

[Charles Henry May Papers, 1883-1966](#)

MAY, CHARLES HENRY, 1861-1943.

Charles Henry May papers, 1883-1966 (bulk 1908-1965)

1.5 cubic feet (5 boxes)

#M-0126

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Charles Henry May, ophthalmologist, was born Aug. 7, 1861 in Baltimore, the son of Henry and Henrietta Oppenheimer May. The family moved to New York four years later where May attended the College of the City of New York, and received a degree from the New York College of Pharmacy (1879). In 1883 he earned his medical degree from the College of Physicians & Surgeons (P&S) where he won prizes for both clinical reporting and proficiency at examination. May traveled in Europe in 1887-1888 where he studied the eye and ear with such luminaries as Graefe, Politzer and Urbantschitch.

Dr. May was instructor and Chief of the Ophthalmology Clinic, P&S, 1890-1903; the founding director and visiting surgeon of the Eye Dept. of Bellevue Hospital, 1915-25; and, consulting surgeon at Mt. Sinai, French and Monmouth Hospitals. He wrote extensively, illustrated his own and others' works, edited journals and contributed to reference books. In 1914, he introduced an improved system of illumination in ophthalmoscopes which became universally adopted.

Charles H. May is best known for his *Manual of Diseases of the Eye*, which became a classic textbook and atlas of ophthalmology. The book went through 23 American editions (1900-63) and 10 translations, many of which went through multiple editions.

In 1893 he married Rosalie Allen; they had no children. He died in New York City on Dec. 7, 1943.

SCOPE AND CONTENT: The May papers span the period 1883-1966 with the bulk of the material from 1908-1965. They are largely concerned with the production and distribution of the *Manual of the Diseases of the Eye* in its various editions and translations from 1906 to 1965. Included are correspondence, contracts, statements, and other supporting materials concerning typesetting, reproduction of illustrations, cost of paper, labor, binding, royalties, shipment of sets of printed plates and books, solicitations of foreign editions and translations, import licenses, duties and all other aspects of printing and publishing.

Since May wanted to keep the price of the book within reach of students, he at first not only wrote and illustrated the volume but also printed it, with the publisher, William Wood and Company, responsible only for distribution. Williams & Wilkins, which succeeded William Wood as publisher of the work in 1932, took a more active role in its production and promotion.

Upon May's death, the editorship passed to his nephew and partner in practice, Charles A. Perera (who had assisted with the 15th through 18th editions), and later to James H. Allen. Perera and May's widow sold their copyright to the text in 1961 to Williams & Wilkins.

Because of this personal and familial authorial participation, the collection contains a wealth of detail concerning practices and techniques of printing and publishing in the first half of the twentieth century.

Other events documented in the papers include a presentation copy of the book to the last Emperor of China, in 1924, shortly before his abdication; the correspondence between Dr. May and Eugene H. Oppenheimer, his cousin, whose German translation was interrupted by World War I, and terminated by growing nationalistic hostility between them; the royalty problems of the third French edition, when the publisher distributing it lost all records and staff in the battle of Argonne with the color plates at the binder's shop also destroyed by the war; and the break in correspondence following the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, with the 2nd Japanese edition nearly sold out, which fed Dr. May's suspicion of piracy.

More than 75 illustrations created by May are included. In addition, the collection contains May's 1883 P&S commencement program; correspondence relating to his affiliation with Bellevue Hospital in 1925, and Mt. Sinai Hospital in 1923 and 1940; biographical essays; printed memorial tributes; and, personal and financial records.

Awaiting cataloging are copies of *Manual of the Diseases of the Eye* in American editions, 1st-22nd (1900-57), British editions, 7th and 9th through 12th, the first German edition, the 5th and 6th Dutch editions, the 6th and 7th Italian editions, the 5th and 6th French editions, the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Chinese editions, the 2nd Japanese edition, the 1st Portuguese edition and the 9th Spanish edition.

ORGANIZATION: The papers are organized in three series: I. Personal; II. *Manual of the Diseases of the Eye*; III. Scrapbook.

LANGUAGE: English.

ACCESS: Open.

PROVENANCE: Gift of Dr. Charles A. Perera, 1982.

SUBJECTS

May, Charles Henry, 1861-1943.
Perera, Charles Allen, 1905-
Ophthalmology – Study and teaching.
Publishing – United States – 20th century.
Scrapbooks.

ADDED ENTRIES

May, Charles Henry, 1861-1943. *Manual of the diseases of the eye, for students and general practitioners.*

SERIES I: PERSONAL

Box 1

- 1 "Biographical data-C.H. May" 1883-1936: correspondence, printed matter
- 2 Financial records, 1941-1943

SERIES II: *MANUAL OF THE DISEASES OF THE EYE*

Subseries I: Correspondence

- 3 History of Printing and Sales, 1922: correspondence, statistics
- 4 "May's Manual Corp.," 1928-29: correspondence, receipts, and applications regarding formation, assignment of copyright to, and dissolution of corporation
- 5 Copyright ownership, 1927-30, 1939: correspondence, contracts
- 6 Williams & Wilkins, 1928-42: correspondence, illustration proofs
- 7 Williams & Wilkins, 1942-47: correspondence, royalty statements re: wartime restrictions, Braille ed., plastic plates, binding cloth, etc.
- 8 "Papers relating to May's Diseases of the Eye," 1947-51: correspondence, statements, receipts, etc. re: book production, esp. postwar shortages
- 9 Williams & Wilkins, 1948-62: correspondence, printed matter

BOX 2

- 1 Williams & Wilkins, 1950-58: correspondence, statements, reports, etc.
- 2 Williams & Wilkins Co., 1960-61: correspondence, bank draft receipts, royalty, bindery statements, etc.
- 3 Sale of book to Williams & Wilkins, 1960-66: correspondence, including Mrs. May's financial affairs

Subseries II: Financial Records & Printed Matter

- 4 Expenses and receipts, 1899-1943: financial records, journal for all editions, foreign and USA
- 5 Publishers statements, 1901-43: expenses and royalties

- 6 Royalties Ledger, 1943-63: correspondence interleaved
- 7 Printed matter, 1914-62: specimen pages, circulars, book review, publications with correspondence giving history of the book (1962)

Subseries III: Illustrations

- 8 Color plates, 1940-59: correspondence, reports, statements re: production, inventory and shipment of plates
- 9 Various plates, 15th ed. (1937) and n.d.: oil paintings and one printed illustration

BOX 3

- 1 Drawings of fundi, n.d.: black and white ink drawings, color oil paintings
- 2-3 Various plates, n.d: oil paintings, printed illustrations

Subseries IV: Foreign Editions

- 4 Expenses and receipts, 1905-40: financial records, correspondence, bank draft
- 5 Italian edition, 1903-33, 1951-53: correspondence, contracts, statements
- 6 Royalties, British edition, 1908-45: correspondence, statements, financial records

BOX 4

- 1 British edition, 1930-66: correspondence, contracts, illus. proofs, circulars, receipts, etc.
- 2 Spanish edition, 1905-60: correspondence, printed matter, statements, etc.
- 3 Dutch edition, 1906-40: correspondence re: production, shipping, licenses
- 4 German edition, 1908-20, 1924, 1946: correspondence, typescript translation
- 5 Scandinavian edition, 1907-11: correspondence
- 6 Russian edition, 1907-10, 1937: correspondence
- 7 Japanese edition, 1907-26: correspondence, etc.
- 8 Chinese edition, 1910-53: correspondence, etc. re: four Chinese editions, translation, and Japanese edition
- 9 French edition, 1912-36, 1955: correspondence, statements, illustration proofs

BOX 5

- 1 Polish edition, 1925-26: correspondence
- 2 Yugoslavian edition, 1926-27: correspondence
- 3 Portuguese edition, 1937-59: correspondence, printed matter, financial and shipping statements
- 4 Korean edition, 1957: correspondence

SERIES III: SCRAPBOOK

Unfolded: Scrapbook of *Manual of Diseases of the Eye* book reviews, including foreign editions, 1900-44

One plastic sign: Charles H. May, M.D.