

**The Osler Library of the History of Medicine  
McGill University, Montreal Canada**

**Osler Library Archive Collections**

**P078**

**JOHN BELL FONDS**

**FINDING AID AND INVENTORY LIST**

This is a guide to one of the collections held by the [Osler Library of the History of Medicine](#),  
McGill University.

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## **P078**

**P078:** John Bell Fonds

**DATES:** 1865-2006

**EXTENT:** 36 cm of textual records. – 1 medical kit. – 1 medical textbook.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:**

Dr. John Bell (1845-78) was born in Toronto, Ontario, son of Rev. Andrew Bell (an early pioneer in Canadian geology) and younger brother of Canadian geologist Robert Bell. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and his first medical degree from Queens University in the early 1860s. Around the time of his graduation, he spent five months apprenticing with the United States Army in two American Army General Hospitals close to the front lines of the American Civil War – Brown General Hospital, Louisville, Kentucky, and the US General Floating Hospital, Ohio, at New Albany, Indiana.

Bell furthered his medical education at McGill University, graduating in 1866 with a Doctor of Medicine and Master of Surgery (MD,CM). Upon graduation, he took the appointment of Senior Apothecary at the Montreal General Hospital – a post which he held for nearly three years. Bell then embarked on ten years of private practice on Beaver Hall Hill in Montreal. There are few details about his practice, although in the late 1870s he was Physician to the Protestant Infants' Home and the Montreal Dispensary.

He published “The Case of Progressive Pernicious Anemia” in 1877 in *Transactions of Canada Medical Association* containing remarks from William Osler, and in 1878 he published “Case of Diphtheria, Acute Laryngeal Symptoms – Tracheotomy – Recovery” in *Canada Medical and Surgical Journal*.

At the time of his death, he had applied to, and was being considered for, the position of Attending Physician/House Surgeon at Montreal General Hospital – the position that William Osler subsequently filled. While visiting relations in Ontario, Bell fell seriously ill with Pneumonia and succumbed to the illness just a few days later on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1878. Bell is known to have been a great inspiration to his friend and colleague, William Osler.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT:**

The fonds documents John Bell's activities related to his medical studies at McGill in Surgery, Materia Medica and the Institutes of Medicine, as well as his work as a private physician in Montreal. The fonds consists of notebooks, a photocopy of his MS McGill medical thesis, letters from his personal and professional life, details of his estate, one of his medical kits, merchant letterheads and receipts from various subscriptions, societies and clubs. The fonds also contains two original copies of Bell's 1878 article, “Case of Diphtheria, Acute Laryngeal Symptoms”, as well as the City of Montreal's “Mortality of Montreal” – a list of all deaths in Montreal in January 1878. A complete inventory of John Bell documents sold by Warren Baker in 2006 is also included as part of the fonds.

**SOURCE OF SUPPLIED TITLE PROPER:** Based on the documents in the fonds.

**LANGUAGE:** The documents are in English.

**FINDING AIDS:** Inventory list is available.

**CUSTODIAL HISTORY:**

Series 1 was purchased at Montreal Book Auctions Ltd.: sale 112, lot 170, 12 October 1978 and at sale no. 116, lots 63, 64, 65 and 115, 2 February 1979. Old accession numbers 734 and 735. Series 2-6 were purchased from Joe Foster in 2015 (who purchased the materials from Warren Baker). The letters of Series 2 and 3 have been grouped in chronological order for ease of access. John Bell's signed textbook, *Medical Jurisprudence* (1861), was donated by Osler librarian Christopher Lyons in 2016 (purchased from Robert Campbell, Montreal antiquarian book dealer).

**SERIES:**

1. Estate Papers, McGill Notebooks & Medical Thesis, Publications, Warren Baker Inventory
2. Letters
3. Letters from Women
4. Receipts for Subscriptions, Societies, Clubs etc.
5. Merchant Letterheads & Invoices
6. Medical Kit
7. Medical textbook

**GENERAL NOTE:** n/a

**SUBJECTS:**

Bell, John, 1845-1878

McGill University Doctors

McGill University Medical Students and Student Notes

**Series 1 – Estate Papers, McGill Notebooks & Thesis, Publications, Warren Baker Inventory**

Folder 1: Warren Baker's John Bell inventory, and librarian acquisition emails from 2006.

- Complete inventory of Bell items in Warren Baker's catalogue, 2006
- Librarian acquisition emails between 2004-2006
- Letter with biographical information written by one John Bell's nieces or nephews, 1964 (copy).
- Montreal Gazette obituary (copy).
- *John Bell, MD – teacher to William Osler* by Nathan Fishman, CMA Journal, 1981 (copy)

Folder 2: John Bell Estate

- List of surgical instruments for sale from the estate of Dr. John Bell

Folder 3: Montreal Activities

- Booklet of testimonials regarding John Bell, candidate for the Office of House Surgeon of the Montreal General Hospital
- Tariff (minimum) of medical fees adopted by the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Montreal, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1873
- John Bell's written announcement of candidacy for the position of Attending Physician to the Montreal General Hospital, March 21, 1878.
- "Mortality of Montreal" – Statement of deaths in the city during January, 1878. Original publication. Signed "Dr. J Bell, no.1 Belmont St"

Folder 3.1: John Bell Publications

- *Case of Diphtheria: Acute Laryngeal Symptoms – Tracheotomy – Recovery.* John Bell. Printed by the Montreal Gazette, 1878 (two original copies)

Folder 4: Notebook (1) 1866

- Notebook labeled "S." and "I.M. Medicine" containing notes from 1866 when Bell was enrolled in McGill College

Folder 5: Notebook (2) 1866

- Notebook labeled "Medicine" and "Materia Medica" containing notes from 1866 when Bell was enrolled in McGill College

Folder 6: Notebook (3) n.d.

- Notebook labeled "Medicine" and "Materia Medica" containing notes (probably from 1866) when Bell was enrolled in McGill College

Folder 7: Notebook (4) 1865

## John Bell Fonds – P078 – Inventory List

- Notebook labeled “Surgery” and “Institutes” containing notes from 1865 when Bell was enrolled in McGill College

Folder 8: John Bell Medical Thesis, 1866

- Photocopy of Bell’s medical thesis, 1866

### **Series 2 – Letters**

Folder 9: Miscellaneous Letters (mostly from family), 1867

Folder 10: Miscellaneous Letters (personal and professional), 1868

Folder 11: Miscellaneous & Family Letters (personal and professional), 1868

Folder 12: Miscellaneous Letters (personal and professional), 1871-1872

Folder 13: Miscellaneous Letters (personal and professional), 1874

- Includes Curriculum vitae for E. K. Patton

Folder 14: Miscellaneous Letters (personal and professional), 1875

Folder 15: Miscellaneous Letters (personal and professional), 1876

Folder 16: Miscellaneous Letters (personal and professional), 1877

Folder 17: Miscellaneous Letters (personal and professional), dates unknown

Folder 18: Patient Lists & Notes, 1872-73 approximately

### **Series 3 – Letters from Women**

Folder 19: Letters from Cousin Maggie, friends and acquaintances, circa 1867

Folder 20: Letters from various family, friends and acquaintances, 1868-1869

Folder 21: Letter from various family, friends and acquaintances, 1872-1874

Folder 22: Letters from various family, friends and acquaintances, 1875-1877

### **Series 4 – Receipts for Subscriptions, Societies, Clubs etc.**

Folder 23: Various receipts from Montreal churches, businesses, societies, subscriptions to newspapers, magazines & medical encyclopedias etc.

Folder 24: Various receipts from Montreal churches, businesses, medical associations, subscriptions... etc.

**Series 5 – Merchant Letterheads & Invoices**

Folder 25: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

Folder 26: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

Folder 27: Invoices from Montreal merchants, Intercolonial Coal Mining Company, printers, Grocers, Druggists (Lymans, Clare & Co.) etc.

Folder 28: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc

Folder 29: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers, City of Montreal (“for the undernoted personal taxes”), Montreal Water Works, etc.

Folder 30: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers (Cheapside), New City Gas Company of Montreal...etc.

Folder 31: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers, John Richardson Wood & Coal Merchant, Scottish Imperial Insurance Company etc.

Folder 32: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers, auctioneers, etc.

Folder 33: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

Folder 34: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers, booksellers, etc.

Folder 35: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers, Montreal Water Works, etc.

Folder 36: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

Folder 37: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

Folder 38: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

Folder 39: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

Folder 40: Invoices from Montreal merchants, printers, grocers etc.

**Series 6 – Medical Kit**

- Dr. John Bell Medical Kit, circa 1870
  - original case with medical instruments inside

**Series 7 – Medical Textbook**

- Taylor, A. S., & Hartshorne, E. (1861). *Medical jurisprudence*. Philadelphia: Blanchard & Lea.

## John Bell Fonds – P078 – Inventory List

- John Bell's textbook for McGill course Medical Jurisprudence, taught by Professor Duncan C. McCallum, M.D. in Fall, 1864.
- Textbook is listed on the "Books Recommended to Students" list in the course calendar.
- Signature on inside cover: "John Bell October, 1864"