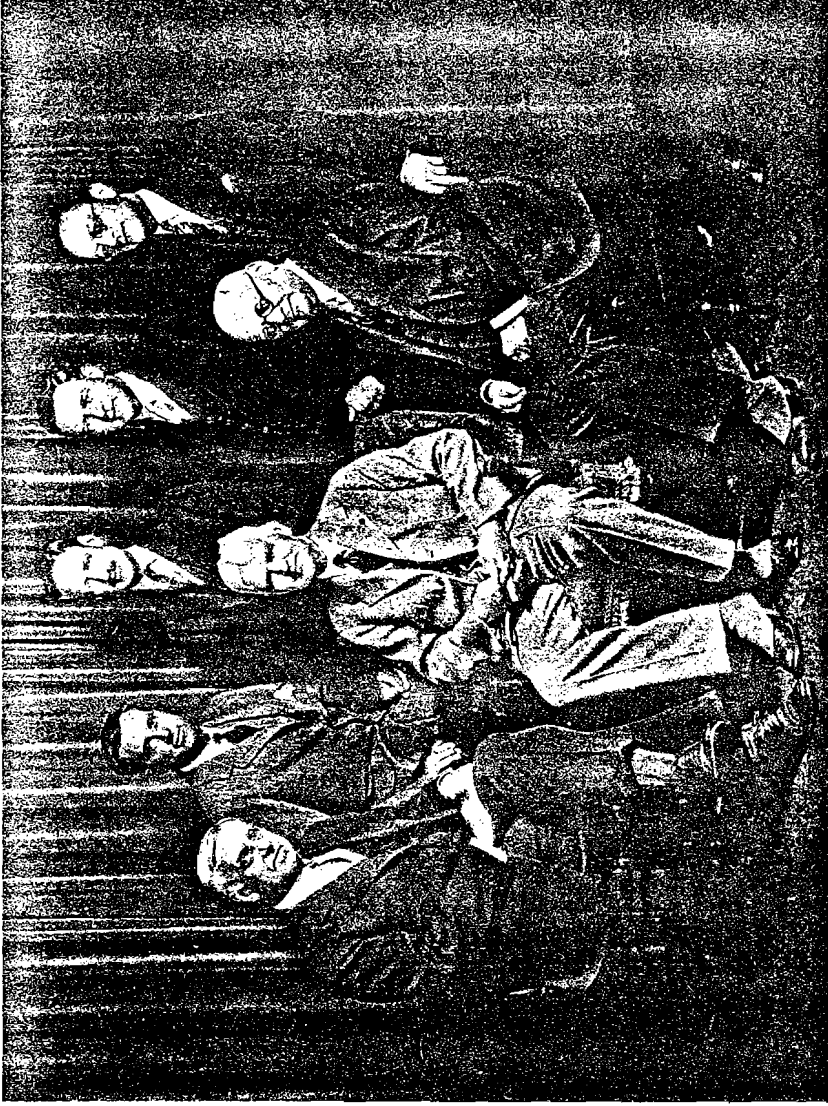
There have always been teachers in medical schools who have known the value of books and even in the days of the apprenticed and resident medical student, he was encouraged to use his preceptor's private library. You all know what James Bovell and his books did for Osler. On the other hand, some teachers, self-styled "practical men," did not frequent the school library themselves, and did not send their pupils to it. Fortunately we have now almost passed that stage and teachers do not think it a disgrace to say they do not know. They are sending their young hopefuls to the library to look up special points for them, recognizing that students should acquire the library habit and become



EXHIBITION COMMITTEE

Top row, left to right: Caleb W. G. Rohrer, Edward M. Hanrahan, Edwin N. Broyles, Ronald T. Abercrombie, J. Albert Chatard, Albert Keidel, Louis A. M. Krause.

First row: Charles C. W. Judd, J. Hall Pleasants, Walter D. Wise, *Chairman*, Leo Brady.  
Photograph by Bachrach.



EXHIBITION COMMITTEE

Back row, left to right: I. Ridgeway Trimble, Henry M. Thomas, Jr., George H. Preston, and Charles R. Austrian.

Front row: J. Charles Macgill, John R. Oliver, and J. Frank Crouch.  
Photograph by Bachrach.



accustomed to the use of the medical bibliographies or the medical books of reference. Bayard Holmes of Chicago was probably one of the first in the country to teach his students systematically the use of medical libraries, and he wrote a paper on the subject as long ago as 1893. Some medical schools amongst which is McGill, now give definite class demonstrations in the handling of the card catalogues and indexes. This is good, but to my mind it is far better to have the students taught individually. If they go with questions to the library and are shown how they can answer them themselves, the instruction offered by the member of the staff of the library will have, it seems to me, much more lasting benefit. The student will be much more attentive when it is his own concern to take back to his professor, an account of what he has discovered at the library. I am not one who thinks that everyone can be taught the value of books, but the old idea of a written thesis—still such an important part of the undergraduate training in France—is an excellent one, for some students are induced to become readers who otherwise would not realize what opportunities and pleasures they had missed. The thesis should not come at the end of the undergraduate course but soon after its beginning, and then necessarily in one of the primary subjects. And you know librarians love to think that their collections are being more and more appreciated.

Our libraries have multiplied and have grown. The readers have increased in numbers. But let us not forget that there were some men a hundred years ago who made just as much if not more of their opportunities than the student does today. And they had then just as keen minds. Osler, you know, used to browse and to study here for an hour or so several times a week. And Dr. Welch, a member of your Faculty, delights in saying that he is a graduate of the New York Hospital Library of the seventies. He had been given a key to the building and read there to all hours. If all the doctors in Maryland are not yet graduates of your library, may they strive for such an honour.