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Talk by  
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The Need for National Museum of Health and Medicine  
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(This speech was repeated on January 23, 1991 at the Methodist Hospital Foundation at Memphis, TN, by special request.)

This speech is an impassioned plea to the leaders of the multiple-medical specialties in the United States to see the need for a National Health Museum and give the project societal financial support. This short account gives some history of why we lost "The Medical Old Red Brick Building" and some other little known facts about Dr. John Shaw Billings, Surgeon General of the Army during the Civil War, whose microscope collection became the National Health Museum and whose library became the National Library of Medicine.

This talk was given in 1990 and as I write this in 2003, in spite of ups and downs and a lot of "almosts" and "nearlys" the Museum still has no home nor has a sight been determined. What I did not know when I made this impassioned plea were some facts of life about museums in Washington. If you, the user of this archive, wanted to build a museum in your nearest metropolitan city, you could have it up and running and charging admission in four years or less. To attempt the same thing in Washington runs into unbelievable barriers in reference to Art Commissions, White House architects, Capitol architects, and so on, all of whom have a voice in the future of how Washington will look. In addition to that, you will find vested interests who don't want to see a Health Museum because they'd rather see something else. There are also people who act like the fabled dog in the manger. Then, if everything else works smoothly, you have to build the museum out of something like imported Italian marble because, after all, it's a national monument. When you get it all finished, you find that you can't charge admission because it is a national museum facing the nation's Capitol. I still have faith that the museum will be built. I'm grateful to the many people who have helped along the way. Pessimistically, at 87, I never expect to walk through its doors.