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EVERY, OSWALD THEODORE, 1877-1955
PAPERS, 1867-1970

Accession number 70-128

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The papers of Oswald Theodore Avery, research physician and bacteriologist with the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, foremost researcher on pneumonia, one of the founders of the science of immunochemistry, and discoverer of the transforming nature of DNA (desoxyribonucleic acid), were given to the Manuscript Unit by his brother and sister-in-law Dr. and Mrs. Roy C. Avery, Nashville, Tennessee.

Linear feet of shelf space occupied: 1.68
Approximate number of items: 600 items and
2 volumes

Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Oswald Theodore Avery papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Oswald Theodore Avery papers, consisting of about 600 items and two volumes covering the years 1867-1970, are composed of accounts, biographical sketches, citations (awards, diplomas, honorary degrees), citizenship papers, correspondence, documents, military papers, obituaries, a patent, photographs, speeches, a will, and scientific writings.

The earliest papers in the collection concern the parents of Dr. O. T. Avery. His father Joseph Francis Avery (1847-1892) was a Baptist minister. Born in England, he moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1870, where he did outstanding service as a Baptist minister. In 1887 he was called to be the pastor of the Mariner's Temple in New York City. Newspaper clippings include several describing his work there and his successful missionary efforts in the city.

Mrs. Avery's papers (Elizabeth Crowdy Avery, 1843-1910) include her pension payments from the Baptist Western Widows and Orphans Society; interest on money she had loaned Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia; funeral bills; a patent, 1879, for "Avery's Auraline," a preparation for the relief and cure of earache, noises in the head and deafness; papers concerning her partnership with Jane Caroline Irish for the sale of this preparation; and her will.

A scrapbook made by Mrs. Avery contains articles written by her husband Joseph Francis Avery (1847-1892), a Baptist minister. The Reverend Avery's articles appeared in newspapers and church papers in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from about 1873 to about 1882. Included is a booklet he wrote in 1876 entitled "The Voyage of Life."

There is biographical data for Dr. O. T. Avery including a reprint from GENETICS, Vol. 51, No. 1, January, 1965. Written by Rollin D. Hotchkiss, the reprint contains a selected bibliography illustrative of Dr. Avery's work.

On August 1, 1918, Dr. Avery became a citizen of the United States. Included are his citizenship papers.

There is a clipping from the NASHVILLE BANNER, December 11, 1965, in regard to the memorial gate at Rockefeller Institute erected by "grateful friends" honoring Dr. Avery. Another clipping from the NEW YORK TIMES, Sunday, November 5, 1967, is about the concept of the Nobel prize, explaining why Dr. Avery had not received the prize even though he had made the historic discovery that hereditary information is coded, for transmission to future generations, in the structure of DNA (desoxyribonucleic acid).

Forty-seven letters, 1909-1944, written by Dr. Avery, the majority to his brother and sister-in-law Dr. and Mrs. Roy C. Avery, discuss family affairs, and reveal a most kindly, thoughtful and generous man.

On May 13, 1943, Avery wrote his brother describing his research dealing with the transformation of pneumococcal types. This letter was written on the eve of his momentous discovery that DNA is a functionally active substance in determining the biochemical activities and specific characteristics of cells, and that by means of a known chemical substance it is possible to induce predictable and hereditary changes in cells.

Correspondence includes one letter, ca. 1892, written by Joseph Francis Avery to his wife from an infirmary where he had undergone an operation; a letter of December 13, 1897, to Mrs. Avery from Jane Caroline Irish in regard to her husband's unsuccessful attempts to get a capitalist interested in marketing "Avery's Auraline" and their consequent inability to repay Mrs. Avery any part of the \$1,000 she had loaned them; and nine letters from Mrs. Avery's sisters-in-law in England, 1897-1910, which deal with family matters. W. A. Cauldwell in New York City wrote the Reverend Avery on February 3, 1890, that it was the desire of their mutual friend Mr. Rockefeller that the Averys should dine at Delmonico's to meet some of the Baptist people in a social way. There is a note from Emily Vanderbilt Sloan, January 22, 1893, to Mrs. Avery expressing her friendship and interest in Mrs. Avery's work.

Roy Crowdy Avery, brother of Dr. Avery, served in the United States Army Sanitary Corps during World War I. Included are 35 letters which describe his situation in France in 1918.

A letter written on October 21, 1947, by colleagues William S. Tillett and Colin M. MacLeod, and Dr. Avery's cousin Minnie Wandell, whom he and Roy had supported and educated after the death of her mother, expresses appreciation to and gratitude for knowing "Fess."

Included is a copy of President Truman's letter, October 1, 1947, to Dr. Harry S. Mustard congratulating the winners of the second annual Lasker Awards for Medical Research and Public Health Administration.

There is a rough draft of a letter written by Dr. Roy C. Avery on February 16, 1965, to the Director of the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland, in regard to the possibility of publishing an American edition of an excellent German text which gives Dr. O. T. Avery credit for his work with DNA.

The most recent letter in the collection is from A. R. Massar, Luanshya, Zambia, dated July 28, 1970, thanking Dr. Roy Avery for permitting him to read O. T. Avery's letter written in 1943, which describes his work on the eve of his discovery of the transforming properties of DNA.

Other correspondence includes many letters of congratulations to Dr. Avery when granted various prizes, awards and honorary degrees.

Included is an oral history memoir of Tom Rivers, titled "Reflections on a Life in Medicine and Science," in which Rivers speaks of Dr. Avery's manner of working and writing, his shy and retiring nature and his generosity in sharing his knowledge.

Dr. Avery's military papers include his appointment as Captain in the Medical Corps, United States Army, September 26, 1918, and his honorable discharge, January 30, 1919.

There are two photographs of Dr. Avery taken in the laboratory when a young man; a snapshot of him taken many years later; a snapshot of the Avery Memorial Gate at the Rockefeller Institute; a group picture of members at the annual meeting of the Army Epidemiological Board, Washington, April, 1945, and April, 1946; and a group picture of members of the Board for the Investigation and Control of Influenza and Other Epidemic Diseases in the Army. Dr. Avery served on both of these boards.

Speeches include one given by Dr. Avery on his acceptance of the Kober Medal Award, reprinted from the TRANSACTIONS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN PHYSICIANS, Vol. LIX, p. 43, 1946; and another upon his acceptance of the Passano Award in 1949. Included also is the speech that Colin M. MacLeod gave at the dedication of the Avery Memorial Gate, Rockefeller Institute, September 29, 1965.

Writings include Dr. Avery's annual report, April, 1947, "Studies on the transformation of pneumococcus." A reprint from ARCH ENVIRON HEALTH, Vol. 21, September, 1970, titled "The 'Undiscovered' Discovery" by Wendell M. Stanley, deals with Dr. Avery's discovery of the transforming principle of DNA.

OCT 20 1972

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Oswald Theodore Avery

- 1877 Born October 21, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, son of Joseph Francis Avery and Elizabeth Crowdy Avery
- 1887 Moved to New York City with his family
- 1893 Diploma from New York City Male Grammar School
- 1900 Awarded B.A. degree from Colgate University
- 1904 Awarded M.D. degree from Columbia University College of Surgeons
- 1904-1907 Practiced general surgery
- 1907 Bacteriologist with Hoagland Laboratories in Brooklyn, New York; became associate director
- 1913 Joined the staff of the Rockefeller Institute
- 1923 Made a member of the faculty of the Rockefeller Institute
- 1943 Retired as emeritus member of the Rockefeller Institute
- 1943-1948 Continued bacteriological research as emeritus member
- 1949 Retired to Nashville, Tennessee
- 1955 Died in Nashville; buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery

CONTAINER LIST

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