The 1846 Catalogue of the Halifax Garrison Medical Library*

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While carrying out research in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia several years ago, I discovered A Catalogue of the Halifax Garrison Medical Library dated 1846.1 I had believed that the only medical libraries in Halifax prior to 1868 were the personal libraries of the physicians and surgeons practising there. The existence of the Garrison Medical Library therefore altered my opinion about the availability of medical literature since this library was both extensive and current in its holdings. Furthermore, the cover page of the 1846 catalogue indicates that the library had been established 30 years earlier, in 1817.

The printed 1846 catalogue reveals that the Garrison Medical Library contained over 400 individual books, with several consisting of two to seven volumes, for a total of almost 500 volumes. Handwritten entries, presumably indicating additions to this catalogue after 1846, account for another dozen volumes. The library also held 18 medical and surgical periodicals of various dates, including The Lancet and the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal; 16 were published in the United Kingdom and the remaining two in the United States. The most current was The Lancet, with a complete set of volumes from 1829 to 1846. The great majority of the library’s books had also been published in the United Kingdom (chiefly in London), with 11 published on the continent (Europe), chiefly in Paris, and six in the United States. Although four books were published in Halifax, Quebec, and Toronto, only one was strictly medical—a pamphlet by William Donnelly, entitled Diary of Practical Observations on Malignant Cholera at New York (Halifax, 1832). (The others were a biographical narrative, a book on language, and Abraham Gesner’s geological work on Nova Scotia.) While most of the collection had been published between 1800 and 1846, 23 books had been printed in the 1700s and two in the 1600s. The seventeenth-century

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books were Vander Linden’s Hippocratic works, published in Leiden in 1665, and W. Cooke’s edition of Morgagni’s works, published in London in 1622.

The full Garrison Medical Library covered a broad range of subjects: anatomy, auscultation, bloodletting, bronchitis, burns, cancer, consumption, dropsy, diseases, epilepsy, fever, forensic medicine, gout, gonorrhea, hernia, inflammation, insanity, liver, midwifery, pathology, pregnancy, pharmacy, respiration, rheumatism, teeth, vaccination, and yellow fever. In addition to well-known works of Hippocrates and Morgagni, the library included the standard surgical writings of John Abernethy and Astley Cooper, as well as works of Hermann Boerhaave, William Cullen, and G. J. Guthrie, among others. More unusual titles in the collection, perhaps, include Churchill’s *A Treatise on Acupuncture* (London, n.d.); Cox’s *Practical Observations on Insanity* (London, 1813); and Barlow’s *An Essay on the Medicinal Efficacy and Employment of the Bath Waters* (Bath, 1822).

I have not been able to determine either where the Garrison Medical Library had been located, or what happened to it after 1846. It could have been housed in the army hospital, on the slopes of Citadel Hill, before the hospital burned to the ground in November 1866. Two other catalogues for the Halifax Garrison Library perhaps provide additional clues. Holding a general collection of books for officers and their wives, this particular library was transferred to Canadian control along with the fortress of Halifax in 1906. Its 1835 catalogue clearly shows that the Halifax Garrison Library must have been separate from any medical collection. Its 1883 catalogue, on the other hand, does list about 30 medical works. The fact that some titles had appeared in the medical library catalogue of 1846 could indicate that the two garrison collections merged sometime in the intervening 40 years. Alternatively, those few medical books in the general collection in 1883 might simply have been those spared the hospital fire of 1866; unfortunately, this would still mean that the majority of the original medical collection perished.

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