



The Historical
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Pennsylvania

Collection 2124

Morgan W. Knerr (1864-1936)
Notebooks

1890-1899 (bulk 1890-1894)
6 vols., 0.33 lin. feet

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Abstract

Morgan W. Knerr was born February 1, 1864, in Upper Macungie Township, in central Pennsylvania, to Wilson (b. 1833) and Angelina (Scharadin) Knerr (1840-1904). Knerr graduated from the Bellevue Hospital's Medical College in New York City in 1891 and was enrolled in post-graduate courses at the Medico-Chirurgical College of Philadelphia from 1893-1894. He held a private practice in the 1890s in Breinigsville in central Pennsylvania and later in Coplay in eastern Pennsylvania, where he was also a physician on that town's Board of Health.

This collection consists of four notebooks of medical information obtained during Morgan W. Knerr's studies from 1893 to 1894 at the Medico-Chirurgical College of Philadelphia and two notebooks of medical information taken from an earlier unidentified source, most likely Bellevue Hospital Medical College. They provide a perspective on conventional medical thought in the late nineteenth century and contain references to prescriptive and operative therapies for the treatment of various diseases and conditions.

Background note

Morgan W. Knerr was born February 1, 1864, in Upper Macungie Township, in central Pennsylvania, to Wilson (b. 1833) and Angelina (Scharadin) Knerr (1840-1904). Morgan was the only male son born to the couple and the only child to survive past his twentieth birthday. Wilson Knerr was a shoemaker and prominent member of the Jordan Lutheran Church.

Knerr attended the Keystone State Normal School and later New York City's Bellevue Hospital Medical College (now known as the New York University School of Medicine), from which he graduated in 1891. The Bellevue Hospital Medical College, established in 1861, pioneered many of the nation's firsts, including the first hospital-based ambulance service, the first children's clinic, the first emergency pavilion, the first in-hospital appendectomy, and the first laboratory for research and teaching in pathology and bacteriology.

From 1893 to 1894 Knerr was enrolled at the Medico-Chirurgical College of Philadelphia as a “special student.” The college was established in 1850 and while Knerr was attending, it was located at 18th and Cherry Streets and shared its space with the Philadelphia Dental College. In the 1890s the Medico-Chirurgical College underwent extensive renovation to its physical location and expanded its facilities through the addition of an amphitheater.

Knerr held his first private practice in Breinigsville in central Pennsylvania from 1891 until 1898. He later moved to eastern Pennsylvania and settled in Coplay where he gained reputation as an expert in diseases of the lungs. He was a physician for the Coplay Board of Health and also an examining physician for several insurance companies. Knerr also took an active part in his community, having served as borough school director and held memberships in the Knights of the Golden Eagle and the Modern Woodmen of America.

In 1893, Knerr married Jennie E. Dubbs, daughter of Charles and Ellen (Stephen) Dubbs, of East Texas, Pennsylvania. They had three children: Myrtle and Mabel, both of whom attended the Allentown College for Women, and Maggie, who died in infancy. Knerr died on January 13, 1936.

Scope & content

Medical information obtained during Morgan W. Knerr’s studies from 1893 to 1894 at the Medico-Chirurgical College of Philadelphia is the primary content of four of the six notebooks in this collection. The two remaining notebooks, dated 1890 and 1891, contain medical information taken from an unknown source, most likely the Bellevue Hospital Medical College from which Knerr graduated in 1891. This collection provides a record of late nineteenth-century medical advancements in prescriptive treatments and operative practices for various diseases and conditions and contains many prescriptive formulas scattered throughout. Each of the notebooks is labeled along its spine with one of the following titles: “Smith,” “Dennis,” “Obstetrics,” “Therapeutics,” “Surgery,” and “Practice,” although these are not entirely indicative of what is contained in the individual notebooks. Notes were sometimes entered with an accompanying date and with what may have been a lecturer’s name. “Shoemaker” is one such name found at the beginning of several entries, which corresponds to a professor of dermatology and the chair of materia medica and therapeutics at the Medico-Chirurgical College. The notes are written in complete or nearly-complete sentences and are easily legible.

The notebook labeled “Smith,” dated 1890, primarily contains notes taken on the medical usages for various substances, such as arsenic, opium, belladonna, cod liver oil, ammonia, and bromides. There is also a large section on different substances that can be used to achieve either diuretic (evacuation of the bladder), diaphoretic (evacuation in the form of perspiration), or cathartic (evacuation of the bowels) effects.

The notebook labeled “Dennis,” dated 1891, primarily contains notes on treatments for bone fractures and dislocations, as well as for tumors, cancers, and wounds. The sections on tumors and cancers also contain some information on what was believed to

be the cause of these conditions and statistics on the number of afflicted persons. There is an extended passage on how to perform a trephination in this notebook.

The remaining four notebooks, which contain material dated from 1893 to 1894, list in no particular order a series of conditions, their descriptions, and recommendations for their treatment. The recommendations come in the form of formulas for various prescriptions and/or general notes about helpful substances and practices. For instance, in the notebook labeled "Therapeutics," one entry states, "Diseases of the lungs markedly benefited by sulphur. Mustard seems very good in lung affections. Onion syrup good for lung diseases especially for colds. Garlic very good to produce the same effects." In the same notebook is the statement that "a man that smokes tobacco to excess or close to excess may be the cause of producing abortions in his wife." In the notebook labeled "Surgery" it is warned that for the treatment of cancer "never use electricity." What is recommended is "equal parts chloride of zinc and arsenic." The "Obstetrics" notebook contains a few pages of instructions for delivering a baby, as well as descriptions of and treatments for several dangerous gynecological conditions. The "Practice" notebook lists descriptions of and treatments for conditions such as asthma, leprosy, and cholera, among others. This notebook also contains several pages of a ledger that documents unspecified monetary charges to various people in 1898 and 1899. Individual charges do not exceed \$1.25. A similar ledger appears in a lesser extent in some of the other notebooks.

Separation report

None.

Related materials

None.

Bibliography

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Subjects

Arsenic – 19th century
Belladonna (Drug) – 19th century
Childbirth – 19th century
Delivery (Obstetrics) – 19th century
Detoxification (Health) – 19th century
Diaphoresis and diaphoretics – 19th century
Diuresis – 19th century
Diuretics – 19th century
Diseases – 19th century
Diseases – Diagnosis – 19th century
Diseases – Treatment – 19th century
Gynecology – 19th century
Lungs – Diseases – Treatment – 19th century
Medical colleges – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia – 19th century
Medical students – 19th century
Medicine – Pennsylvania – 19th century
Medicine – Formulae, receipts, prescriptions – 19th century
Medicine – Study and teaching – 19th century
Obstetrics – 19th century
Opium – 19th century
Pathology – 19th century
Physicians – Pennsylvania – 19th century
School notebooks – Pennsylvania – Philadelphia – 19th century

Surgery – Pennsylvania – 19th century
Therapeutics – 19th century
Trephining – 19th century

Knerr, Morgan W., 1864-1936

Medico-Chirurgical College of Philadelphia
Bellevue Hospital Medical College

Administrative Information

Restrictions

None.

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Alternative format

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Volume listing

Volume title	Date	Vol.
Smith	1890	1
Dennis	1891	2
Obstetrics	1893	3
Therapeutics	1894	4
Surgery	1894	5
Practice	1894, 1899	6