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Archival Collection Finding Aid

Name/Title:	Dr. William H. DeCamp Collection
Subject(s)	personal papers, medicine
Archival Collection #:	157
Accession #:	135633
Source:	Museum Collection
Date Acquired:	Unknown
Span Dates:	1834 - 1912
Processor(s):	Stacy Burns, Paul Christians

Abstract:

This collection contains a number of personal papers and newspaper clippings of or relating to Dr. William H. DeCamp. Most date to the second half of the 1800s, although a few pre- or post-date that period. Little correspondence is present, although the collection contains a significant number of newspaper clippings on several subjects. Other papers include account books, medical association documents, and material pertaining to natural sciences, especially conchology.

History:

Dr. William H. DeCamp was born in Mt. Morris, Livingston County, New York, on November 6, 1825. He studied medicine at New York University and then at the Medical College of Geneva, New York. After graduating in 1847, he remained in the state and practiced at Grove Center and Hunt's Hollow, each for about four years. Somewhat failing in health, DeCamp came to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1855 and soon established a drug store. However, the doctor lost everything when the store burned down in 1857, and was forced to renew his medical practice—which he continued for the rest of his life. An avid natural scientist and conchologist, Dr. DeCamp was also an active member of the Grand Rapids Lyceum of Natural History, and later the Kent Scientific Institute. (He eventually published a monogram titled "The Mollusks of Michigan," that was based on his own large collection.) In 1861 William DeCamp entered the Union Army, appointed Surgeon of the First Michigan Engineers and Mechanics by Governor Austin Blair. He served until 1864, the end of his appointment. For much of 1862-1863 DeCamp was Post Medical Director at Harrodsburg, Kentucky, charged with the treatment of over 1500 wounded Confederate soldiers left there by General Braxton Bragg during his retreat from Union forces. After his service, he returned to Grand Rapids and resumed his practice in medicine. In 1868 he was elected the president of the Michigan State Medical Society. He also served as president or vice president of the Grand Rapids Medical and Surgical Society for several years during that time period. Dr. DeCamp was often called on to give medical and natural science lectures around the region, and also served as a medical examiner for several insurance companies.

Scope and Content:

Archival Collection #158 is perhaps most useful for inquiries into the medical career of Dr. William DeCamp. Its several dozen news articles cover many of the medical and criminal cases in which DeCamp was involved. In a broader context, it forms a record of common 19th century accidents and illnesses in a growing frontier town—as well as their treatments. The medical association papers and insurance appointment documents also may contribute to this type of research. However, although the other personal documents present may further illuminate the doctor's life, they are of little use as a source on his family.

Series Descriptions:

No.	Series Name	Description
I.	Personal Papers, 1834-1912	Personal papers of Dr. William H. DeCamp and his immediate family. Included are correspondence; miscellaneous documents and records

relating to his conchology and natural science collections; notices of appointment as Grand Rapids' liquor inspector and for several insurance medical examiner positions; two early diaries or account books; and some professional medical association papers.

- II. Newspaper Clippings, c. 1859-1884
- II-1. Accidents Articles covering accidents, illnesses, and other medical and criminal cases treated or investigated by Dr. William DeCamp
- II.-2 Natural Science Articles relating to Dr. DeCamp and his natural science collections. Most reference his large collection of shells.
- II-3. Lectures Articles describing lectures and meetings presided over by or otherwise including Dr. DeCamp. Most are medical in nature.
- II-4. Medical Societies Articles pertaining to the Michigan Medical Association and the American Medical Association.
- II-5. Miscellaneous Any other newspaper clippings, not relevant to the above topics. Includes articles mentioning other members of the DeCamp family.

Container List:

Container	Folder	Series	Description of Contents	Dates	Count
1	--	I.	Diary/account books of Dr. William DeCamp	1834-1845	2
1	1	I.	Medical association and conference papers	1867-1872	9
1	2	I.	Correspondence & calling cards	1868-1912	15
1	3	I.	Natural science papers	1859-1891	16
1	4	I.	Notices of appointment	1859-188	9
1	5	II.	Newspaper clippings, by sub-series	1857-1884	84