Guide to the William Beaumont Collection 1821-1938

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Descriptive Summary

Identifier: ICU.SPCL.BEAUMONT

Title: Beaumont, William. Collection

Date: 1821-1938

Size: 24 linear feet (18 boxes)

Repository: Special Collections Research Center
University of Chicago Library
1100 East 57th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.


Information on Use

Access: The collection is open for research.

Citation: When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Beaumont, William. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.


Biographical Note

William Beaumont was born on November 21, 1785 in Lebanon, Connecticut, to Samuel Beaumont and Lucretia Abel, farmers. Samuel Beaumont was a veteran of the Revolutionary War. William Beaumont left home in 1806 and settled in Champlain, New York, where he taught school for three years. In 1810, he moved to St. Albans, Vermont, and was apprenticed to
Drs. Benjamin Chandler and Truman Powell for two years. Beaumont was certified to practice medicine by the Third Medical Society of Vermont in 1812.

That same year, Dr. Beaumont joined the United States Army as a surgeon’s mate, and served until the conclusion of the War of 1812, at which time he opened a private medical practice in Plattsburg, New York. It was here that Dr. Beaumont met his future wife, Deborah Greene. He reenlisted in the army as a post surgeon in 1819, and was sent to Fort Mackinac on Mackinac Island, Michigan. In 1821, Dr. Beaumont married Deborah Greene; they had four children: Sarah Beaumont, William W. Beaumont, Lucretia Beaumont, and Israel Greene Beaumont.

On June 6, 1822, Dr. Beaumont was summoned to treat a French-Canadian employee of the American Fur Company on Mackinac Island, Alexis St. Martin, who had been accidentally shot in the stomach. St. Martin survived, but with a permanent hole, or gastrocutaneous fistula, in his stomach. Between 1825 and 1833, Dr. Beaumont used St. Martin for hundreds of physiological studies of the digestive system. The experiments demonstrated the importance of gastric juice in digesting food, and proved that the process of digestion is essentially a chemical process. He published his findings in Experiments and Observations on the Gastric Juice, and the Physiology of Digestion (Plattsburgh, NY: F. P. Allen, 1833). The book cemented Dr. Beaumont’s legacy as the father of gastric physiology, and ushered in a new era of experimental physiology.

Dr. Beaumont served as an army medical officer throughout most of his life. He was stationed at Fort Niagara, New York; Fort Howard in Green Bay, Wisconsin; Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin; and Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Beaumont spent 19 years in St. Louis, and built a lucrative private practice there. He was also appointed Professor of Surgery at the Medical Department of Saint Louis University in 1837. When a surgeon general ordered him to Florida in 1839, Beaumont resigned from the army. He died on April 25, 1853 from a head injury after slipping on ice-covered steps.

**Scope Note**


The collection is divided into seven series: Series I: Personal and Professional Documents; Series II: Correspondence; Series III: Family Papers; Series IV: Photographs and Postcard; Series V: Art; Series VI: Artifacts; and Series VII: Oversize.

Series I, Personal and Professional Documents, contains personal ephemera belonging to Dr. Beaumont (such as his calling card), documents related to Dr. Beaumont’s medical practice, legal
documents, and copies of letters and documents relating to William Beaumont and Alexis St. Martin obtained from the William L. Clements Library and the Washington University Medical School Library of St. Louis.

Series II, Correspondence, contains incoming and outgoing correspondence of Dr. Beaumont from 1826 to 1853. Letters are arranged chronologically. This series includes one letter from Alexis St. Martin, as well as several letters from Ethan Allen Hitchcock pertaining to events of the Mexican and Civil Wars. Dr. Beaumont met Ethan Allen Hitchcock while serving in the United States Army at Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Also included is a letter from Amos Lewes Shoemaker to Zachary Taylor, requesting that Shoemaker be appointed minister to England.

Series III, Family Papers, is divided into two subseries: 1) General Documents, and 2) Correspondence. Subseries 1 contains legal documents and a few personal papers of Deborah Greene Beaumont, Israel Greene Beaumont, Sarah Beaumont Keim, and other members of the Beaumont family. Subseries 2 includes incoming and outgoing correspondence of the Beaumont family from 1846 to 1887, arranged chronologically. Of note are letters two letters from Alexis St. Martin to Israel Greene Beaumont, and correspondence with Ethan Allen Hitchcock. The letters for the most part are concerned with family matters.

Series IV, Photographs, Postcard, Art, and Artifacts contains photographs of Dr. Beaumont, of his family and friends, and of various places associated with him, as well as one postcard of Fort Howard Hospital, Green Bay, Wisconsin where Dr. Beaumont was stationed from 1826 to 1828. Of note are autographed carte-de-visites of Robert E. Lee and his wife, Mary Custis Lee. The Beaumonts became close friends of Robert E. Lee and his family when Dr. Beaumont was stationed at Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, Missouri between 1834 and 1839.

The artwork in this series consists of paintings of Dr. Beaumont and his family, as well as a reproduction of a sketch of the United States Hotel at Plattsburg, New York owned by Israel Green.

This series also holds numerous personal effects of Dr. Beaumont and his family. Included are Dr. Beaumont’s surgical instruments, mortar and pestle, watch, knife, razor, and leather change purse. The series also contains Ethan Allen Hitchcock’s dress sword, and a cast iron key to Fort Mackinac, Michigan where Dr. Beaumont served from 1819 to 1826.

Series V, Genealogical Chart and Surveyor’s Plats, contains a genealogical chart of the Beaumont family compiled by Arno B. Luckhardt (a professor of physiology at the University of Chicago), and three surveyor’s plats for land owned by William Beaumont.
Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html

Arno B. Luckhardt Papers

Three books were transferred to the rare book collection:

Beaumont, William. Experiments and observations on the gastric juice, and the physiology of digestion (Plattsburgh, NY: F. P. Allen, 1833)

Dickinson, Samuel N. The Boston almanac and business directory. 1843

Sacred exercises: in four books, compiled for the use of places of education (Boston: Greenough and Stebbins ..., 1810)

William Beaumont’s papers are also held in the Bernard Becker Medical Library Archives, Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Copies are held at the National Library of Medicine.

Subject Headings

• Beaumont, William, 1785-1853
• Hitchcock, Ethan Allen, 1798-1870
• Lee, Robert E. (Robert Edward), 1807-1870
• United States. Army.--History--19th century
• Physicians
• Surgeons
• Gastroenterology--History
• Medicine--United States--History--19th century
• Physiology

INVENTORY

Series I: Personal and Professional Documents

Box 1
Folder 1
   Four prescription blanks, undated
Box 1
Folder 2
  Two admittance cards to Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis issued to William Beaumont and Deborah Beaumont, undated

Box 1
Folder 3
  Case history of an unknown woman patient of William Beaumont - transcription by Arno B. Luckhardt, undated

Box 1
Folder 4
  Medical instructions and recipes written for Israel Greene Beaumont by William Beaumont "in case of sickness by the way," A.D. 4 p., undated

Box 1
Folder 5
  Calling card, "Wm. Beaumont, M.D. Surgn U.S. Army," undated

Box 1
Folder 6

Box 1
Folder 7

Box 1
Folder 8
  Surveyor's plat for land owned by William Beaumont in Green Bay, Wisconsin, undated

Box 1
Folder 9
  Legal Documents (17), 1830-1870

Box 1
Folder 10
  Photostats of letters and documents relating to William Beaumont and Alexis St. Martin obtained from the William L. Clements Library and the Washington University Medical School Library of St. Louis, undated

Series II: Correspondence

Box 1
Folder 11

Box 1
Folder 12
  • Includes typescript transcript
Folder 13

Box 1
Folder 14

Box 1
Folder 15

Box 1
Folder 16

Box 1
Folder 17

Box 1
Folder 18

Box 1
Folder 19

Box 1
Folder 20

Box 1
Folder 21

Box 1
Folder 22

Box 1
Folder 23

Box 1
Folder 24

Box 1
Folder 25

Box 1
Folder 26

Box 1
Folder 27
Irwin, Douglas S., Camp near Matamoras, to Ethan Allen Hitchcock, St. Louis - April 21, 1846 - A.L.S. 4 p.

Box 1
Folder 28

Box 1
Folder 29

Box 1
Folder 30

Box 1
Folder 31

Box 1
Folder 32

Box 1
Folder 33

Box 1
Folder 34

Box 1
Folder 35

Box 1
Folder 36

Box 1
Folder 37

Box 1
Folder 38
  • Lilly Beaumont Irwin, St. Louis, to Israel Greene Beaumont, Green Bay - September 8, 1850 - A.L.S. 1 p. (written on p.3 of letter of William Beaumont of same date)

Box 1
Folder 39

Box 1
Folder 40

Box 1
Folder 41

Box 1
Folder 42

Box 1
Folder 43

Box 1
Folder 44

Box 1
Folder 45

Series III: Family Papers

Subseries 1: General Documents
Box 1
Folder 46
Legal documents (24), 1842-1885

Box 1
Folder 47

Box 1
Folder 48
Course certificates, Green Bay High School - William Beaumont, 1874 and 1877

Box 1
Folder 49
Essay by Deborah Beaumont Martin - "Jottings along the Shenandoah Valley" - Manuscript, undated. Poem by Mary Mrskosh for Lily Beaumont Irwin, circa 1914

Box 1
Folder 50
Genealogical record - Sarah Beaumont Keim, Lucretia Beaumont Irwin, undated

Subseries 2: Correspondence

Box 1
Folder 51
Correspondence, 1846-1858
• Hitchcock, Ethan Allen, n.p., to Israel Greene Beaumont, Green Bay - December 8, 1858 - A.L.S. 1 p. (American Express receipt on reverse, 1 p.)

Box 1
Folder 52
Correspondence, 1859-1887
• St. Martin, Alexis, St. Thomas de Joliette, to [Israel Greene Beaumont], n.p. - April 28, 1889 [possibly 1879] - A.L.S. 4 p. (and typescript transcript 1 p.)
• Alt, Adolf, St. Louis, to [Lucretia Beaumont Irwin], n.p. - November 18, 1886 - A.L.S. 1 p.

Series IV: Photographs, Postcard, Art, and Artifacts

Box 2
Folder 1
Carte-de-visite - Deborah Greene Beaumont, undated

Box 2
Folder 2
Photograph (oval) - Deborah Greene Beaumont, undated

Box 2
Folder 3
Photographs - Ethan Allen Beaumont and Katherine Rhode Beaumont, circa 1930s

Box 2
Folder 4
Photograph (reproduction) - Israel Greene Beaumont and Ethan Allen Hitchcock, undated

Box 2
Folder 5
Photograph - Israel Greene Beaumont as a young man, standing, undated

Box 2
Folder 6
Photograph - Sophie Beaumont, undated

Box 2
Folder 7
Carte-de-visite (hand colored and inscribed) - Mary Custis Lee, undated

Box 2
Folder 8
Carte-de-visites - Robert E. Lee - Two as a young man and one as an elderly man with his signature, undated
Box 2
Folder 9
Photographs (reproduction) - Robert E. Lee in profile, undated

Box 2
Folder 10
Carte-de-visite - Unidentified young girl, Green Bay, Wisconsin, undated

Box 2
Folder 11
Photo Album - Birthday Pilgrimage to W.B.’s Grave, November 21, 1936

Box 2
Folder 12
Photographs - Beaumont Emergency Operating Room, Fort Mackinac, 1938

Box 2
Folder 13
Photograph - Fort Howard, Green Bay, Wisconsin - Surgeon’s Quarters, undated

Box 2
Folder 14
Photograph - Home of William Beaumont, St. Louis, undated

Box 2
Folder 15
Postcard - Old Fort Howard Hospital, Green Bay, Wisconsin, circa 1931

Box 2
Folder 16
Small reproduction of a sketch of the United States Hotel at Plattsburg, New York owned by Israel Green, undated

Box 3
Folder 1
Photograph of William Beaumont’s birthplace - Lebanon Hill, Lebanon, Connecticut, undated

Box 4
Framed photograph and reproduction - Sarah Beaumont Keim wearing riding habit, undated

Box 4
Framed photograph - William Beaumont, undated

Box 4
Framed photograph - Israel Greene Beaumont as an elderly man, seated with hat, undated

Box 4

Box 4
Framed portrait (reproduction?) of William Beaumont, circa 1821

Box 5
Framed photograph - Unidentified woman, undated

Box 5
Framed portrait miniature of William Beaumont in small frame with oval matting, undated
Box 5
Framed portrait miniature of Douglas Simms Irwin, undated

Box 5
Bronze bust of William Beaumont; approximately 5” tall

Box 5
Gold watch; open face; stem winding; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 5
Gold watch; open face; belonged to Deborah Greene Beaumont

Box 5
Gold watch; closed face; belonged to Israel Greene Beaumont

Box 5
Masonic emblem; elliptical; gold plated; engraved; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 5
Medallion issued in commemoration of the opening of the Erie Canal, 1826

Box 5
Medallion issued at the XIII International Physiological Congress, Boston, 1929; profile of William Beaumont on obverse

Box 5
Silver napkin ring; engraved with flower and leaf design; inscribed "To W.B. from E.S.W," [Beaumont’s cousin, E.S. Wallace]

Box 5
Leather change purse; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 5
Brass candle wick trimmer; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 5
Straight razor, bone handle; used by William Beaumont, Israel Greene Beaumont, and Ethan Allen Beaumont

Box 5
Spectacles and metal case; belonged to Deborah Greene Beaumont

Box 5
Brass name plate from army trunk, engraved "Wm. Beaumont. Surgn U.S. Ay"

Box 5
Keys to metal trunk and tin safe

Box 6
Surgical instruments in leather kit; includes thirteen surgical instruments: five differently bladed surgical "jack knives," spatula, file, dissecting forceps, two directors (one round and the other cutting and grooved with white bone handle), spud and aneurism needle without handles, one bullet forceps; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 6
Fur trade-era knife in leather sheath used by William Beaumont and Israel Greene Beaumont

Box 6
Candle mold; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 6
Steeleyard; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 7
Iron mortar and pestle; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 8
Table knives; thirteen in leather kit; bone handles; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 9
Mahogany revolver (derringer) case including accessories; Bullet mold, ramrod, bullets, gun powder container; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 10
Cast iron key to Fort Mackinac; 12.65 kg; 32 cm x 14 cm x 3 cm

Box 11
Linen kerchief with lace trim; "Sarah Beaumont" printed in center

Box 12
Cup; "I. G. Beaumont" in gold lettering on side

Box 13
Valise; "weekend bag-a-box; wooden box covered with leather; leather handle; black; 11" x 8" x 11"; belonged to William Beaumont

Box 14
Wood box with leather handle; black; 11" x 8" x 5"; "Sirius" on front; belonged to Israel Greene Beaumont; held personal effects as part of the equipment of his yacht, Sirius

Box 15
Tin safe; painted black with floral design and "Mrs. S. B. Keim, St. Louis Mo"; 1' x 1' x 2'

Box 16
Metal trunk

Box 17
Dress sword in animal skin sheath; belonged to Ethan Allen Hitchcock

On Display
Cane seat chair; given to William Beaumont by Robert E. Lee

Series V: Genealogical Chart and Surveyor’s Plats

Box 18
Folder 1
Genealogical chart of the Beaumont family, compiled by Arno B. Luckhardt (copy), undated

Box 18
Folder 2
Two surveyor’s plats for land owned by William Beaumont in St. Louis