



National Museum of Health and Medicine

Otis Historical Archives

OHA 176 Gorgas Collection

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Date of Records: 1903-1954

Size: 2 boxes, .75 linear feet

Finding Aid: by Laura Cutter (2012)

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Biographical Note: William Crawford Gorgas was born on October 3, 1854 in Toulminville, Alabama, the son of Amelia Gayle and Josiah Gorgas, a Northern-born Confederate general. William Gorgas attended the University of the South as an undergraduate, completed medical school at Bellevue Medical College, and joined the Army Medical Corps in 1880. Like most southerners, Gorgas was familiar with yellow fever and its devastating outbreaks, it wasn't until he was stationed at Fort Brown, Texas that he encountered the illness as a medical professional. He fell ill with the fever while treating a young woman, Marie Doughty – they both recovered and were married two years later. He would go on to devote most of his life to controlling yellow fever. Gorgas, according to reports, was never so much a scientist or clinician as an administrator, and was one of the greatest sanitarians in the history of United States military.

After the Spanish-American War, during which tropical diseases devastated American troops, Gorgas was appointed the chief sanitary officer in Havana, Cuba. It was at this time that Major Walter Reed arrived in Cuba to begin his famous studies into the causes of yellow fever, eventually proving Carlos Finley's unpopular theory that mosquitoes transmitted the virus. Gorgas' daunting assignment was to eradicate malaria and yellow fever in Havana – using Reed and Finley's research he completed the task in six months.

In 1904, Gorgas was appointed chief sanitary officer on the Panama Canal project by President Roosevelt. Yellow fever and malaria resulted in astronomical mortality rates (sometimes as high as 75 percent) among workers and had prevented the completion of the canal for decades. After Gorgas arrived there was no case of yellow fever between 1906 and the completion of the project in 1913. Even before completion, Gorgas' fame had spread internationally and he was sought by various governments as an expert in controlling tropical disease. During this time he was elected President of



the American Medical Association and in 1914, appointed Surgeon General of the Army, just one year before the United States entered the First World War.

Gorgas retired in 1918, planning to continue his yellow fever work. Gorgas believed that it was possible, over time, to eradicate yellow fever in the world. In keeping with this vision, Gorgas was on his way to West Africa when he fell ill and died in London on July 3, 1920.

Series/Scope and Content Note: This collection consists primarily of the over 20 awards, medals, and honors given to William Gorgas and correspondence about his receipt of them, including the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George and the establishment of the Gorgas Hospital in Panama. There are also a few publications by Gorgas and some biographical material. The rest of the collection consists of 12 books from Gorgas' personal library, including ten volumes of the Medical War Manuals.

BOX AND CONTENT LIST

SERIES 001: CORRESPONDENCE, AWARDS, AND PUBLICATIONS

Box 001:

00001: Correspondence regarding honors, awards, and medals, 1907-1918.

00002: Correspondence regarding honors, awards, and medals, 1919-1928.

00003: Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, 1916.

00004: Statutes of Saint Michael and Saint George, 1920.

00005: Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, 1909.

00006: Sons of Confederate Veterans certificates, 1914, 1915, 1916.

00007: Daughters of the Confederacy, 1927

00008: Notes on the Causation of fevers.

00009: Publications by William Gorgas, 1903, 1916

00010: Biographical articles by William Gorgas, 1933, 1954.

00011: Portion of the San Francisco Examiner, 26 March 1938.

SERIES 002: BOOKS

Box 002:

00001: Kelly, Howard A. *Walter Reed and Yellow Fever* (New York: McClure, Phillips &



Co., 1906)

- 00002: Le Prince, Joseph A. and A.J. Orenstein. *Mosquito Control in Panama* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1916)
- 00003: Vedder, Edward B. *Sanitation for Medical Officers*. Medical War Manual No. 1 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1917)
- 00004: Goodwin, T.H. *Notes for Army Medical Officers*. Medical War Manual No. 2 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1917)
- 00005: Greenwood, Allen, G.E. de Schweinitz, and Walter R. Parker. *Military Ophthalmic Surgery*. Medical War Manual No. 3 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1917)
- 00006: Greenwood, Allen, G.E. de Schweinitz, and Walter R. Parker. *Military Ophthalmic Surgery*. Medical War Manual No. 3 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1917)
- 00007: The Orthopedic Council. *Military Orthopaedic Surgery*. Medical War Manual No. 4 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1918)
- 00008: McDill, John R. *Lessons from the Enemy*. Medical War Manual No. 5 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1918)
- 00009: McDill, John R. *Lessons from the Enemy*. Medical War Manual No. 5 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1918)
- 00010: Division of Infectious Diseases and Laboratories. *Laboratory Methods of the United States Army*. Medical War Manual No. 6 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1918)
- 00011: de Tarnowsky, George. *Military Surgery of the Zone of the Advance*. Medical War Manual No. 7 (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1918)
- 00012: McCombe, John and A.F. Menzies. *Medical Service at the Front* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1918)