

**Guide to the
Dr. Joseph Wilson, Jr. Papers**

Creator: Dr. Joseph Wilson, Jr.

Dates: 1797-1885 (bulk 1837-1885)

Quantity: 1 box and 5 volumes (For artifacts, see Curatorial Department)

Call phrase: Wilson Papers

Provenance: Donated by Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Clark. ISM number: 1979.51

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Biographical note: Joseph Wilson, Jr. was born in the Holmesburg section of Philadelphia on January 6, 1816, the fifth of nine children born to Joseph Wilson, Sr., M.D. and Mary Paul Shallcross. The Wilsons were a prominent Quaker family.

Wilson received his early education at private schools in Holmesburg and completed his collegiate training at Bolmar's Academy, then located in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1837 with a degree in medicine. Following his graduation, he assumed a one-year position at the University as Acting Demonstrator of Anatomy. He then embarked upon the practice of medicine in Holmesburg until his appointment as Assistant Surgeon in the United States Navy in 1842. The following year, while awaiting orders, he was in practice in the Frankford section of Philadelphia. Wilson entered the Navy as Assistant Surgeon on May 13, 1843 and achieved the rank of Lieutenant in March 1848. He earned the title of Surgeon and rank of Lieutenant-Commander on April 19, 1857. Wilson became Medical Inspector and ranking Commander on May 23, 1871 and, finally, Medical Director of the Navy on June 27, 1873. He retired at the age limit of 62 in January 1878.

Dr. Wilson first saw duty on the Pacific coast, remaining there four and a half years during the period that included the Mexican War. For a portion of this time, he was detached and assigned to land duty as Chief Surgeon on the staff of General John C. Fremont who was then in command in California. July 1843 saw Dr. Wilson aboard the U.S. Sloop of War LEVANT, followed by service on the U.S.S. SAVANNAH from 1844 to 1847.

Dr. Wilson married his cousin, Elizabeth Love, in 1850, the same year he was assigned to the Washington Navy Yard. After two years stationed there, he was assigned to Commodore M. C. Perry's Japan Expedition; he gains favorable mention in Perry's official dispatches. From 1855 to 1857 Dr. Wilson was stationed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard until he was ordered back to the Pacific Coast Station on the VANDALIA, remaining until 1859. In 1860 Dr. Wilson was attached to the POWHATAN in the Gulf of Mexico, from 1861 to 1863 with the MICHIGAN on Lake Michigan, and from 1863 to 1865 upon the VANDERBILT on the Atlantic coast. In 1866 he became Surgeon in charge of the Norfolk Hospital and, two years later, Fleet Surgeon of the south Atlantic Squadron. Beginning in 1871 and for the next four years, Dr. Wilson was Medical Director of the Naval Hospital in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

While on shore duty, he was often assigned to additional service on examining boards. Additionally, Dr. Wilson was a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. He penned two editions of a book entitled *Naval Hygiene* (Government Printing Office, Washington; 1870). The first edition contained an appendix, *Moving Wounded Men on Shipboard*, by Albert C. Gorgas. The second edition was published under the title *Naval Hygiene: Human Health and the Means of Preventing Disease, with Illustrative Incidents Principally Derived from Naval Experience* (Lindsay and Blakiston, Philadelphia; 1879).

Dr. Wilson died on March 7, 1887.

Scope and content: The papers of Dr. Wilson are arranged into three series.

The first series, Professional Papers, consists of drafts, essays, journals, medical diaries, patient logs, scrapbooks and letters sent and received by Dr. Joseph Wilson, Jr., some of which were composed while Dr. Wilson was serving onboard the ships LEVANT and SAVANNAH as Assistant Surgeon. The second series, Personal Papers, consists of essays, cartes de visite, family estate accounts, a school atlas and a partially printed journal relating to farm management. The third and final series contains two parchment certificates of medical accomplishment awarded to Dr. Joseph Wilson, Sr.

Though the division between items of professional interest and items of personal interest is artificial, it is thought that it best represents the overlapping but separate focuses held by Dr. Wilson. The original order is no longer extant and only a small remnant of Dr. Wilson's prolific corpus is thought to be present here. It is hoped that this arrangement helps to facilitate access and to establish the differing interests of the collection's creator while being cognizant of their inherent relationships to one another.

Notes: The artifacts in this collection (including 10 watercolors, a Navy jacket, sword belt, epaulets, military hat, and two boxes) are administered by the Curatorial department. For information about viewing artifacts, please inquire.

Series 1. Professional Papers, 1797-1885 (bulk 1837-1885).

Scope and Content: The items comprising this series include those that were composed while Dr. Wilson was Assistant Surgeon aboard the U.S.S. LEVANT and the U.S.S. SAVANNAH. He maintained lists of officers' names, noted the course and position of the ship, designed detailed charts of the temperature, barometric pressure and wind, and drew coastlines as seen from the sea. In addition to this sailing record, he also writes from a medical perspective when he describes the living conditions on board, his visits to sick crewman and charts the progression/regression of illness. Not immune to seasickness himself, Dr. Wilson gives a detailed account of the condition and attempted remedies, including the consumption of wine, ether, porter and creosote. Dr. Wilson also kept diaries of a personal nature during these voyages. For example, he comments upon the racial situation in Brazil and bull fighting in Peru. Letters received by Dr. Wilson, predominantly from family members, as well as eighteen letters sent from Dr. Wilson to his brother Jesse are also present.

This series further includes a patient log/account book from Dr. Wilson's practice at the beginning of his medical career and a manuscript in five parts: "Duties of patient to doctor," "Duties of doctor to patient," "Duties to children," "Sermon to friends on health," and "Odds and ends" (n. d.). Also present is a lengthy medical journal, alphabetically indexed by Dr. Wilson (1855-1882). It discusses individual illnesses and diagnoses, deaths, epidemics, sanitary conditions, ship design, yellow fever in Philadelphia, longevity statistics and studies, hydrophobia, ventilation, malaria and the centennial celebration in Philadelphia. A journal/scrapbook, alphabetically indexed by Dr. Wilson, contains a photograph of him affixed to the front endpapers and a record of the proceedings of a naval medical board convened in Pensacola, Florida in regard to Yellow Fever (1874) as well as additional medical information. Within this series there is also an eleven-page pencil draft entitled "Naval Hygiene" (n. d.) which likely contributed to the published book by the same name, and a nine-page ink draft of "The Legal License, and Syphilis in St. Louis." Included, too, is a 209-page scrapbook containing clippings and cartoons that date mostly to the 1880s. Present at the front of the scrapbook is a list of donors and the amount of money that they donated "to alleviate the distresses of the citizens of Philadelphia, 1797" in addition to a family bible record. Lastly, letters, circulars, announcements and invoices received by Dr. Wilson from the American Public Health Association and other medical organizations are also found within this series.

Series 2. Personal Papers, 1844-1884.

Scope and Content: This series includes a diary with descriptions of animals, ports, people and buildings on Madeira, the Canary Islands and the Cape de Verde Islands. There is a twenty-one page manuscript—written in pen but with pencil edits throughout—called "Notes on Polynesia: Its People and Languages" (n. d.) as well as an account of the last will and testament of Mary Wilson; Dr. Wilson and his brother Jesse were the executors (1854-1864). The 16 cartes de visite found here show people, scenery and buildings of Rio de Janeiro and Madeira (c. 1871). Also included in this series is a printed journal entitled "Farmer's Accountant" with notes by Dr. Wilson that relate to the

management of Strawberry Hill Farm and contains pressed tree leaves. Lastly, a school atlas containing twenty-five colored maps (c.1884) may be found here.

Series 3. Dr. Joseph Wilson Sr. Papers, 1800, 1802.

Scope and Content: This series consists of two certificates awarded to the elder Dr. Wilson. The letter, a photocopy, is to Dr. Wilson Sr. from the prominent Dr. Benjamin Rush.

Container List

Series 1. Professional Papers

Box 1, Folder 1. Patient log/Account book, 1837-1839

Box 1, Folder 2. LEVANT, Journals, 1843-1844

Box 1, Folder 3. LEVANT AND SAVANNAH, Letters received, 1843-1845

Box 1, Folder 4. LEVANT AND SAVANNAH, Log book/Sailing record, 1843-1847

Box 1, Folder 5. SAVANNAH, Letters sent, 1844-1846

Box 1, Folder 6. SAVANNAH, Journal, 1844-1845

Box 1, Folder 7. Drafts, 1844-187?

Volume 1. Medical diary, 1855-1882

Volume 2. Journal, 1874-1883

Volume 3. Letters and circulars received, 1874-1885

Volume 4. Scrapbook, 1797-188? (bulk c. 1880)

Series 2. Personal Papers

Box 1, Folder 8. Diary, 1848-1849

Box 1, Folder 9. Executors' accounts, estate of Mary Wilson, 1854-1864

Box 1, Folder 10. Drafts, [c.1860s]

Box 1, Folder 11. School atlas, c.1844

Volume 5. Farmer's journal, 1877-1879

Series 3. Dr. Joseph Wilson, Sr. Papers

Box 1, Folder 12. Letter (photocopy), 1802