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Development of the Library During the Civil War

SURGEON GENERAL CLEMENT ALEXANDER FINLEY

CLEMENT ALEXANDER FINLEY, who had been in the Army for 43 years and served in the Indian and Mexican wars, was appointed Surgeon General on May 15, 1861. The Civil War was bringing hundreds of physicians to the door of the Medical Department, and Finley needed more office space for his expanding staff. He moved from the Winder Building at F and Seventeenth Streets to a building on the southeast corner of F and Fifteenth Streets, where he had several rooms.¹ There, with his military aides, at least eight civilian clerks and one messenger, he administered the procurement of medical supplies, construction of hospitals, recruitment of physicians, and all the other tasks that came with the war.

The Library moved with the Surgeon General. During the war it was



Clement Alexander Finley, Surgeon General, United States Army, 1861 to 1862.

probably consulted more than any time in the past. Finley preferred certain books for his own use, among them Gross' *Surgery*, John E. Erichsen's *Surgery*, Bennet's *Practice of Medicine*, John Foote's *Practitioner's Pharmacopeia*, Amos Dean's *Principles of Medical Jurisprudence*, and Claude Bernard and Charles Huette's *Manual of Operative Surgery*.² The standard list of books for distribution was revised to fit war conditions. Surgeons in the armies received the following: Thomson's *Conspectus*, William J. E. Wilson's *Practical and Surgical Anatomy*, Thomas Watson's *Practice of Physic*, and Erichsen's *Surgery*. Surgeons at hospitals and posts received the same, plus George Fowne's *Elementary Chemistry*, the *Dispensatory of the United States*, Robley Dunglison's *Medical Dictionary*, Alfred S. Taylor's *Medical Jurisprudence*, and Ellis' *Formulary*.³ Finley cancelled the office's subscription to *American Medical Times* and ordered 35 copies of the *Philadelphia Medical and Surgical Reporter* for distribution.⁴

Finley, owing to the seniority system then followed generally in making promotions, was 64 years when he was appointed Surgeon General. He probably would have been a satisfactory leader during placid, peaceful times, but he did not act fast enough, according to his critics, in developing the small medical department into the large, energetic organization needed by the Federal armies during war. In 1862 he was relieved of his duties and transferred, whereupon he retired.

SURGEON GENERAL WILLIAM ALEXANDER HAMMOND

Owing to the influence of the Sanitary Commission, seniority was ignored in choosing the next Surgeon General and 34-year-old William Alexander Hammond was appointed on April 25, 1862. Hammond had been an assistant surgeon in the Army from 1849 to 1860 and then had resigned to teach in the University of Maryland's Medical School. Energetic and competent, Hammond improved the department as rapidly as chaotic wartime conditions would permit. Shortly after he took office he established the Army Medical Museum and ordered the beginning of the compilation of statistics that was to be published many years later under the title *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*.⁵

Two months after Hammond arrived he moved his office to the buildings owned by Riggs and Company, a private banking firm, on the northwest corner of Fifteenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue.⁶ Attached to the bank was a two-story brick building that had originally been a private house. In the back yard was a two-story frame structure and a large stable. The general's private office occupied the back room on the first floor of the brick house, and his clerk's office the adjacent pantry. Surgeon John H. Brinton, whom the general appointed to organize the Army Medical Museum, sat in the front room, formerly the parlor, and there he began accumulating the first specimens. Also in the parlor were shelved books and journals, handy for the general.⁷ On the second floor of the house were several small rooms occupied by officers on the general's staff and their clerks, and a large room for files and clerks. Other officers and

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*William Alexander Hammond,
Surgeon General, United States
Army, 1862 to 1864.*

clerks had desks in rooms on the second floor of the bank building. The frame building housed a printing press, a distribution room where Medical Department publications and medical journals were sorted and sent to surgeons in the armies and military hospitals, and one or two rooms for clerks. In the stable were two horses and three carriages, used mainly in picking up and delivering mail and packages. In the spring of 1862 Brinton moved with his increasing number of museum specimens into another building, and eventually medical books and journals filled the parlor, which served as the library for a few years.

Under Hammond's direction recently published books were selected and purchased for distribution. A score of reference books was provided for each general hospital and permanent post.⁸ Surgeons attached to regiments in the field could not carry around a box of books, but they were supplied with five of the most useful.

Journals for distribution comprised *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*,⁹ apparently a copy for every surgeon; *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*,¹⁰ probably for selected officers; *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review*, for the most senior officers¹¹; and *Medical Times*.¹²

For office use Hammond ordered *Annales d'Hygiène*,¹³ Charles Lyell's *Antiquity of Man*,¹⁴ *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*,¹⁵ *Recueil de Mémoires de Médecine, de Chirurgie et de Pharmacie Militaires*,¹⁶ *Archives Générales de Médecine*, Virchow's *Archiv*, Alexander Tweedie's *Lectures on . . . Fevers*, Charles Murchison's book on "continued fevers," and the publications of the Académie de Médecine and Société Nationale d'Acclimatation of Paris.¹⁷ He stopped the office's subscription to the *Medical and Surgical Reporter*, taken by Finley, and subscribed to the *Chicago Medical Journal*.¹⁸

Blanchard & Lea, a Philadelphia publishing firm, generously donated volumes "towards forming a library."¹⁹

Many years later a person, identity unknown, in the Surgeon General's office, jotted down the following account of Hammond's influence on the book collection: "Up to 1862 there was no library connected with the office except a few common works of reference and such public documents as are annually distributed. Surgeon General Hammond, however, began to buy books which he wished to use himself. The first were brought from Baillière Bros. in August 1862. From that time on they were bought continuously for use in making up the Medical and Surgical History."²⁰

Hammond might have enlarged the little collection into a first-class library had he not made an enemy of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Stanton exiled him to New Orleans in August 1863 and elevated Joseph K. Barnes to the rank of Acting Surgeon General. Hammond was court-martialed and dismissed from the Army in August 1864. He became a prominent physician, textbook writer, teacher, researcher, novelist, and journal editor, and he continually appealed his court-martial sentence. The government finally exonerated him in 1879 and restored his rank, but he never returned to the Army.

SURGEON GENERAL JOSEPH K. BARNES²¹

Barnes, who had been in the Army since 1840, was appointed Surgeon General on August 22, 1864. He retained, with few exceptions, the same standard medical books chosen by his predecessor for distribution. A large number of these were purchased during the war: 7,317 copies of Bumstead on *Venereal Diseases*, 5,370 of Erichsen's *Surgery*, 4,850 of the *Dispensatory of the United States*, 3,895 Power's *Surgical Anatomy*, 3,442 Gray's *Anatomy*, 3,254 Watson's *Practice of Medicine*, 3,251 Stephen Smith's *Principles of Surgery*, 3,239 Woodward's *Hospital Steward's Manual*, 3,100 Parkes' *Hygiene*, 2,671 Sargent's *Minor Surgery*, 1,905 Dunglison's *Medical Dictionary*, 1,640 Fowne's *Chemistry*, 1,542 Bennett's *Practice of Medicine*, 1,412 Dalton's *Physiology*, 1,333 Parrish's *Pharmacy*, 1,237 Hartshorn's *Principles of Medicine*, 1,178 Longmore's *Gunshot Wounds*, 1,062 Beck's *Jurisprudence*, 1,024 Stillé's *Therapeutics*, and lesser quantities of Webster's *English Dictionary*, McLeod's *Surgical Notes*, Virchow's *Pathology*, Jones' *Diseases of the Eye*, Bedford's *Midwifery*, Toynbee's *Diseases of the Ear*, Wilson's *Diseases of the Skin*, and Guthrie's *Commentaries*.²²

Books and journals for the Library were selected mainly by Brinton, Assistant Surgeon George A. Otis, and Assistant Surgeon Joseph J. Woodward, who needed works on anatomy, surgery, and other subjects for reference in the museum and for compiling the *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*.²³ Surgeons James R. Smith, Charles H. Crane, and Charles H. Alden sent the orders for books to publishers and booksellers.²⁴

Purchases for Hammond, Brinton, Otis, and Woodward during 1862, '63, and early '64 increased the collection greatly. Books and journals were con-

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stantly added to the shelves in the front parlor of the brick house, where bookcases probably lined the walls except for door and window openings.

In January 1864 Barnes decided that the Library, now containing approximately 1,800 volumes, should be reorganized, enlarged, and cataloged.²⁵ On May 10 of that year the first printed catalog of the Library was published, perhaps for distribution to surgeons with the armies and in the many military hospitals.²⁶ Barnes had not yet appointed an officer to act as librarian, and it is not known who superintended the preparation of the catalog of 1864.

The catalog was a pamphlet of 24 leaves, the rectos bearing titles and the versos blank for additions or notes. Books were listed alphabetically by authors under nine subject headings: anatomy; physiology; materia medica, pharmacy and therapeutics; general pathology and practice of medicine; surgery; midwifery and diseases of women and children; medical jurisprudence and medical police; natural philosophy, chemistry, etc.; miscellaneous, journals, reviews, reports, encyclopedias, etc. A logical assumption is that the volumes were arranged on the shelves in the same order. All-in-all the catalog carried 485 titles, including about 50 journals, showing a total of approximately 2,100 volumes.²⁷

The catalog contained the titles of William James Rhees' *Manual of Public Libraries* (1859) and of William T. Lowndes' multivolume *Bibliographer's Manual of English Literature* (1857–1861). This indicated that the Surgeon General was trying to develop a library on principles advocated by professional librarians. If the volumes had been considered previously as an incidental collection, they were no longer.

According to the 1864 catalog the Library had not yet acquired any incunabula, any 16th or 17th century books, or any 18th century works except Robert Hamilton's *Duties of a Regimental Surgeon* (1787), which had been in the catalog of 1840, and *Hamburgisches Magazin, oder Gesammelte Schriften aus der Naturforschung* (1747–63), 25 volumes. A number of books mentioned in the catalog of 1840 (among them the works of Gannal, Dungleison, Ashwell, Colombat, Elliotson, Graves, and Maclise) and others acquired during Surgeon General Lawson's term did not appear in the catalog of 1864. Perhaps in the hustle and bustle of the office at the start of the Civil War, along with a shortage of space for the ever expanding volume of medical records accumulating during the conflict, volumes that were obsolete or obsolescent were simply thrown away.

Otis and Woodward continued to choose most of the books purchased through 1864 and '65, the orders being sent to booksellers by Crane, by Surgeon William C. Spencer from 1864 to 1866, and by Assistant Surgeon John Shaw Billings from November 6, 1865, onward.²⁸

In the autumn of 1865 Surgeon General Barnes ordered that a new catalog be compiled. One would assume that the primary reason for a second catalog only a year and a quarter after the first was that almost all copies of the 1864 catalog had been distributed to medical officers. A second reason may have

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been the accumulation of more than 100 works, about 200 volumes, since the previous catalog had been issued.

The second printed catalog was published on October 23, 1865. Like its predecessor it was a pamphlet.²⁹ Titles were on the recto of the leaves while the verso and interleaves were blank so that the owner could add notes or titles.

According to this catalog the Library now contained 2,282 volumes.³⁰ Six hundred and two titles were listed, including at least 67 journals.³¹ The publications were grouped in 11 classes, the differences between this and the previous catalog being the addition of a new class, natural history, and the division of one class into two classes, a) medical journals and reviews, and b) miscellaneous. The largest class was surgery with 120 titles; followed by pathology with 116 titles; natural philosophy, chemistry, etc., with 76; medical jurisprudence and medical police, 72; medical journals and reviews, 44; anatomy, 40; miscellaneous, 39; natural history, 37; midwifery and diseases of women and children, 20; materia medica, pharmacy and therapeutics, 20; and physiology the smallest with 18. Books were listed alphabetically by author, journals by title.



Riggs Bank, Pennsylvania Avenue and Fifteenth Street, N.W., Washington. From 1862 to 1888 the small building on the left and the upper story of the bank on the right was the headquarters of the Surgeon General. The Library was shelved in the front parlor of the house on the left from 1862 to 1866. This photograph was taken in the 1890's, a decade before the buildings were torn down.

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In the latter half of 1865 an unusual source of publications opened up for the Library as the Army began to close temporary military hospitals. Erected during the war for the care of the tens of thousands of wounded soldiers, these hospitals possessed medical books and journals for the use of the surgeons, and a miscellany of fiction and nonfiction works donated by the Sanitary Commission, citizens, and relief organizations for patients. On June 26, 1865, Barnes issued the following order: "when hospitals shall be discontinued and the libraries disposed of, the most valuable works, Scientific, Historical, etc. shall be carefully selected, packed and turned over to the Quartermaster's Department for transportation to Surgeon George A. Otis, U.S.V., Curator of the Army Medical Museum."³²

It is not known how many publications the Library acquired from hospitals. The following anecdote by Daniel S. Lamb, a pathologist at the museum for half a century, indicates that the men dismantling the hospitals were not very discriminating in the choice of works they forwarded to the Capital: "On May 25, [1866] a lot of non-medical books which had been sent to the Museum from discontinued hospitals were ordered to be divided among four employees who were connected with Sunday Schools in Washington, to be given to the said schools."³³ Furthermore among books accessioned after the war were a few on navigation, astronomy, calculus, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, logarithms, geology, and agriculture, hardly the subjects that would have been purchased for a medical library but more likely that would have arrived from closed hospitals.³⁴

Notes

¹ The office had moved to the Winder Building at F and 17th Sts. in 1848 from "Mrs. Elsey's House," on G Street between 17th and 18th, whence it had moved in 1845 from "Mr. Vevan's House." The latter two buildings no longer exist.

² "If you have any of the following books in the purveying dept. the Surg. Gen'l. wishes to have a copy of each (with the usual lettering) . . . He does not however wish to have them purchased for this purpose": letter, Surg. L. A. Edwards to Surg. R. S. Satterlee, Nov. 11, 1861: NA.

The last volume on the above list was probably *Illustrated Manual of Operative Surgery and Surgical Anatomy*, by Bernard and Huette, edited with notes by W. H. Van Buren and E. C. Isaacs, N.Y., 1855.

³ Letter, Surg. Robert C. Wood to Surg. R. S. Satterlee, Nov. 11, 1861: NA.

⁴ Letters, Surg. L. A. Edwards to Butler & Levis, Mar. 10, 1862, Edwards to Baillièere & Bros., Mar. 10, 1862: NA.

⁵ The museum was started by Hammond's

order issued in Circular No. 2, May 21, 1862. From the museum developed the Army's Medical School and the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

The most recent history of the famous museum is Robert S. Henry's *The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Its First Century, 1862-1962* (1964). Daniel S. Lamb, pathologist of the museum for half a century, wrote *History of the United States Army Medical Museum, 1862-1917*, which contains reminiscences and lists of publications of museum members, but which is scarce because it was mimeographed in a small edition.

The necessity of having reference works for use of the writers of the *Medical and Surgical History* was one of the chief reasons why books were purchased for the Library during the 1860's.

⁶ The correct name of the bank was Riggs and Company until 1896 when it incorporated as The Riggs National Bank.

⁷ ". . . there were in the private office of the Surgeon General a few preparations of human anatomy, which had long been there, or in the

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adjoining *library room*" (italic supplied) Lamb, History, p 1

⁸ Titles of books may be found in the standard supply tables of Sept 20, 1862, of Oct 20, 1862, in SGO Circular No 12 and of May 7, 1863, in SGO Circular No 7

⁹ Letter, Asst Surg J R Smith to Blanchard & Lea, Apr 10, 1863, increasing the subscription to 200 copies NA

¹⁰ Letter, Asst Surg Smith to editor, *Boston Med Surg J*, July 2, 1863 NA Fifty copies were ordered

¹¹ Letter, Hammond to Lindsay & Blakiston, Mar 11, 1863 NA Ten copies were ordered

¹² Letter, Asst Surg J R Smith to Baillière & Co., Oct 22, 1862 NA The number of copies is not given

¹³ Letter, Asst Surg J R Smith to Baillière Bros, Sept 16, 1862 NA Baillière Bros, a New York firm, imported the journal for SGO

¹⁴ Letter, Surg C H Alden to J Pennington & Son, Mar 23, 1863 NA

¹⁵ Letter, Asst Surg J R Smith to editor, *Boston Med Surg J*, July 2, 1863 NA Fifty copies were subscribed to, plus a complete set of back issues—the latter would have been for the SGO

¹⁶ Letter, Asst Surg J R Smith to Surg R S Satterlee, Oct 22, 1862 NA

¹⁷ Letter, Surg Gen Hammond to Joseph Henry, Smithsonian Institution, Mar 23, 1863 NA The volumes were obtained through the Smithsonian's book agents in Europe Hammond requested complete sets of *Archives Générales*, Virchow's *Archiv*, and *Bulletin of the Académie*

¹⁸ Letters, Asst Surg J R Smith to ed *Med Surg Rep*, Sept 10, 1862, Smith to S W Butler, Aug 5, 1863, Smith to editor, *Chicago Med J*, July 6, 1863 NA Hammond wanted as many back numbers as were available of the Chicago journal

¹⁹ Letters, Asst Surg J R Smith to Blanchard & Lea, July 14, 1862 NA Perhaps the firm continued to donate books throughout the war, for on May 13, 1865, Act Surg Gen J K Barnes sent a letter of thanks for a copy of Hodges' *Obstetrics*

²⁰ Around 1890 a person in the Medical Department began to make notes for a historical sketch of the Surgeon General's office Only a fragment of the manuscript remains, from which the above quotation is taken MS/C/64

Baillière Bros, N Y, went out of business in 1870

John Shaw Billings, letter to editor, "Who founded the National Medical Library?" *New York Med Rec* 17 298-9 (1880) stated that 359

volumes, including sets of *Annales d'Hygiène Publique* and *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, were added during Hammond's period I believe Billings' figure is incorrect because a catalog published in May 1864 listed 2,100 volumes, whereas the catalog of 1840 listed approximately 200, a difference of about 1,900 volumes, and most of these were purchased, I believe, during Hammond's time

²¹ Barnes had no middle name He took the letter K to distinguish himself from his father, Joseph Barnes

²² Letter, Gen Barnes to Sec of War E Stanton, Oct 20, 1865 NA

²³ Billings, "Who founded the National Medical Library?" *New York Med Rec* 17 298-9 (1880), credited Woodward and Otis with selecting volumes in 1864 and '65

Brinton was the first curator of the Museum from August 1862 to October 1864 Brinton and Woodward were directed to begin preparing the *History* in June 1862 Otis succeeded Brinton as editor of the *History* and curator of the museum in October 1864

²⁴ These three were senior officers in the Surgeon General's office Copies of letters sent by them to publishers and booksellers may be found in SGO records, NA I assume they merely ordered books selected by Brinton, Otis, and Woodward, but possibly they also selected books they ordered

²⁵ Letter, Surg C H Crane to Joseph Henry, Smithsonian Institution, Jan 25, 1864, "The Library of this office, now being reorganized, contains about 1800 volumes, and as it is the intention to increase the same, and to make it an institution for the Medical Department [the remainder asks for Smithsonian publications]" NA

²⁶ There are two copies of the catalog in the History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine One copy has the original paper wrappers and bears the signature of E Shaw, clerk and assistant of John Shaw Billings

²⁷ Fielding H Garrison *John Shaw Billings*, p 213, wrote that a "catalog was prepared and published, showing that at this time, the collection comprised 1365 volumes By my count there are 485 titles, approximately 50 of which are journals, and a total of 2,094 volumes

²⁸ "During the years 1864 and 1865 about 1000 volumes were added to the library, mainly works selected by Drs Woodward and Otis", John S Billings, *New York Med Rec* 17 298-299 (1880)

²⁹ The History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine, has copies of the catalog, two of which have the original paper wrappers, one green and one yellow, bound in

³⁰ Fielding H Garrison, *John Shaw Billings*,

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p. 214, stated that the catalog of 1865 contained 602 entries, comprising 2,253 volumes. Billings, in his memorandum or preface to the catalog of 1872, said that the catalog of 1865 accounted for about 1,800 volumes. My count of 602 entries and 2,282 volumes is approximately the same as Garrison's figure.

³¹ "Letter from Washington," by an anonymous writer in *Boston Med. Surg. J.* 99. 706-709 (1878), credited the catalog with listing 26 American journals and 17 foreign, or 43 in all. By my count, the catalog gives the titles of at least 67 journals.

³² S.G.O. Circular Orders No. 6. It would appear from this order that Otis had been placed in charge of the growing library and might be considered as the first librarian of the Surgeon General's office. Perhaps he supervised the preparation of the catalogs of May 1864 and October 1865.

³³ Lamb, *History of the United States Army Medical Museum*, p. 39.

³⁴ Titles are in the early registers, for example, Register 3, p. 14.