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Billings Seeks a Building for the Library and Museum

PLANNING THE BUILDING

AS soon as Billings won his battle to publish the *Index-Catalogue*, he began a campaign to persuade Congress to provide the Library and museum with a building of their own. He had gathered so much printed material that he had run out of space in Ford's Theatre. Volumes were double and triple shelved. "There came to be no room for even the storage of books and specimens," wrote Charles Smart, "not to speak of facility of reference or advantageous display."¹ Billings considered placing books in the attic but decided that the weight there might cave in the building, or that if a fire ever broke out the volumes would be burned or ruined by water from fire hoses. Assistant Surgeon David Huntington relieved a bit of the pressure by storing books and undistributed volumes of *Index-Catalogue* at Soldier's Home about 4 miles away on the outskirts of Washington.²

The ex-theater was undesirable in other respects for its present uses. The Museum, crowded into the third floor, was visited by approximately 36,000 persons a year and was being enlarged by about 500 specimens annually. The lower floor, where clerks searched Civil War records for pension applicants, was dim, illuminated only by gas lamps, and had no ventilation. The Inspector General of the War Department had protested strongly that three times as many clerks were jammed into the space as ought to be.³

The theater had been erected hurriedly in a few months and was poorly constructed. The east wall was more than a foot out of plumb. The southwest corner had given way until there was a large crack in the wall. The weight of books, specimens, furniture, files, and people placed stresses on the floors and walls that the building had not been designed to bear. Officers were apprehensive that the continual addition of weight would cause the building to collapse.

Finally, the building, although the walls were of brick and the floors of concrete, was not fireproof. In 1875 a small frame building adjacent to the south side caught fire. Daniel Lamb, pathologist of the museum, discovered the blaze before it had time to spread widely, but before it was extinguished

it damaged the photograph room.⁴ The staff always feared that a fire might start in a neighboring house or shed, jump to Ford's and destroy all their work.

It seems that Billings had four choices: to recommend to Surgeon General Barnes that the Library stop collecting (which he would not have done if humanly possible, and which would have ended publication of *Index-Catalogue*), to suggest or agree to a merger with Library of Congress (which he did not want to do), to find storage spaces here and there in government buildings (which would have fragmented the Library), or to persuade the Surgeon General to ask Congress for permission and funds to construct a special library-museum building. Apparently, he had no difficulty with the last alternative, for medical officers, from the Surgeon General to the most recent assistant surgeon, were proud of their Library and museum.

Billings had learned something about the functional design of buildings years before when he compiled and edited Circular No. 4 of the Surgeon General's office, *A report on Barracks and Hospitals, with Descriptions of Military Posts*. And he had learned more while consulting with officials of Johns Hopkins about the design of its hospital. He discussed his ideas for a building with Adolph Cluss of the architectural firm of Cluss and Schulze and sketched a floor plan of a building that Cluss translated into a design. Undoubtedly Cluss contributed to the plan; several years earlier he had won third place among 28 entries in a competition for a design for the proposed Library of Congress building.

The building was to be L-shaped, four stories high. The center segment and the first floor of the wings were to contain offices, workshops, laboratories, and space for records. The upper portions of the wings were to be halls, one for the Library, the other for the museum.

The strategy that Barnes and Billings decided upon to gain Congressional support was to emphasize the unsafe condition of Ford's, rather than the lack of space for books and specimens, or the crowded condition of records and clerks. "In the building . . .," the general reported to his superiors, "these collections are continually exposed to the danger of destruction by fire. This building is surrounded by inflammable houses and sheds . . . destruction by fire of the roof would not only involve the whole Museum Collection in the third story, but, by the fall of at least a portion of the walls, the destruction of the contents of the lower stories, including the Library and the Records, would result."⁵

Barnes convinced Secretary of War Alexander Ramsay that a new, sturdy, plain, fireproof building, costing a quarter of a million dollars on a site costing about \$50,000, was needed for the Library, museum, and records. Ramsay gave President Rutherford B. Hayes information about the building and its contents, and the President was impressed.⁶ He recommended, in his annual message, that Congress appropriate money for a new structure, stating that⁷

the Army Medical Museum and Library are of national importance. . . . Their destruction would be an irreparable loss, not only to the United States, but to

the Government against attempted frauds, as well as for the benefit of honest claimants. These valuable collections are now in a building which is peculiarly exposed to the danger of destruction by fire. . . .

Perhaps because the Hayes administration and the 46th Congress were both nearing their end no further action was taken, but Barnes and Billings had succeeded in opening the door.

The following year, with a new President in office and a new Congress soon to convene, Surgeon General Barnes repeated his request for a building. Secretary of War Robert T. Lincoln agreed that Barnes had a good case, and forwarded the proposal to President Chester A. Arthur, who approved and transmitted the communications to the Senate and House on January 19, 1882. Both houses printed pertinent documents on the proposed building.⁸

Barnes, Billings, and other officers now had to persuade Congress to agree. The general offered to guide Representative James Singleton and other members of the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds (the committee that would decide whether or not a new building should be constructed) through Ford's, and show them the condition of the structure.⁹ At least one congressman, Representative Strother Stockslager, toured Ford's with the Surgeon General and later emphasized its unsafe state during debate.¹⁰ Barnes also went to Capitol Hill and talked to the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds.¹¹

Without detracting from the importance of General Barnes' (and his successors, General Charles Crane's and Robert Murray's) talks and correspondence with members of Congress, it appears that almost all of the lobbying for the proposed building was directed by Billings. When the Senate and House referred the President's message to committees on public buildings, Billings made a list of the names and home towns of each member of the House committee.¹² He then wrote to prominent physicians in the home states of these congressmen, explained the necessity for a library-museum building, and asked them to influence their legislators. Thus he began a letter writing campaign that would last more than 3 years to encourage American physicians to persuade representatives and senators to vote for the building.

Owing to his voluminous correspondence in search of books, journals, and other medical literature; his founding of *Index Medicus*; his manifold activities in the American Public Health Association, American Medical Association, and National Board of Health; and the publication of *Index-Catalogue*; Billings was known to and respected by medical editors and leaders in state and national medical societies. Therefore when he asked physicians to help obtain a new building for the national medical Library and museum, many of them responded enthusiastically. William Pepper, professor at the University of Pennsylvania medical school, and Horatio C. Wood, professor in the same school and editor of *Philadelphia Medical Times*, contacted Representative Shallenberger. James G. Thomas, past president of the Georgia State Medical Association, wrote to Representative Philip Cook, and also asked a Dr. Cooper of Cook's home town

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to influence the congressman. Professor Austin Flint, Jr. of Bellevue Hospital Medical College wrote to Frank Hiscock, a powerful member of the House Committee on Appropriations. A physician whose identity we do not know of Scranton, Pennsylvania, persuaded a score of his colleagues to send a petition to Representative Joseph Scranton. Jerome Cochran, professor at Medical College of Alabama; William W. Dawson, professor at Medical College of Ohio and a future president of the American Medical Association; David W. Yandell, editor of *American Practitioner* in Louisville, Kentucky; Thomas Wood, editor of *North Carolina Medical Journal*; and James F. Hibberd, past president of the Medical Society of Indiana, promised to help.¹³

Billings, his associates or his friends, had petitions printed for physicians to sign and send to congressmen. Billings kept a supply at hand to pass out on request.¹⁴ Christopher Johnson, professor at University of Maryland Medical School and former president of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, obtained the signatures of 32 physicians on a petition and presented it to Representative Robert McLane. Robert A. Kinloch, professor at Medical College of South Carolina and former editor of *Charleston Medical Journal*, circularized petitions and also talked with a Carolina senator. Claudius H. Mastin, a future president of the American Surgical Association, passed around a petition which he presented to Representative Hilary Herbert and also chatted with his friend Senator John Morgan, who agreed to back the building. Granville P. Conn, secretary of New Hampshire Medical Society, James R. Chadwick, founder of Boston Medical Library, and William Pepper circulated petitions.¹⁵ Representative Perry Belmont received a petition signed by Fordyce Barker, Austin Flint, Cornelius R. Agnew, and other physicians; Representative Will Aldrich received a petition from 22 physicians and surgeons of Chicago; Representative Leopold Morse heard from physicians of Boston and Representative Stanton Peelle from Theophilus Parvin, Allison Maxwell, and other physicians of Indianapolis.¹⁶

Several editors publicized the campaign for a building through editorials, published letters, and new items. John V. Shoemaker of *Medical Bulletin*, Philadelphia, told Billings to send a memo of the facts that he would like to have emphasized and Shoemaker would write an editorial. The first editorial, "A new building wanted," appeared in the March 1882 issue. It noted the size and usefulness of the museum, Library, and Civil War record collection, the crowded, unsafe state of the building, and ended with this appeal:

Let every physician consider the cause his own, and work earnestly for its success. Speak at once to your senators and representatives, telling them how important it is that this subject should receive favorable consideration and prompt action. Write to them when the bill is introduced and get your friends to do likewise, and we are certain that the present Congress will perform its duty and provide a suitable edifice for the treasures of the Surgeon General's Office.

Thereafter as the occasion demanded Shoemaker ran news items about the Library, museum, building, and *Index-Catalogue*.¹⁷

TO THE HON.

My Dear Sir:

We desire to call your special attention to the application for a fire-proof building for the Army Medical Museum and Library at Washington, which is now before the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds of the House and Senate respectively, and to respectfully urge that you exert your best influence to have this application granted with the least possible delay.

This Library is now the most complete and valuable collection of its kind in existence, and its practical utility to all medical writers and teachers in this country will be greatly increased by the publication of its Index Catalogue, which, so far as issued, has received the highest praise in all parts of the world, and which should be finished as rapidly as is possible consistent with preserving the completeness and accuracy which characterize the volumes already printed.

The Museum is also in its way the most complete in the world, and with the Library forms a contribution to Scientific and Practical Medicine of which we, as American Physicians, are justly proud.

At present these collections are stored in a building which is not fire-proof, is situated in the midst of highly inflammable buildings, is entirely too small to permit of the proper display and management of their materials, and is so unsuited to its purpose that they should not remain in it a day longer than is necessary.

In this connection we invite your special attention to the importance of keeping the Library and Museum together, as being mutually illustrative and used by the same investigators. We would respectfully but strongly protest

One of several petitions drawn up by Billings or one of his friends, to be signed by physicians and presented to Congress.

Thomas Minor, a prolific contributor to *Cincinnati Lancet-Clinic*, informed Billings that he would write about the institutions and he did. *Lancet-Clinic* gave the proposed building some of its earliest publicity, a long published letter by William Dawson in January 1882.¹⁸ Henry C. Lea published editorials and items in his weekly *Medical News*. After Congress failed to take up legislation for the building in 1882, Lea told his readers:¹⁹

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against the proposal, which we understand has been made, to have this Library transferred to the building which is to be provided for the National Library, and thus to separate it from the Museum and remove it from the management which has made it so successful.

It is our opinion that special Scientific Libraries should be in the same buildings with the Museums, Laboratories, Observatories, etc., which pertain to their special subjects, and should be under the direction of men specially familiar with them—who will thus have the strongest inducement to do good work, and who will have the cordial co-operation of all those specially interested in the matter.

The Library of the Surgeon General's Office is practically the Medical Section of the National Library, but it should not be merged with the latter nor be in the same building with it.

The completeness and prosperity of this Library is a matter of great interest to the medical profession of this country; it is the one thing by which the National Government can give powerful aid to scientific medicine and a higher medical education, and we sincerely hope that this Congress will not adjourn without having granted the request for a new building or having made the necessary appropriations for continuing the Index Catalogue, and for obtaining every new medical book and journal as soon as published.

Begging you to give this matter your special attention and favorable consideration, we are

Yours, very respectfully,

It is the clear duty as well as interest of the profession to bestir itself in this matter. Let every physician who can, either in person or by letter, convey his views to a senator or congressman, urge upon him the importance of providing a fireproof building for the library and museum (which ought never to be separated), of keeping the library under the control of the Surgeon General, and of providing for the completion of its index catalogue, the usefulness of which can hardly be overestimated.

And Lea listed the names and states of representatives on the committee in charge of library legislation.

Other journals that helped included *Philadelphia Medical Times*, *Medical Register*, and *The Nation*. The latter was a top-notch magazine of general circulation; and whereas medical journals were probably never seen by politicians, *The Nation* was a magazine they would have kept their eye on. In March 1882 it published an account of the Library and museum, explained the inadequacies of Ford's Theatre, and hoped that Congress would provide a new building.²⁰ In the autumn, in an article discussing the proposed structure for the Library of Congress, it again talked about the Surgeon General's Library and supported the campaign for a new building.²¹

Billings also suggested to his correspondents that they initiate discussions of the Library and museum at medical society meetings. The Medico-Legal Society of New York passed resolutions favoring the building, and sent them to Representative J. Warren Keifer. The St. Louis Medical Society adopted a resolution which it had printed and sent to Missouri senators and representatives. The Philadelphia County Medical Society, Medical Society of the County of Kings (New York), Centre District Medical Society (New Hampshire), Alabama State Medical Association, Hudson County Medical Society (New Jersey), and Chester County Medical Society (Pennsylvania) drew up memorials to Congress.²²

THE LIBRARY'S APPROPRIATION

While Billings was directing the lobbying activities of an influential segment of the medical profession, he had to marshal his friends to oppose another attempt to decrease the Library-museum appropriation. The appropriation bill for fiscal year 1882-1883 proposed to give the Library and museum \$5,000 rather than the \$10,000 they had been receiving since 1872. This would not only have hurt both organizations for a 12-month period but might have established a precedent for low appropriations in the future. One can be certain that Billings spoke to those legislators whom he had come to know in Washington and that David Huntington, curator of the museum, and other medical officers did the same. Billings' friends who were writing, talking and petitioning in favor of a new building also stressed the necessity of keeping the appropriation at the \$10,000 level. During the spring sympathetic congressmen increased the sum to \$7,500, and when the appropriation came before the House in April Benjamin Butterworth raised it to \$10,000.²³

Then Billings learned that the Senate Committee on Appropriations had recommended only \$5,000. He took his pen again and began scrawling notes to his friends. "I write in great haste," he told Abraham Jacobi, "I must get off *many* letters today & tomorrow."²⁴ Billings and his friends persuaded the senators to reconsider and not halve the usual amount.²⁵ But he and Huntington did not know how much money they would have for the Library and museum until June 30 when the law was finally enacted and they received \$10,000.

During the 1870's and early 1880's the quantity and prices of new medical works had continually increased, with the result that Billings had fallen behind

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in his purchase of current literature. In 1883 the Surgeon General appealed for a larger appropriation, stating in his *Annual Report*: "It is often necessary to reply [to readers] that the desired book or pamphlet is not in the library, even though it may be new and readily obtainable by purchase. The amount heretofore appropriated for the library is not sufficient to purchase all new books and journals, and therefore a selection must be made, which of course cannot meet the wants of everyone."²⁶ Congress agreed, and the following year it separated the Library's appropriation from the museum's and increased it to \$10,000. Within a short time Billings made arrangements to have "every new medical work from every country sent promptly to the Library."²⁷ The annual appropriation remained \$10,000 into the 1890's:

Fiscal Year ending June 30	Library	Museum	Both
1884			10,000
1885	10,000	5,000	
1886	10,000	5,000	
1887	10,000	5,000	
1888	10,000	5,000	
1889	10,000	5,000	
1890	10,000	5,000	
1891	10,000	5,000	
1892	10,000	5,000	

BILLINGS, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL BOARD OF HEALTH

During 1882 Billings had another reason to be concerned over appropriations. In 1879, after several years of discussion, Congress had created an agency called the National Board of Health, which the government, sanitarians, and citizens hoped would draw up a practical plan for keeping yellow fever and other epidemic diseases out of the United States. The Army appointed Billings as its representative on the Board. The Board elected Billings its vice president, and because he lived in Washington where the Board's office was located, while the president resided in Charlottesville, Virginia, Billings generally presided at meetings of the Board's executive committee and slowly gained the reputation of running the Board, which was largely true. The Board moved along well for a year, but slowly it began to meet opposition in Congress from economy-minded and States Rights legislators and in the Treasury Department from the *Marine Hospital Service*, ambitious to become the Nation's public health agency. By 1882 the National Board of Health's appropriation was being threatened seriously, and Billings was being criticized. Finally in the summer of 1882 he asked to be relieved from duty on the Board.

Criticism and lack of appreciation of his labors may have been sufficient to cause Billings to resign, yet it seems unlike him to have left the Board because of these reasons. Perhaps he was working too hard enlarging the Library, campaigning for a building, delivering speeches at meetings of organizations, participating in activities of library and medical societies, directing compilation of the *Index-Catalogue*, consulting with the architects of Johns Hopkins medical

school, and doing other things; yet if overwork was the cause, he could have dropped tasks less important than the National Board. Fielding H. Garrison, Billings' associate, gave the bald reason that "Billings was not the sort of man to remain long in an environment which did not suit him or in which little could be accomplished. Living up to the device, 'environment wins,' he resigned his vice-presidency in 1882."²⁸ Yet, this statement does not really explain the reasons for the resignation.

It seems to me probable that Billings resigned because he feared that antagonism toward the Board in the committees on appropriations (the committees finally stopped the Boards' appropriation and literally killed it) would be transferred through him to the Library and museum; and that if he wanted to remain on good or at least neutral terms with key legislators throughout the remainder of his career in the Library and continue to obtain sufficient funds along with a new building, he had better leave the controversial Board before it was too late.

CAMPAIGN FOR A BUILDING, 1883

Shortly after Congress convened in December 1882, several congressmen visited the theater to confirm the crowded, unsafe conditions. They questioned Thomas Wise in the Library and Henry C. Yarrow in the museum. After they left, Wise and Yarrow asked Billings for a résumé of his arguments for a new building, to make certain that they were providing all possible reasons to inquisitors.²⁹ Billings must have been a bit on edge waiting for one of his sympathizers to act, but finally on February 28, 1883, Representative Shallenberger introduced Bill H.R. 7681 to authorize construction of a building costing \$200,000 on ground owned by the government near the National Museum and Smithsonian Institution.³⁰ The original estimate of \$250,000, made in 1880, had been cut to \$200,000 by modifying the design—for instance, by reducing the number of front entrances from three to one.

The bill appeared only a few days before the session was scheduled to end on March 3, and Surgeon General Crane, Librarian Billings, and Curator Huntington knew that Congress would probably not have time to pass legislation before adjournment. Nevertheless they tried to obtain passage of legislation in a roundabout way. Billings drafted an amendment to the Sundry Civil Bill to authorize \$200,000 for the building, and Crane asked Senator Joseph R. Hawley to introduce it. Crane told Hawley that "assurances have been given that [the amendment] will be also accepted by the House," and he emphasized that money would be saved by moving pension clerks from rented buildings into the Library-Museum Building.³¹

For reasons not known the strategy failed. There was no hope for action on the bill until a new Congress convened in December. But in the meantime Billings renewed his efforts to obtain support from the medical profession. During the winter, spring and autumn of 1883 he wrote to editors and to leaders of state and national medical societies and distributed blank petitions.

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Hosmer Johnson, one of the founders of Northwestern University Medical School and a former editor of *Northwestern Medical and Surgical Journal*, replied: "I have your letters suggesting methods of reaching the members of Congress upon the question of the medical library. I will secure the signatures of a dozen or so of our leading physicians and as many more as you think will be useful. I am quite sure that there would be no difficulty in getting the names of every doctor in Illinois."³²

Charles O'Leary, Providence, Rhode Island, promised to talk to Representative Henry Spooner, and he also circulated a petition and presented it to the congressman. Claudius Mastin spoke to Alabama legislators who congregated in Mobile to attend a funeral. Jerome Cochran approached several Alabama congressmen. Richard Wyckoff, Brooklyn, New York, influenced Representatives Henry Slocum and Darwin James. Tobias Richardson, New Orleans, circulated a petition and urged Senator Randall Gibson, a guest in his home, to favor the Library. S. Weir Mitchell talked to Senator Morgan. Theophilus Parvin, Indianapolis, buttonholed Senator Daniel Voorhees.³³

James Reeves, secretary of the West Virginia Board of Health, had resolutions drafted by Billings passed by his medical society and also obtained a promise of aid from Representative Nathan Goff. William Robertson, president of the Iowa Board of Health, persuaded his state medical society to pass resolutions and also obtained a petition signed by the leading physicians of Iowa. Samuel Gross influenced the Pennsylvania Medical Society to pass resolutions. Henry Bowditch persuaded the Massachusetts Medical Society to act. The societies of Connecticut, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Minnesota drew up resolutions which they sent to all senators and representatives of their states, and published in medical journals.³⁴

Philadelphia County Medical Society, Medical Society of the County of Kings (New York), and New Hampshire Central Medical Society sent petitions to Congress, as did groups of physicians in Beaver County, Pennsylvania; Augusta, Georgia; Rhode Island; Louisiana; South Carolina; and New York.³⁵ *Louisville Medical News*, *St. Louis Courier of Medicine*, *Medical News* (Philadelphia), *Nation*, *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, and other journals ran editorials.³⁶

The American Surgical Association, American Laryngological Association, and American Library Association enacted resolutions, but the most powerful national group to support Billings was the American Medical Association. Apparently Billings conceived the plan of having physicians of national stature prevail upon the AMA to pass resolutions. Those he asked were Samuel Gross, Austin Flint, Sr., and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Gross had been president of the association in 1868, Flint would be president in 1884, and Holmes was universally known through his writings. These three signed a petition (Holmes insisting that his two cosigners have the honor of signing first) drafted or planned by Billings urging the organization to memorialize Congress. Gross read this petition at the meeting. The AMA appointed five members to prepare a mem-

Proposed Amendment to Sundry Civil Bill

The Construction under the direction of
the Office in charge of the
construction of the State War and
Navy Department ~~building~~ ^{through} of a fireproof brick building
to contain the ^{Army} Medical Museum and Library
of the Surgeon General's Office U.S. Army,
two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000.00)
provided that said building shall be erected upon
the Government reservation in the vicinity of
the National Museum on a site to be selected
by a Commission composed of the Secretary
of the Smithsonian Institution, the
Architect of the Capitol and the Office
in charge of the construction of the State War and Navy
Department building
and in accordance with plans submitted by the
Surgeon General of the Army, subject to the
Approval of said Commission

Billings' hand-written proposal for legislation to authorize construction of, and appropriate funds for, a Library-Museum building, 1883.

orial; Gross, Flint, Tobias Richardson (a former AMA president), David Yandell (another ex-president), and Henry Campbell (a future president). Their memorial carried considerable weight; it was quoted in debate and was printed in journals and in Senate and House documents dealing with construction of the Library-Museum Building.³⁷

and provided further that five thousand dollars of this appropriation shall be immediately available for the purpose of preparing detailed drawings and specifications for said building.

CIVIL WAR PENSION RECORDS

During the years that had elapsed since the end of the Civil War the Medical Department had been receiving more and more requests for information from veterans seeking pensions. By 1882 the backlog of applications had become so large that Congress ordered the employment of more clerks. There was no room for additional workers in the Pension and Record Division on the first floor of Ford's, and the government rented buildings number 935, 937, and

939 F Street, on the northeast corner of Tenth and F, for use as file rooms and offices for the new employees.

There was now another argument in favor of constructing the Library-Museum Building. The government could transfer the clerks and files from the F Street building to the first floor of the new structure and save the money it was paying in rent. At the rate pension applications were arriving, the F Street buildings would be needed for many years; therefore savings would amount to a considerable sum if the clerks could be moved. From 1883 to 1885 the Surgeon Generals emphasized the potential savings, and undoubtedly this was taken into account by economy-minded senators and representatives.³⁸

ATTEMPT TO REDUCE THE APPROPRIATION

In early 1883, Billings had to concentrate on blocking another attempt to cut in half the Library-Museum appropriation from \$10,000 to \$5,000. S. Weir Mitchell talked to Senator Thomas Bayard and learned that Senators John Logan and Preston Plumb were responsible. These two had been among the chief congressional critics of the National Board of Health, and one wonders if they were not trying to scuttle Billings. Senators Bayard and John Mitchell promised S. Weir Mitchell that they would help the Library-Museum obtain its usual amount. Representative McLane told Christopher Johnson that he would assist in the House. Virgil Cubney, New York Academy of Medicine, marshaled physicians to put pressure on Senators Logan and Elbridge Lapham. Undoubtedly, other senators were asked to help by officers and Billings' friends; and before the Army Appropriation Bill went to the President for approval, it granted the Library and museum the regular amount of \$10,000.³⁹

SUGGESTED MERGER WITH THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

As a coincidence, during the same period in which Billings was seeking a building for the medical library, Congress was discussing the construction of a building for its own library. The Library of Congress, then located in the Capitol, was so crowded from continual purchases, gifts of books, and deposits of copyrighted publications that Librarian Ainsworth Spofford had gloomily forecasted that it would become "the greatest chaos in America."⁴⁰

Congress had decided that the Library building would be located on Capitol Hill, and for several years legislators, architects, and librarians had been debating about the design, size, and interior arrangement of the structure. A question that had to be answered before the final plans could be drawn was this: *should all government libraries (Agriculture, Patent Office, Geological Survey, State Department and so on) be merged into the Library of Congress and placed in the new building?* There were logical arguments for (convenience of all books in one place instead of dispersed, prevention of duplication, economy) and against (inconvenience to the departments, preference of users) doing this.

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The debate over this matter was of utmost importance to Billings. If those legislators who favored consolidation of government libraries won, the Surgeon General's Library would be split eventually from the medical museum and moved into the Library of Congress building, where it might be kept intact, but lose some, most or all of its independence. To counter the reasons for merging libraries, Billings used several arguments that he repeated over and over, persuasively, in letters to and in talks before societies. He pointed out that the museum, which was by now the most famous medical museum in the Americas and Europe, needed the Library adjacent to it for ready reference by scientists working on a variety of subjects. He maintained that medical libraries served physicians best, were preferred by the profession, and flourished when kept apart from general libraries. Writing to William Poole, head of Chicago's Public Library and an influential leader in the expanding library profession, he expressed his views concisely.⁴¹

Mr Spofford thinks that it should be merged with the general national collection as soon as he has secured a building large enough to receive it, his idea being that the National Library should absorb all the special collections in Washington. Now putting aside all personal feeling in the matter, which I am quite willing to do for the general good, it seems to me that this is a mistake and that it is better to keep such special collections, medical and scientific, as the library of the Surgeon General's Office, of the Geological Survey, of the Astronomical Observatory, of the Patent Office, and all natural history pertaining to the National Museum, under separate and distinct management, and for them to receive distinct appropriations, as at present. The scientific and medical department of great national libraries, such as those of England, France and Germany, are very little used by scientific and medical men who prefer to resort to special libraries, under the direction of special librarians for the works which they need. The very rapid progress and comparative completeness of this library is largely due to the great interest which has been taken in it by the medical profession of the whole country, who contribute largely to its files and take care to see that it is supplied with that large mass of miscellaneous, current medical matter, which does not come into the book trade, is not copy-righted, is very ephemeral, and to secure which is one of the greatest difficulties of such a library.⁴²

Billings advanced the same reasoning, with more detail, to impress physicians attending the 85th annual session of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland.⁴³

Why then is it that they [British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale] do not contain all medical books which have ever been printed, and that your medical library in Washington, which is only about twenty years old and has never had in any one year funds sufficient to purchase more than two-thirds of the medical books printed in various parts of the world during that same year, should already be equal if not superior to them in practical value? It appears to me that it is very largely due to the fact that while the Washington library is the National collection, it has been kept separate from the general National library. As a matter of fact, comparatively little use is made by medical writers of the collection in the British Museum or Bibliothèque Nationale. They

consult, in preference, the special medical libraries in London and Paris. . . . It is to such special libraries that physicians give their books and pamphlets; and the rapid growth of the Washington library is largely due to this cause. . . . Now, so long as the library can preserve and extend this feeling of interest in its completeness, so long it is sure to grow in value and usefulness, but if it be merged into a general National library this interest will rapidly diminish. It is not to be expected that the manager of a large miscellaneous library . . . should also be familiar with the various departments of scientific literature. . . . I think therefore that you will do well to see that a proper and commodious fire-proof building is provided for your Washington collection, that it is not merged into the Congressional Library, and that it is granted sufficient funds to enable it to secure all new medical books as they are published, and gradually to collect the best of the older literature.

In order to persuade senators and representatives to accept his viewpoint, Billings asked his small army of lobbyists to emphasize in memorials, petitions, and resolutions their desire that the museum and Library not be separated, and that the Library remain under the management of the Medical Department.

Although Spofford favored merging all government libraries into the Library of Congress, he did not push his views vigorously. If he had he probably would have won, for he mingled with representatives and senators every day at the Capitol. But an anonymous person, perhaps someone in the Library of Congress, who was not as gentlemanly as scholarly, book-loving Spofford, initiated a virulent attack against the independence of the medical Library in the *Washington Sunday Herald*.⁴⁴ The writer stated that Billings had earlier asked Spofford to help him get appropriations for the Surgeon General's Library, promising to keep publications only until the *Medical and Surgical History of the War* was completed when they would be given to Library of Congress. Spofford, believing he would receive the publications, stopped ordering medical books. The history was now completed but

Dr. Billings and all of his associates are very indignant at even the idea of consolidating this medical library . . . with the Library of Congress. If the library were placed under Mr. Spofford's charge it would be accessible to the medical profession. As the affair now stands, the collection, which is one of the best in the United States, and one of the finest in the world, is held for the exclusive benefit of a few people in the Surgeon General's Office and their friends. And even they make no use of the library which can in any way benefit the public. Aside from the *Medical History of the Rebellion*, which was a mere compilation of other peoples' writings by Dr. Woodward and his associates, this library has published nothing. It is the clearest possible case of a very insignificant and surly dog in a richly-stuffed manger.

This article would have angered a saint had it been directed toward him, and it probably infuriated Billings temporarily, but he contacted the editor or a reporter and with his customary tact and diplomacy gave his account of the development of the Library. The result was that a longer, more detailed article appeared the following Sunday, praising the Surgeon General's Library and supporting Billings' campaign for a new museum-library building.⁴⁵

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Notes

¹ Smart, "The Army Medical Museum and the Library of the Surgeon General's Office," *JAMA*, 24 555 (1895)

² Letters, Huntington to Billings, June 17, 1881, Billings to Calvin DeWitt, Oct 5, 1882 MS/C/81

³ 47th Cong, 2d sess, H Report 1995 to accompany bill HR 7681, Feb 28 1883

⁴ Daniel S Lamb *History of the United States Army Medical Museum*, p 69

⁵ *Annual Report of the Surgeon General*, 1880, pp 17-18 The Surgeon General repeated his warning about the unsafe condition of Ford's for several years in annual reports until a new building was authorized

⁶ Notation regarding letter, Barnes to Ramsay, Nov 15, 1880, and letter, Ramsay to the President, Nov 17 1880 NA Letter, Sec of War re fireproof building for library and museum, received in House, Feb 9, 1881, and referred to Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds NA

⁷ The portion of the President's message referring to the need for a new building was reported in *Annual Report of the Surgeon General*, 1881, pp 16-17

⁸ Billings drafted the letter from Gen Barnes to Sec of War Lincoln, Nov 21, 1881, date crossed out and Dec 7 inserted NA Copy of letter, Gen Barnes to Sec of War Dec 7, 1881, submitting estimate and plans for building NA 47th Cong, 1st sess, Sen Exec Doc 65, containing letters of Barnes, Lincoln, and Arthur, extract from the Surgeon General's *Annual Report* of 1881, and three drawings and plans of the proposed building

⁹ Copy, letter, Barnes to Singleton, Feb 2, 1882, NA

¹⁰ *Congressional Record*, Feb 16, 1885, pp 1767-1770

¹¹ Letter, Rep William Shallenbarger to Barnes, Feb 15, 1882, MS/C/1, NLM, Barnes to Shallenbarger, Feb 17, NA

¹² Billings' list of names is attached to a copy of Senate Executive Document 65 AMM

¹³ Letters, Shallenbarger to Pepper, Feb 9 Oct 2, 1882, Shallenbarger to H Wood, Feb 9, 1882, Thomas to Billings, Feb 20, 1882, Flint to Billings, Feb 20, 1882, Cochran to Billings, Dec 2, 1882, Dawson to Billings, Nov 20, 1882, Yandell to Billings, no date, postal card, Hibberd to Billings, Feb 13, 1882, T Wood to Billings, Oct 5, 1882, May 5, June 11, 1883, all in MS/C/1 Scranton petition, *Congressional Record*, Mar 27, 1882

¹⁴ Copies of two different printed petitions are in NLM and AMM

¹⁵ Letters, Johnson to Billings, Dec 9, 18, 20, 1882, Kinloch to Billings, Oct 6, Nov 18, 1883, Mastin to Billings, Sept 11, 21, 29, Oct 5, 20, Nov 15, Dec 14, 1882, Pepper to Billings, Dec 15, 1882, Conn to Billings, Sept 6, 1882, Chadwick to Billings, Dec 11, 1882, all in MS/C/1

¹⁶ Petitions to Belmont in *Congressional Record*, Dec 5, to Aldrich, Dec 14, McLane, Dec 18, Morse, Dec 23, Peelle, Dec 27, 1882

¹⁷ Letter, Shoemaker to Billings, Jan 30, 1882 MS/C/1 *Med Bull* 4 74 (1882)

¹⁸ Letters, Minor to Billings, Feb 18, 1882, Dawson to Billings, Feb 7, 1882 MS/C/1 *Cincinnati Lancet-Clinic* 47 116-117 (Jan 28, 1882)

¹⁹ *Med News* 41 577 (1882) Other items on the Library-Museum are in the same volume, pp 529, 699, and in vol 40, pp 137-138 (1882)

²⁰ *Nation*, Mar 2, 1882

²¹ *Nation*, Oct 26 1882

²² Meeting of the Medico-Legal Society as reported in the *N Y Tribune*, Mar 2, 1882, and reference to petition in *Congressional Record*, June 22, 1882 Letter, G F Dudley, Secy St Louis Med Soc, to Surg Gen Barnes, Feb 22, 1882, sending resolution of the society, MS/C/1 Copy of resolution of St Louis Medical Society, Feb 11, 1882, in Army Medical Museum, and reference to resolution in *Congressional Record*, Feb 28, 1882 Report of resolution of Philadelphia Co Med Soc in *Philadelphia Med Times*, p 144, Nov 18, 1882 Letter, R M Wyckoff to Billings, Nov 28, 1882, sending resolution of Medical Society County of Kings, MS/C/1 Reference to petitions of Centre District Medical Society, Alabama State Medical Association, Hudson County Medical Society, Chester County Medical Society, in *Congressional Record*, Dec 4, 11, 14, 19, 1882

²³ Resolution of American Surgical Association to the Senate requesting that the \$5000 appropriation be increased to \$10,000, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 2, 1882, *Boston Med Sur J*, 106 566-7 (June 15, 1882) Letter, Richard Cleeman to Billings, June 7, 1882, sending copy of resolution of College of Physicians, Philadelphia, urging Senate to increase appropriation to \$10,000 AMM Butterfield's amendment, *Congressional Record*, Apr 5, 1882, p 2632

²⁴ "This [reduction] has been done on the recommendation of Senator Logan and I am afraid

it will pass the Senate", letter, Billings to Jacobi, June 3, 1882 MS/C/1

²⁵ "I am happy to say we have induced Senator Logan to have the appropriation restored to the amount usually given", letter, Billings to Jacobi, June 8, 1882 MS/C/1

²⁶ *Annual Report of the Surgeon General* 1883, pp 25-26

²⁷ *Annual Report of the Surgeon General* 1884, p 28

²⁸ Garrison, *Billings*, p 165

²⁹ Letter, Yarrow to Billings, Jan 15, 1883 MS/C/1

³⁰ 47th Cong, 2d sess, Bill HR 7861, and H Report 1995 to accompany the bill The bill and report were reprinted in 48th Cong, 1st sess, Senate Executive Doc 12, Dec 17, 1883

³¹ Billings' draft of the amendment is in NLM Letter, Crane to Hawley, Mar 1, 1883, NA

³² Letter, Johnson to Billings, Oct 11, 1883, MS/C/1

³³ Letters, O'Leary to Billings n d, 1883, Spooner to O'Leary, Jan 26, 1883, Mastin to Billings, April 1, 1883, Johnson to Billings, April 22, May 12, 1883, Cochran to Billings May 3, 1883, Wyckoff to Billings, Nov 16, 23, 1883, Richardson to A Flhnt, Sr, Nov 24, 1883, Parvin to Billings, May 28, 1883, all in MS/C/1 Mitchell to Billings, Dec 1, 1883 NYPL

³⁴ Letters, Reeves to Billings, May 4, 18, 1883, Robertson to Billings, May 12, 18, Nov 4, 1883 MS/C/1

Med News, v 42 (1883), resolutions of medical societies of Pa, p 563, Mass, p 702, Conn, p 634, N Y p 726, N H, pp 746-7, Minn, pp 748-9 Notice of these resolutions may be found in other medical journals Printed copy of resolutions of Iowa State Medical Association, dated Dec 13, 1883, typed copy of resolutions of N H Med Soc, dated Nov 25, 1883, extract from minutes of annual meeting N J Med Soc AMM

³⁵ *Congressional Record* 1883, Jan 5 re petition of Phila Co Med Soc, Jan 10, of Med Soc Kings Co, Jan 13, of N H Central Med Soc, Jan 22, of physicians of Beaver Co, Jan 26, of R I Letters, H F Campbell to Billings, Jan 17, 22, 24, 1883, Chaillé to Billings, Dec 29, 1883, W H Geddings to Billings, Nov 7, 1883, A Flhnt Jr to Billings, Nov 18, 1883 MS/C/1

³⁶ See, for example, *Louisville Med News* 15 40 (1883), *St Louis Courier Med* 9 43-45 (1883), *Med News* 42 419-20, 428-30 (1883), *Nation*, June 7, 1883, *Boston Med Surg J* 108 20 (Jan 4, 1883)

³⁷ Resolution of Amer Surg Assn, *Med News* 42 693 (June 16, 1883), *Boston Med Surg J* 108 561 (June 14, 1883) Copy of resolution

of Amer Laryngological Assoc, Nov 27, 1883 AMM Resolutions of Amer Library Assn in *Med News* 43 222 (1883) and *Library J* 8 278 (1883)

Letter, Holmes to J R Chadwick, May 16, 1883, draft of petition, n d MS/C/1 Four drafts of the AMA resolution, with an attached note in Billings hand re the order of signatures, and an endorsement indicating that 600 copies were printed (undoubtedly for distribution where Billings thought it would do most good) is at AMM

The petition and AMA memorial were reprinted in 48th Cong, 1st sess, Sen Ex Doc 12, in 47th Cong, 2d sess House Report 1991 to accompany Bill H R 7681, in a pamphlet containing Bill H R 7681 and Report 1991 to accompany Bill H R 7681, and cited in later congressional debate over the building

Resolutions reported in *Med Times*, June 16, 1883, p 637, and *Med News*, June 9, 1883, p 657

³⁸ Letters, Surg Gen Crane to Sen J R Hawley, Mar 1, 1883, Surg Gen Murray to Rep S M Stockslager, Dec 28, 1883, Surg Gen Murray to Sen William Mahone, Dec 14, 1883, Surg Gen Murray to Rep S J Randall, chairman House Comm on Appropriations, Feb 9, 1885, NA 47th Cong, 2d sess, H Report to accompany Bill H R 7681, Feb 28, 1883

³⁹ Letters, Bayard to S W Mitchell, Feb 5, 1883, J Mitchell to S W Mitchell, Feb 8, 1883, Johnson to Billings, Dec 9, 1882, Gibney to Billings, Feb 2, 1883, MS/C/1 Debate in Senate on Amendment to Army Appropriation Bill H R 7077, for purpose of reducing Library-Museum appropriation, *Congressional Record*, Feb 22, 1883 *Boston Med Surg J* 108 278, 309 (1883)

⁴⁰ Lucy Salamanco, *Fortress of Freedom the Story of the Library of Congress*, (1942), p 217

⁴¹ Letter, Billings to Poole, Sept 11, 1882 Poole in reply, Sept 14, promised to use his influence to keep the Library under control of the Medical Department Letters in MS/C/1

⁴² Billings, to my knowledge, had no proof that "the scientific and medical departments of great national libraries, such as those of England, France, and Germany, are very little used by scientific and medical men" Of course physicians of Edinburgh, Lvons, Hamburg and other towns preferred the convenience of their local medical libraries rather than travel to London, Paris, or Berlin Furthermore the rapid growth of the SGL was mostly owing to Billings' exertions, not to the preference of American physicians who would have sent him books and journals whether he was housed in Ford's Theatre

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or the Library of Congress. But Billings' arguments sounded reasonable, and he made the most of them.

⁴³ Address delivered April 1883, published in *Trans. Med. Chirurgical Faculty Maryland* 1883, pp. 58–80, and in *Med. News* 42: 507–511 (May 5, 1883), and reprinted in Rogers, *Selected papers on John Shaw Billings*, pp. 149–169. Billings devoted part of his speech, “Libraries in Washington,” at the meeting of the American Library Association, Buffalo, August, 1883, to the same argument: *Library J.* 8: 199–200 (1883). Note that he told his audience that the Surgeon General’s Library was “your medical library in Washington.” Billings cleverly gained support of the medical profession for the Library on every possible occasion.

⁴⁴ Column entitled “Sunday Gossip,” *Washington Sunday Herald*, Apr. 1, 1883.

⁴⁵ “The Medical Library,” *Washington Sunday Herald*, Apr. 8, 1883. According to this account, Spofford, much earlier, had opposed the formation of other libraries in Washington, but Billings had appealed to him, pointing out that the Library of Congress was already overcrowded, that the museum needed medical books at hand for reference, and that if the Surgeon General’s library was to be absorbed ultimately by LC, it would be preferable if the SGL was complete. Since that time the SGL had vastly increased, partially through congressional appropriations, but “very largely through the liberality of physicians in all countries.”